

The Challenges of Rural Education in Zambia

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Abstract

Education is a basic human right that is recognized globally and documented in many educational policies even among sub-Saharan African countries and Zambia inclusive. This basically implies that education is a right for each individual. It is also a means for enhancing the well-being and quality of life for the entire society. This being the case, education must be available to all people to enable them survive and develop to their maximum potential. This paper was compelled by the frequent reports coming from the Zambian rural areas and other prominent scholars & institutions on the neglect of rural areas in terms of social and economic services provision. Using a desk study, the researcher's interest was to look through literature on the experiences of different areas in their provision of education to the rural areas. A focus on education is important because it is an important instrument for the existence and full functioning of society. Am able to confirm that majority of the rural citizens in the Zambian rural areas are denied access to education due to a myriad of challenges. It was established that many factors contribute to the challenges of rural education in most of the poor and rural areas of Zambia. These range from social, economic to cultural and geographical dispositions of an area. After synthesizing different province experiences, I summarized the challenges into two categories: 1). Factors that contribute to the lack of qualified teaching staff in rural areas; and 2). Factors that make it difficult for learners and teachers to attend rural schools. I concluded that it is incumbent upon government, being the custodian of public interest to ensure that every citizen is given access to quality education regardless of their location in Zambia, be it urban or rural.

Keywords: education, rural education, rural schools, rural, urban, human rights.

1.0. Introduction

The concept “education” lends itself to so many meanings. Its use in one area can easily be misunderstood and disputed by other people in another, or indeed within the same area. However, UNICEF (2017) states that, “Education is a necessity for human survival. It enables people to efficiently and effectively function in their own environment”. The concept of education suggests the development of valuable knowledge and skills in a society. The transmission of culture through generations, grooming of an individual and moral development, and promotion of social and economic progress (Siegel, 2018). Education involves everyday learning through life experiences including organized learning activities (Rogers, 2007). As a result of the necessity for education, there has been the view that one who ceases learning ceases to exist, although he or she may be living. On this basis, Msimuko (1987) records that all races, no matter how primitive they are considered to be, have had an education system which has enabled them to survive in their respective environments. He regards education as a social mechanism designed to enable humanity to survive in their relevant societies regardless of the state of their backwardness in comparison to other societies.

Several initiatives have been launched over the globe in which the importance of education has time and again been re-affirmed. For example, the 1990 World Conference on Education For All (EFA) (UNESCO, 2006). The Conference adopted the World Declaration on Education for All and a Framework for Action emphasizing meeting the basic learning needs. It was declared that every person being a child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. The EFA envisaged educational programs that are encompassing, activities and services in the public and private sectors that are aimed at meeting the basic needs of children, youth and adults both within and outside school (UNESCO, 1990). In addition, the World Food Summit in 1996 in Rome emphasized increased access to education for the poor and disadvantaged groups including people in rural areas. This was identified as a key strategy for poverty eradication and sustainable development (Shibeshi, 2006; UNESCO, 2009). Furthermore, the World Education Forum that was held in Dakar Senegal in the year 2000, adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, which incorporated the six Regional Frameworks for Action (UNESCO, 2006). The Forum participants demonstrated a collective commitment to action to achieve the goals and targets of then the Education for All by 2015 (UNESCO, 2005). Subsequently, many countries have realized the importance of universal education, both as an instrument for economic growth and as a foundation for democratic societies. Education has also been realized to be a key to development (Brende, 2015).

Since this realization, several countries have heightened their efforts towards the provision of education. Education reports from some Southern Africa countries show that governments have expanded the provision of education, and many children are now attending school in both rural and urban areas (UNESCO, 2005). However, there still more that needs to be done as many rural areas continued to encounter difficulties in accessing education and later on quality education. Rural children, like urban children, have the desire to acquire knowledge and skills. Additionally, Africa 24 Medial (2011:1) writes that:

The craving for education by rural children is evidenced by the harsh conditions which they undergo in order for them to go to school. Many are in tattered clothes, often with no shoes or formal uniforms, the classrooms are dilapidated and grubby. Boys and girls alike, continue to assemble in classrooms with limited ventilation and other informal learning places to get the much-needed education. In cases where there are no teachers, they depend on their parents and tutors, if available, in grass thatched buildings or under a tree.”

However, the provision of education in rural areas in Zambia remains marred with challenges. Rural areas are often deprived of better education services. More often schools are few and located far from the people. There is a marked shortage of teachers and learning materials and other educational resources such as libraries (Harmon and Weeks, 2011). These are some of the setbacks which make rural education in Zambia unattractive and challenging.

