



## Research Article

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## Understanding Quality of Education Received by Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Selected Public Primary School in Harare, Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** This study sought to understand the quality of education received by orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in selected public primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe. Phenomenological research philosophy as well as qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted in this study. The sample of 10 primary school heads, 10 teachers and 80 OVC participated in the study. In-depth interviews were employed to collect data from the school heads and teachers, while focus groups were used to collect data from OVC. The study adopted interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyse data. The researcher observed all necessary ethical considerations. Research findings established that quite a lot still needs to be done for OVC in public primary schools to achieve quality of education. There is a lack of policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation on quality education and support services received by OVC in public primary schools. The study concluded that OVC in public primary schools were not adequately receiving standard quality education and support services due to lack of adequate recourses. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the government should collaborate with other interested stakeholders in education.

**Keywords:** Public Primary Schools, Quality of Education, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Social Protection.

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## INTRODUCTION

Given that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirmed that primary education ought to be free and compulsory to all children, the notion of achieving basic primary Education for All has been on the agenda of various education systems. Kanyongo (2005 as cited by Garira, 2015) points out that numerous countries have made great steps towards the achievement of basic primary education, Zimbabwe as well has moved closer to the attainment of total basic primary education. Likewise, Garira (2015) says, there is; “dramatic increase of access to education in Zimbabwe and many other countries, but later posed problems as access to education alone was failing to provide the expected goals of Education for All.” The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2016); & Garira (2019) affirmed that the quality of education was generally going down in various countries. However, quality of education has become a fundamental focus of many developing countries, Zimbabwe included for improvement purposes. Hence, this study sought to understand the quality of education received by orphans and vulnerable children in Epworth, Mabvuku and Tafara public primary school in Harare, Zimbabwe.

## BACKGROUND

According to UNESCO (2005:37); & Mavundutse (2016:19) “education is the springboard for

economic and social development in Africa.” Similarly, education is defined as a lifelong endeavor concerned with ongoing exploration of new knowledge, skills, insights and attitudes and their implications for daily life (Clarks 2014). Hence, quality of education means different things to different stakeholders and quality of education is based on context (Fauziati, (2018). This study adopts the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2005); OECD (2012); & Hammond *et al.* (2019) definition of quality of education which views quality of education at the individual and societal levels. According to UNESCO (2005) says, “at individual level, quality of education is one which allows children to reach their fullest potential in terms of cognitive, emotional and creative capacities.” While at societal level, the education received by children should allow them to meet societal expectations (UNESCO, 2015). Likewise, Fauziati, (2018); & Chapman & Adams (2002) says, “quality education submits to Inputs thus (numbers of teachers, amount of teacher training, number of textbooks), Processes (amount of direct instructional time, extent of active learning), Outputs (test scores, graduation rates), and Outcomes (to education). More importantly, UNICEF (2000); & Bhoje (2014) assert that, “quality education refers to a system of education that through the programming process, structure, and content enables:

- “Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities and;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy” (UNICEF, 2000).

Furthermore, quality of education in this study would mean attending to the needs of orphan and vulnerable children, improving and providing all that is done and needed at school; accurate measurement of performance, and staff developing teachers to enhance their instructional ability and handling OVC in their classrooms (Kalaba, 2010; & Ogba *et al.*, 2020). This could be only possible when schools provide a safe and protective environment that is adequately staffed with qualified teachers, equipped with adequate resources and graced with appropriate conditions for learning (Nyamwega, 2016).

Quality education is assured by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), the (1990) World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, the (2000) World Education Forum and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) to mention a few. These instruments serve as benchmarks for ensuring quality education (Fauziati, 2018). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015), Goal number four specifically focused on quality education as it says, “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning”. This goal serves as a benchmark that ensures quality education to all children, OVC included. Fauziati (2018) highlighted that a call for quality education is a great move in making sure that every child, despite his or her condition in life, receives quality education.

According to Mujuzi (2016 citing the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2010) defined orphan and Vulnerable Children as children who are aged between 0 to 18 years and whose parents are deceased, while vulnerable children may have both parents, but do not have adequate basic needs for survival. In most countries, Zimbabwe included, orphans and vulnerable children are children whose parents have died and now staying alone as child-headed families, similarly OVC are those from deprived social and economic backgrounds (Mujuzi, 2016). In this study vulnerable children are the ones who lack various basic needs and whose educational fees are paid by the government through social protection programmes for OVC known as Basic Educational Assistance Module (BEAM) or whose educational needs are paid by non-governmental

organisations, faith based organisations (churches) or by individual community members.

