

Improving Junior and Senior Open Learning Classes for “Push Overs” (Drop-Outs) in Zambia

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Situation Analysis

Open and Distance Learning has over time been given paltry attention at all levels of education administration and management in Zambia. In the Ministry of Education the Directorate for Open and Distance Education (DODE) is responsible for four major types of educational programmes:

- Providing Junior and Senior secondary courses to over 30,000 students envisaged to be enrolled in the National Correspondence College
- Organizing and managing open secondary schools where more than 19,000 students study, under the supervision and learning-materials produced by National Correspondence College
- Organizing and teaching evening classes at primary and secondary levels for more than 15,000 students most of them adults; and
- Training in specific skills for more than 1,250 recent school leavers and adults in Schools for Continuing Education

The above bullets indicate the categories and students who are “pushed out” of the conventional school at various levels.

The main focus of the programmes offered by DODE is the provision of formal school-type education for those who had not have an opportunity to undertake or complete formal school. For many of the students, the programmes provide the second chance to obtain formal qualifications that they were unable to obtain in school and colleges.

DODE face serious problems of under-funding, lack of skilled personnel and transport, inadequate materials for learning and teaching and uncoordinated planning. Although there is potential for enormous growth in the number of students reached by the programmes, the capacity to sustain immediate and rapid growth does not exist. This

problem will persist as long as these forms of education remain the sole responsibility of the Ministry.

In its Mission to Providing equitably accessible education and skills training opportunities for sustainable livelihood and development; and the vision of Innovative and productive life-long education and training accessible to all by 2030, (Educating Our Future, 1996), (Fifth National Development Plan, 2007) Zambia has been striving to develop policies and interventions to meet its nationals with at least Basic Education.

Responding to the OAU Charter on the Universal Education for all, Zambia soon after its independence in 1964, embarked on achieving the set goal for all children of seven (7) years and above to be provided a place in school. This was achieved in 1968 as

“Nearly 90 percent of the target for the total primary school enrollment was achieved. This was a very satisfactory performance”.

Mwanakatwe (1974:33)

At this time the population of Zambia was only about 3.5million. As the population gradually increased, this proclaimed achievement, of course, was without far reaching consequences. As the country approached the 21st century, the drop out rates at primary and secondary levels soared:

“... 250,000 primary school age children were not attending school and 32,000 children could not find places in Grade 1.

By 2001, it was estimated that 30% of children in the school-going age were not enrolled, which translated into nearly 620,000 children. The problem was particularly high in the rural areas where, for children aged 7, over 55% were not enrolled.”

(National Implementation Framework, 2007-2010 NIF Report 2006 pp11

While School infrastructure remained stagnant, the school going population kept on increasing. Equipment could not be properly maintained or replenished and the extent of deterioration rose to levels that the schools and colleges developed into eye sores. School desks ran short; water supply became erratic in most of the public schools. Vandalism, and pilfering made most public schools to be *unpopular* creating the private and grant aided schools to be the most preferred.

“As a consequence of the state of affairs above, the quality of education remained quite, resulting in loss of confidence in the value of education among parents and communities.” (National Implementation Framework, 2007-2010 NIF Report 2006 pp11)

Rejuvenation

In trying to recollect the lost fame and confidence in public schools, the Government in 1991, developed a policy document “*Educating Our Future*” which provided for a new approach to education delivery. In this policy document, the government envisaged to rehabilitate the schools, provide necessary requisites and capacity build the human resource in order to improve the learning environment.

Between the years 1991 and 2002, Government through several cooperating partners started funding school programmes that emphasized on rehabilitation of infrastructure and curriculum development that favoured the education of the child. Various programmes like Basic Education of Sub-Sector Improvement Programme (**BESSIP**), Programme for Advancement Girls Education (**PAGE**) and New Breakthrough to Literacy (**NBTL**) were successfully launched and executed. All these were envisaged to refine the *physical environment for the education of the learners*.

These efforts, though vigorous and highly funded by cooperating partners could not arrest the aggravated drop out rates in schools; the number of “push-overs” continued to soar.