These experiences entail that growing up in a rural area of Zambia, represents transitioning into adulthood without a decent education. If they receive the necessary education, people in the rural areas are capable of taking the lead in shaping the future for themselves and, more importantly, the development of the nation. Education for rural people is, therefore, equally significant in achieving both the Sustainable Development Goals, including sustainable development for the rural communities in Zambia. Before, getting into a detailed account of the aim of this article, a clarification of key terms is crucial.

2.0. Conceptual definitions

2.1. Rural

There are many views and a lengthy debate of the meaning and categorizations of “rural.” Rose (2017) explains that the problem of defining the concept “rural” is not new, there has been a wide debate. However, it is not in the interest of this paper to enter into debates on the concept rural. The definition adopted in this article is by Avila and Gasperini (2015) for its relevance to our focus. They say: “Rural is a composition of human settlements with agriculture production as the main economic activity. Geographically, rural areas are isolated from urban areas. They are remote places found in the countryside, in forest and or mountains. Typically, rural people lack access to socio-economic amenities such as quality education, good health services, transport, marketing facilities, as well as electricity among others. Rural people often live a nomadic life; they are pastoralist and fishermen.”

2.2. Education

Like any concept in social science, education has been conceived differently by different scholars. For the purpose of this article. Education refers to the development of valuable skills and knowledge in society. It is the continuous reorganization of experiences, values, knowledge and skills to enable people survive in their own environment. This factor is reinforced by Julius Nyerere (1967:17) who defines education as “the transmission of the accumulated wisdom, knowledge and skills of society from one generation to the next.” Essentially this definition sums up the universal aim of education, which is to prepare people to fit in their own sociocultural contexts be it family, community and society as a whole.

2.3. Rural Education

Rural education is, therefore, an amalgamation of the two terms ‘rural’ and ‘education’ as defined in the foregoing. It can be defined as “education, whether formal or informal, provided to and for people residing in rural areas, whose aim is to enable them to live efficiently and effectively in their environment.” It can be both contextual and sometimes universal (CEI-Global, 2014). Contextual to respond to the learning needs relevant to the immediate environment of the learners and universal to respond to the needs of the wider global socioeconomic community.

3.0. The Challenges of Rural Education in Zambia

3.1. Lack of Qualified Teachers for Growth in Education

There is no doubt that Zambia faces serious challenges of teachers’ qualifications, supply (Michael and Stephen, 2017), and teacher’s deployment. The Ministry of General Education (MOGE) was of the view that “areas have qualified teachers who are unemployed or even underemployed, while rural areas have unfilled posts.” This

pattern of simultaneous surplus and shortage (Mulkeen, 2005) is strong evidence that the problem of teachers in rural schools will not be solved simply by training or producing more teachers from the institutions of learning. Lembani (2019) stated that “the lack of qualified teachers in rural schools is simply because many teachers do not want to stay in rural areas due to social, professional, and cultural issues or isolation.” However, Samoff (2017) argues that “low salaries, lack of access to professional opportunities, and the responsibility to take on multiple duties are major challenges confronting teachers and affect their decisions to work or stay in rural areas of the country”

In addition, most rural schools in Zambia are staffed with a cohort of untrained teachers especially in rural Community Schools. Retired teachers, as well as unemployed youth volunteer their services to teach in rural schools (Joubert, 2007). This is in consonant with Agbor (2012) who explained that rural schools tend to have less qualified teachers and an inadequate number of staff in relation to the number of pupils enrolled.

Nevertheless, the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of General Education was committed to recruitment of teachers for rural schools and communities, fewer, teachers were deployed to take positions and teach in rural areas, though this has always been perceived to be political statements (MOGE, 1996).

In spite of that, many teachers are not deployed in rural schools, especially young teachers, to teach in schools.” The Headteachers receive a list of the deployed teachers for the rural schools from the ministry, but fewer reported, even those who report use it as a stepping stone to leave sooner or later.” One of the major challenges facing rural schools, is attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers. In most rural schools, the learner-teacher ratio is much higher than in urban schools, there is a high turnover of qualified teachers, and rural schools tend to appoint more unqualified teachers. Furthermore, another problem in rural schools is that the more experienced teachers normally take the smaller classes and then leave the larger classes for the young, not so experienced teacher (Lembani, 2019). The young teacher soon leaves because of the pressure of teaching a larger class.”

The quality of teaching in rural schools may also be poorer than in urban areas, as “parents and teachers have lower expectations of what rural learners can achieve” Many teachers in rural areas are not properly trained and are unfamiliar with the latest trends in teaching methods (Chakanika et al, 2016). Rural teachers receive less support from the provincial departments of education. The disparity between rural and urban schools is not new, but rural schools and districts in these areas really struggle to appoint well-qualified teachers who are able to teach effectively.