Zimbabwe as a nation adheres to the stipulations of the international and regional instruments which it is a signatory to. As a requirement, it developed legislatives and policy frameworks that support children in general and OVC in particular in public primary schools. These policies include, the Social Protection Policy (2016) which provides health and educational assistance, National Orphan Care Policy (1999) which provides basic care and protection guidelines for orphans and vulnerable children, this policy further provides a commitment to allocation of resources for enhanced access to education and health services. This is done through Social Protection Programmes such as BEAM which is managed by the Department of Social Welfare. More importantly, according to Mahati *et al.* (2016) the National Orphan Care Policy furthermore provides components of care and support programmes for OVC, specifically in addressing child abuse, stigma and counseling. Despite all these policies, the problem of achieving quality education for OVC in public primary schools still exists. Hence this study sought to understand the quality of education received by OVC in public primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the quality of education received by orphans and vulnerable children in selected public primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe. To be more specific, the primary schools were drawn from Epworth, Mabvuku and Tafara District. Hence, the main research question was: How is the quality of education received by orphans and vulnerable children in public primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was mainly informed by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) whose main thrust is that the environment affects every person’s development. This theoretical framework provides a detailed analysis of environmental influences and argues that natural environments are the major source of influence on developing persons (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; & Swick & Williams, 2006). In this study, these developing persons are orphan and vulnerable children in public primary schools whose environment, according to Guy-Evans (2020) is divided into five special systems which are; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem (Donald *et al.*, 2010). All these five levels could directly or indirectly influence child development, depending on the nature of the impact. The Ecological Systems Theory views the child within structures such as the family, the school and the wider community. Similarly, Garira (2019) notes that, whilst this theory is used for education, various levels of

education structures such as at national level, provincial level, district level, school level and at classroom level ought to work together in order for OVC receive quality education and support services they need. Ecological systems theory also enables establishing the relationship among the school, the home, the health centre and other related systems in their efforts to support orphan and vulnerable children in public primary schools. In the same way Chinhara (2016) states that the, "Ecological Systems Theory seeks to provide a platform to explore the situation of vulnerable children's educational needs in relation to the different socio-economic and cultural factors." The same source further claims that this is so because children's characteristics heavily depend on their elements of the broader environment in which they (together with their families) live and function (Chinhara, 2016). The above explanation is in line with the purpose of this study which sought to understand the quality of education received by OVC in public primary schools, hoping to come up with information that could be instrumental in quality education and support services for OVC in public primary schools.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Given the complexity of understanding the quality of education received by OVC in Epworth, Mabvuku and Tafara in Harare, Zimbabwe this study adopted the phenomenological hermeneutic philosophy by Van Manen (2014) which is based on the lived experiences of research participants. The researcher adopted this philosophy as it is aligned with prominent scholars of the past and present such as Husserl (1970); Van Manen (1990); Reiners (2012); Vagle (2018); & Ringson (2020) and many others who concur that the purpose of phenomenology is to allow the researcher to provide a detailed narration of the studied phenomenon from participants' lived experiences. Other related studies such as Kafle (2011); Ringson (2017); & Barrow (2017) have adopted phenomenology as research philosophy and came up with rich outcomes. For this reason, the researcher considered that phenomenology was the most appropriate research philosophy for this current study which sought to understand the quality of education received by OVC in public primary schools. The current study further used a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the current phenomenon. This approach was found most relevant as it allowed the researcher to understand the perceptions, views, awareness, knowledge and feelings of OVC, school heads and teachers on quality of education. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 public primary schools which took part in this study, also to select 10 school heads, 10 teachers and 80 OVC from Epworth, Mabvuku and Tafara public primary schools. Creswell (2014) points out that purposive sampling enables researchers to select participants for their ability to provide the data required to address the research question. Data was therefore collected using in-depth interviews with school heads and teachers, while focus group discussions with OVC. The study

adopted the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) by Smith *et al.* (2009) to come up with themes from the collected data. More importantly, the researcher followed all the necessary procedures before the study commenced. Firstly, permission to conduct this study was granted by Women's University in Africa's Ethics Committee. The researcher further sought permission to conduct a research in public primary schools from the permanent secretary of the ministry of primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe, likewise permission was granted. The study was further guided by other ethical principles such as informed consent and assent for OVC. Children voluntarily signed assent forms after their parents and guardians were informed about the study, while school heads and teachers signed informed consent forms before participating in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were as well observed in the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the current research are based on a research question: How is the quality of education received by orphans and vulnerable children in public primary schools in Harare?