The emancipation from public company ownership to privatization in 1991 escalated the levels of retrenchments and company closures. These economic changeovers had great impact on education and aggravated on the rise of drop-outs. Many families relocated from places with nearby schools, to places and settlements where schools were either a pipe dream or too distant to reach.

Drop Out rates

By the year 2006 the extent to which the pupils abandoned school became alarming. Though the drop out of pupil vary from region to region in all cases the drop out rates for girls was higher than that of boys

Drop Out Rates by Grade and Gender

Grade	Male %	Female %	Total %
1-7	2.12	2.75	2.43
1-9	2.17	3.00	2.58
10 – 12	1.17	2.62	3.79

2006 Educational Statistical Bulletin Ministry of Education p.p.82

Drop out Reasons

Generally the drop out reasons in the country have been summed as follows

- Limited number of available places in schools (at all levels)
- Non expansion of existing infrastructure in schools
- Limited number of schools in the country, districts and zones
- High pupil/Teacher attrition rates
- Distant locations of schools from dwelling places especially in rural schools
- Long distances between villages
- High birth rates and fast population expansion without birth control especially in peri-urban arrears, suburbs, compounds and villages
- Shortage of teaching staff in schools
- Fewer High schools than basic schools
- Relocation of families due to retrenchments, closure of mines and companies, privatization

Lower Basic level Drop-outs

Statistics revealed that although there was massive campaign for grade 1 enrollments, the number of places in the Lower Basic School could not capture all school going children eligible for entry. Others were dropped out. In urban areas and worse still in rural areas – due to limited classroom space – children were enrolled in grade 1 at the age of 9 and 10 instead of the mandatory and legitimate age of 7 years. This marked drop-outs at the onset.

Middle Basic Level Drop-Outs

The upper basic section (grade 5 to 7) also had its reasons for drop-outs. Records show that, the progression rates reduced especially for girls due to negative attitudes enshrined in the communities that it was not worth to educate a girl; that the place for the girl was in the kitchen; that the girl should only be trained to be custodians of families; and early marriages.

Upper Basic Level Drop-Outs

In order to meet and accord an opportunity of dropped-out children at a tender age, parents in communities and scanty locations felt duty bound to formally educate the drop-outs in small groups by using a volunteer member of the community from the church or neighborhood. Such arrangements became very common in the country.

Constraints

Education Broadcasting, Audio-Visio Aids and e-Learning

Due low number of teachers available to supervise open and distance education, education broadcast and e-learning would play alternative. However the following inhibit the process.

- Zambia's resource do not allow extensive provision of computers for use as educational media in the school system
- Computers though are increasingly being used for in-service teacher education in resource centres and are extensively used in the higher level of education
- Programmes and materials are directed towards enriching and supplementing the educational experiences of those in the formal system and likewise of those enrolled in the distance education programmes and in open secondary schools
- Very few schools have radio or television sets for receiving the transmissions, or player s for making use of tapes and cassettes.
- Schools which do not have electricity may be unable to locate or purchase batteries for receivers they may have.
- User ignorance has also resulted in transmissions being not properly used or appreciated
- The greatest problem is however the very high cost of studio and broadcasting time. The estimates for recording and transmitting programmes on the same scale as in the past would now cost equivalent 7.5% of the current budget of the Ministry of Education which is clearly unaffordable
- Much of the equipment has not been well maintained and much is obsolete
- The Education Broadcasting Unit has been operating without the necessary human resources for programmes and equipment and has lacked the transport needed for making films and recordings and for providing professional support to users
- The unit maintain no more than skeleton staff engaged in the preparation of broadcasting materials but not in the actual provision of services

Interventions

However, in recent years, the Government has increased the funding to 3.2% of Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) on education and training (including Technical Vocation Education Training expenditures under another ministry). Notwithstanding this effort, funding level is still much lower than the average government expenditure on education in three comparator

countries (Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi) where this is 5.3% of GDP. The comparator countries devote at least 25% of their domestic discretionary budgets to education, compared to Zambia's 20%. (Fifth National Development Plan 2007).