### Lack of Policy Knowledge and Awareness

School heads and teachers interviewed revealed that they have limited knowledge on child related policies, secondly, they claimed that they were not taught about policies during their teacher training, and they are not involved in any policy formulation. Hence, they found it difficult to implement or enforce the policies they do not know. This participant stressed that:

*I heard of quality education policies and OVC policies, but during teacher training these policies were not taught. As teachers, we are not involved in any policy formulation, hence it is not easy to implement something you don't know or even aware of..."*

The study further established that school heads and teachers due to poor policy knowledge were compromising the quality of education they are to provide to OVC in schools as they do not know policies that are to guide them. This concurs with MacBeath (2016) who established that school heads and teachers should be involved in policy formulation as they are the key policy implementers in schools. The findings further concurs with Chiwaro & Manzini (2015) who articulate that most education policies in Zimbabwe were not being implemented as planned because those who should put them into action either do not understand the intentions of these policies or are uninterested to implement them because they feel they were left out during the policy formulation. Hence, the impotence of full ownership of policies by teachers is important for successful implementation of child related policies in schools. Tshabalala (2015) argued that

teachers are not involved in the policy making process and yet they are perceived as the most important stakeholders in the education making process. Hence, the Government through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education are urged to involve school heads and teachers when formulating policies to do with school children, particularly OVC in schools.

### **Educational and Support Service for OVC in Schools**

From the interviews and FGDs inadequate resources came out as one of the major challenges in public primary schools. The participants highlighted that there is a lack of financial, material and human resources. These are presented and discussed in this section.

### **Provision of School Fees**

It emerged from the current study that OVC in schools encounter a number of challenges including lack of school fees. Lack of school fees has a negative impact on OVC academic performance as they are often barred from attending classes. The findings highlighted that school fees for some of the orphans and vulnerable children were being paid by the government through BEAM programme and also other non-governmental organisations and faith based organisations working in local communities assist with fees for other OVC who are not on BEAM. This provision of school fees by the Government and non-governmental organisations enables a number of OVC to acquire quality education regardless of their status. One of the participants attested that:

*Our school attendance is irregular because of not paying school fees. Sometimes the School Development Committee will not listen to pleas from parents or guardians, but strongly maintain on fees payment. During such days, we don't come to school, but rather stay home and come back to school when the situation is better.*

It emerged from the study that the OVC school fees payment was also worsened by inconsistent BEAM or late disbursement of BEAM funds which pays fees for some of the OVC in public primary schools. On the other hand, the participants in this study appreciated the good work that BEAM is doing for OVC in public primary schools in terms of fees payment. However, the study revealed that for OVC in schools, to effectively receive quality education BEAM has to provide other critical educational needs such as school uniforms, sports fees and stationery which BEAM is currently not providing. This finding validated other findings which revealed that the BEAM programme was narrowly focused on the issues of school fees, while rejecting other important needs such school feeding programmes, stationery, uniforms and health. Overall, OVC seems to appreciate the contributions of BEAM, NGOs and FBOs programme in supporting OVC in public primary schools. The current findings concur with a South

African study by Mwoma (2016) who established that the government and other stakeholders have done all they could to make sure that OVC in public primary schools are assisted to obtain their basic education. Similarly, Ncube (2016) highlighted that Non-Governmental Organisations always try to improve access to education and wraparound services for OVC by strengthening the systems that support these children especially those already in schools.

### **Lack of Transparency on BEAM Programme**

The current study further revealed that the BEAM programme had faced challenges especially with the selection committees. One of the challenges of the BEAM programme was the biases of the BEAM school selection committees when selecting BEAM beneficiaries. The findings of the current study revealed that BEAM school selection committees were not doing a fair job as some children from well-to-do families were recommended and benefiting from the programme and disadvantaged the well-deserved OVC and this left a huge number of deserving OVC out of the programme. Hence, the findings revealed that there are serious irregularities when it comes to the implementation of the BEAM programme in public primary schools thus compromising quality of education to be received by OVC. One of the school heads highlighted that:

*BEAM committees are not fair in that some children from well-to-do families were recommended to benefit from BEAM at the expense of deserving vulnerable children.*

It further emerged from the study that OVC in public primary schools fail to access BEAM programmes because BEAM school selection committee members are politically motivated when undertaking the selection processes. It was revealed that one's parent/guardian's political affiliation may be the deciding factor in whether one's child would qualify for the BEAM programme or not. One of the participants revealed that:

*I can say politics in this community is rampant; everything is politicised, including this BEAM programme for OVC in schools.*

The study revealed that there is a lot of politicising and corruption in the BEAM school's selection committees and a result deserving OVC are being left out of the programme. In addition, the findings of the present study concur with a study done by Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA) (2014 cited by Mangwaya) which revealed that the, "BEAM selection was seriously based on political grounds thus preferring children of well-known political numbers of a certain political party for fear of being victimised if they do not select their children into the BEAM programme". The study furthermore established that there was late disbursement of BEAM funds to schools. The late disbursement of BEAM funds to schools may

compromise the quality of education and may also affect the academic performance of OVC as they are sometimes asked to go back home and look for fees. The findings of the present study concur with Ncube (2018) who revealed that late disbursement at times forced School Development Committees (SDCs) to send back home BEAM beneficiaries for non-payment of fees. The late disbursement of funds may be impacted negatively on OVC's education as they may be kept out of school for a considerable period of time, hence disadvantaged these children in terms of syllabi coverage.

### **Provision of School Uniforms**

In public primary schools, school uniforms are a requirement that every child is expected to have. It emerged from the study that school uniform for learners is a policy requirement which is difficult to implement since most of the OVC come from very poor families. Not having school uniforms may psychologically, emotionally and academically affect OVC in public primary schools as they may be singled out from fellow learners and they are likely to lack self-esteem. One of the participants stated that:

*Although every child is expected to be in school uniforms, sometimes we relax the policy especially when it comes to OVC, though we always encourage them to be in school uniforms as other children...procurement of school uniforms is one of the greatest challenges for OVC in primary schools.*

The buying of school uniforms is totally the parents' and guardians' responsibility. The current findings concur with Tshoko (2017) in Botswana who established that OVC in schools lack school uniforms. Likewise, Dekeza (2018) and the other study by Munyati et al. (2006) highlighted that OVC in schools come across challenges in procuring school uniforms. The current study findings further established that not being in school uniforms OVC were at risk to stigma and discrimination which in most cases may affect their self-esteem and academic performance. In this vein, it could be an opportune time for public primary schools to look for external support that may help to respond to the needs of OVC meaningfully.

### **Provision of Stationery**

The procurement of stationery such as exercise books, pens, book covers and rulers was found to be a responsibility of parents or guardians. The study revealed that most OVC were coming to school without adequate stationery and that was a stumbling block for OVC's academic performance. Due to lack of stationery children may sometimes be asked to go back home and get all the required stationery. This act of chasing OVC out of classrooms due to lack of stationery is the act of depriving children their right to education, and that has a negative impact on their educational opportunities. Lack of stationery was revealed as the course of poor

academic performance, absenteeism and bad behaviour for learners in public primary schools. One of the participants mentioned that:

*Most of OVC in schools do not have enough stationery including exercise books, pens and other school stuff which contribute to poor academic performance, irregular school attendance and bad behaviours.*

Data clearly revealed that OVC in public primary schools were the hardest hit by the non-provision of stationery by schools. Only a few OVC were being helped by NGOs and local business people with stationery, while the majority of them need help in terms of stationery. School heads and teachers revealed that most of the cases they solved and handled were of stealing of exercise books and pens by OVC from other children. The findings of the current study regarding lack of stationery are in consistent with earlier studies conducted in Zimbabwe, for example, Chinyoka (2013) revealed that without textbooks and other teaching and learning resources, quality education in schools cannot be attained. This concurs with Vander Zalm (2010) who revealed that learners who are provided with adequate learning materials such as exercise books and pens perform much better than those who lack such basic provisions. Similarly, Dekeza's (2018) articulates that learners benefit a lot from the teaching-learning process when they participate in the learning activities such as daily writing exercises.

### **Provision of Food and Nutrition**

The study revealed that the hunger situation faced by OVC in public primary schools was worsened by the termination of support by international Non-Governmental Organisations which used to provide feeding programmes to OVC in schools. The termination of feeding support by Non-Governmental Organisations could have been caused by political interference and it is sad because that left many OVC struggling to get food. The study further revealed that lack of food affects OVC's academic performance as they fail to adequately concentrate in class. Furthermore, lack of food affects children's thinking skills, behaviours and health. All these factors may impact negatively on the academic performance of OVC in schools as hunger may cause problems with memory and concentration in class. One of the participants stated that:

*OVC struggles a lot to get food, which as a result compromises their health and concentration in class leading to poor performance...currently, we are receiving food donations from one of the local organisations. The donations have a positive impact on OVC's daily school attendance and academic performance.*

It emerged from the study that learners, particularly, OVC should be provided with adequate

nutrition both at home and at school as food improves concentration and class participation. The study further established that one of the local organisations working in partnership with Mary's Meals International is providing children in schools with nutritional support and the feeding programme is motivational as OVC learners attended school daily leading to good academic performance and good school attendance. It also emerged from the study that the Government of Zimbabwe through its ministries was sponsoring a school-feeding programme in primary schools; however, the programme was viewed by participants as not doing much towards OVC in schools. This could be due to financial constraints that may cause the government to fail to provide adequate school feeding programmes.