Placement of drop-outs in formal learning activities has been the greatest challenge for Zambia. Thousands of pupils drop-out from school at different age. The most critical age group, which even institutes the largest number of drop-outs, is between 14 and 18 years. Because of the vulnerability of this age group, the Government of the Republic of Zambia had introduced interventions that strive to establish Junior and Senior Secondary Open Learning Classes.

Organization of Open Learning Centres

Between 1996 and 2006 the Ministry of Education had paved to individuals, NGOs, Churches to open community schools in order to improve access of basic education to the nationals and try to curb the number of drop-outs. With this intervention, a steady decline in the number of out of school children from 2000 to 2006 was experienced as illustrated below.

OUT OF SCHOOL Children

AGE GROUP	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
7 -13	22,626	1778	24,405
14 – 15	25,189	43,857	69,046
16 -18	100,419	198,913	299,332

2006 Educational Statistical Bulletin Ministry of Education p.p.82

The Ministry of Education under the DODE re-organized the department to a more appropriate structure and review infrastructure needed by the learners. This restructure was to refer all sorts of learning offered to drop outs as Alternative Learning. This was to be categorized as follows:

Alternative Lower Basic Education (**ALBE**) to cater for grades 1 – 4

Alternative Middle basic Education (**AMBE**) to cater for grades 5 – 7

Alternative Upper Basic Education (**AUBE**) to cater for grades 8 – 9

Alternative High School Education (**AHSE**) to cater for grades 10 – 12

Alternative Learning was to be organized at various levels of education according to levels. Junior and Senior Open Learning therefore was arranged to meet the needs of the drop outs between grades 8 – 12.

It was envisaged that these programmes begin in the year 2007. Materials were developed and all administrative structures established. Between July 2005 and March 2006 the department of Open and Distance Learning organized sensitization and training programmes to prepare for the take off of Learners Support System. The sensitization and training sessions had the following outcomes:

- Increase access to Basic and High school education for out of school and hard to reach children, orphans and other vulnerable groups by 2006.
- To join Regional and International Open and Distance Association for collaboration in relationships with Open and Distance Learning procedure

Functions of Institutions

Under the learner support the following were lined up as functions.

Resource Management:

This was the provision of part-time staff mobilization and utilization of materials i.e. record keeping and distribution.

The first batches were produced to cover the basic subjects at Junior Open Learning levels i.e. Grades 8 and 9. This was a starting point that flagged off in the year 2006. Some pilot schools were selected in some provinces of the country where the Learner Support Materials were sampled. The materials were proved to be effective but several set backs were realized;

The learners could afford the cost of course materials. The sampled materials were relatively expensive in rural areas while those in urban areas could afford and proposed the reorganization of learner support in order to accommodate drop outs at all levels. The proposed structure designed to arrange the learners as follows:

- Recognizing its inability to respond to all the needs, the Ministry will encourage partnerships with other stakeholders, communities, non-governmental

organizations, and the private sector in the provision of continuing and distance education

- Promote continuing education programmes which combine the formal acquisition of knowledge with the development of skills and competencies relevant to employment, economic growth and development
- The Ministry of education will promote the use of distance education for the initial and ongoing training of teachers.
- The ministry will integrate the provision of open learning into mainstream planning process.
- Increase access to quality continuing education programmes as another avenue of educational provision for out of school children, youths and adults.
- Recognizing its inability to respond to all the needs, the Ministry will encourage partnerships with other stakeholders, communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector in the provision of continuing and distance education.
- Promote continuing education programmes which combine the formal acquisition of knowledge with the development of skills and competencies relevant to employment, economic growth and development

Wherever they go they either get places in Academic Production Unit (APU) or day schools where they rent quarters or stay with relatives or acquaintances at a fee.

Conclusion:

In addition, for as long as DODE programmes aim mostly at providing a second chance to obtain formal qualification, their potential to provide lifelong education for adults will be constrained. Like many other third world countries, Zambia needs capacity building of staff that shall be able meet the needs of the drop-outs. In the there is need to set up a global fund that would be able to meet and facilitate the needs of the drop out. Dropouts do not just need education. They greatly need economical empowerment while they are striving to meet their lost glory.

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