### **Provision of Psychological Service**

The study revealed that most OVC encounter psychological challenges that affect their academic performance and social life in general. These psychological problems including stress, depression, lack of love, discrimination and stigma, lack of concentration in class, loneliness, isolation and rejection. These views were shared by one of the participants who clarified that:

*OVC face serious psychological problems such as discrimination, stigmatisation, and lack of concentration in class, loneliness, isolation and lack of love as some of the teachers have a negative attitude towards OVC.*

Such psychological issues, if not addressed properly, may negatively affect the well-being of OVC in primary schools. School counselling is one of the strategies mentioned by the participants as being implemented in schools to address the psychological needs of OVC. Although school heads and teachers highlighted some knowledge on the value of school counselling in addressing the psychological needs of OVC, they indicated that a lot needs to be done in training teachers and school heads in order for them to assist OVC in public primary schools effectively. It emerged from the study that all public primary schools do not have professional school counsellors who are to provide quality psychological support to OVC in public primary schools. Participants in study revealed that school counselling was not that effective as teachers and school heads were not taking the programme seriously due to a lack of training and lack of resources. One of the participants revealed that:

*We have two school counsellors who provide counselling to learners with problems. As general teachers, we are not specialists in counselling, though we received some basic training through workshops organised by NGOs.*

It is necessary if primary schools could have specialist school counsellors who may assist the

learners adequately. The above situations according to Ncube (2014) denies children their rights as enshrined in the UNCRC (1989) and calls for institutions such as schools to respond accordingly to the plight of these children. Hence, Ongevalle *et al.* (2014) suggest that teachers should have the capacity and commitment to address the needs of OVC in schools. The findings of the current study further established that public primary schools were struggling to respond to the psychological needs of OVC due to lack of ongoing training and workshops for teachers who are appointed as school counsellors. Lack of training and workshops for counselling teachers could compromise services received by OVC in schools. The counsellors may not be aware of what counselling services to offer and how to offer them. The current study further revealed that OVC in schools were receiving watered down counseling support as school counselors were professionally incompetent in counseling provision. Likewise, Shumba & Moyo (2014) established that OVC were not getting adequate counselling because the school counsellors were lacking specialised professional skills, knowledge, attitudes and understandings to manage and administer counselling provisions in tandem with the unique characteristics, interests, abilities and needs of each individual child. From the statement above, the participants concurred that the provision of school counselling, if well supported and adequately funded by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education can empower public primary schools to effectively respond to the psychological needs faced by children in general and OVC in particular in public primary schools.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study concluded that OVC in Epworth, Mabvuku and Tafara public primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe were not adequately receiving standard quality education and support services because of serious lack of financial, material and human resources in schools. Furthermore, the study concluded that even though the Government has assisted OVC in public primary schools with the educational fees, a lot has to be done on other essential needs such as stationery, uniforms, feeding and health. Lack of these needs have a negative impact on OVC's academic performance and also affect their behaviour. The study also concluded that one of the major reasons why children in general and OVC in particular were not receiving quality of education in public primary schools was because teachers were lacking knowledge and skills needed when handling OVC in schools. Similarly, inadequate provisions of textbooks, poor school management, lack of teacher-pupils supervision and poor facilities contribute to poor quality education despite that fact that the government always claim that it has major concern for improving quality of education in public primary schools. For orphans and vulnerable children in public primary schools to achieve quality education, it simply requires additional resources from the

government. The study further concluded that there is serious politics and corruption on social protection programmes and this disadvantages the deserving beneficiaries as they end up not receiving what they are entitled to. Hence, there is a need to involve all other key stakeholders in communities who are interested in education to be part of the social protection committees.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- There should be regular monitoring and evaluation of social protection programmes such as BEAM and all other programmes that are meant for OVC in public primary schools.
- The Government should allocate enough resources for OVC programmes and should collaborate with other interested stakeholders in education.
- Communities should form child advisory boards which work together with other OVC stakeholders in local communities.
- There is need to conduct a countrywide study on the same topic for the purpose of coming up with a more academically sound knowledge base.

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