Furthermore, the teacher turnover rate in rural schools is high (Lembani, 2019), which compounds School Headteachers’ challenges to retain teachers at these schools. In contrast, urban areas are crowded with trained teachers who have no placements. These untrained teachers are paid by either the school or the parents of the children, in the form of chickens, groundnuts, maize, money or anything of value that the family can afford. In turn, pupils perform various forms of chores assigned to them by teachers, instead of paying school fees (Chakanika et al, 2016). The increased demand for education in the quest for the goal of Education for All, coupled with the scarcity of trained teachers in rural areas, has increased the teacher-pupil ratio. As a result, the rural teacher is burdened with an enormous work load, which has the potential to compromise the quality of education. A lack of qualified teachers is a huge challenge in the provision of rural education in Zambia. It leads to low educational attainment and stands out as one of the key constraints in eradicating poverty in the country (Dakar Conference, 2000). For instance, the average educational attainment of adults in Saharan Africa is estimated at three years, which is half the historical minimum threshold for sustaining economic growth. Without first improving access and quality of education, Zambia cannot attain the level of growth needed to reduce poverty and attain the current set Social Development Goals.

3.2. The Relevance of the Curriculum

Research shows that schools’ location and poverty status are closely associated with certain curriculum priorities (Alexander, 2002). According to Alspaugh (1998:43) “learners from rural schools are offered fewer practical educational opportunities than learners in urban schools.” Rural schools offer less, present fewer electives like art and computers, and have fewer advanced placement offerings. But instead teaching and learning must be emphasized in order to improve and also emphasis must be placed on curriculum delivery because this is the lifeblood of schooling.” According to Harley and Wedekind (2002) rural schools lack material provisions such as physical space, electricity, running water, proper toilet facilities, textbooks, and it appears that issues in the curriculum are almost overshadowed by the more pressing needs for resources for effective learning and teaching in Zambian rural schools.

The urban schools are much more resourced and do not get specialized staff to teach computers, for example.” According to Mulkeen (2005) curriculum structuring and planning are difficult in rural areas. Rural schools are not often visited by district officials, and Lembani (2019) in consonant with Mulkeen (2005) said, “rural schools

do not see subject specialists to assist teachers and that is why rural schools experience a higher absenteeism in rural areas because the atmosphere is more relaxed and visits by district are less frequent.”

Additionally, according to Freire (1985), Education should help people to survive in their own environment. Any form of education whose purpose is to disconnect people from their own environment is an instrument of oppression. The economic activities of rural areas in Zambia are totally different from those of urban areas. If children in rural areas are provided with education that equips them to survive in an urban environment, they will inevitably tend to migrate to urban areas. Avila and Gasperini (2015) hold the view that the curriculum should combine the core national content with the local content, taking into account context, customs and livelihood activities. Unfortunately, the curricula of many African countries and inclusive of Zambia generally tend to be too academic, theoretical and examination oriented. This makes the curricula irrelevant to rural children in Zambia (Mwansa, 2016). The curriculum should be informed by the educational needs and the goals that the environment dictates. Zambian environments and cultures are diverse. Different regions have different economic activities. In some regions for instance Luapula Province, fishing is the main economic activity, in others such as Eastern, it is crop production. It is important for school curricula to integrate the main economic activities in rural areas so as to make education relevant to the Zambian rural people. One significant aspect to consider is that the way the curriculum is prescribed (the curriculum as planned), implemented (the curriculum as taught) and incorporated by pupils (the curriculum as learned) has a major impact on the quality of education provided (MOGE, 1996).

The child’s right to a safe, joyful and formative childhood implies that the curriculum at the lower and middle basic levels must be concerned with the pupil’s complete needs: those of the body (physical education, sport, performing arts) as well as those of the mind (concepts, literacy, numeracy, knowledge), affective (music, dance, creative arts) as well as social needs (hygiene, citizenship); moral (values, attitudes) as well as spiritual needs (living in harmony with self, with others, with the supernatural), which mostly are a challenge in rural education in Zambia (MOGE, 2014).

On the other hand, people from the rural communities are less educated and feel less able to challenge the authority of teachers, they do not monitor teachers and do not place a great premium on education. The school’s needs at both local and district level must be addressed for curriculum planning to be effective. Important here is that it must be articulated in educational policy as well. By reviewing curriculum planning and coordination schools may identify and create approaches within new programs that could be applied in other areas. Mwansa (2016) found that “teachers are not engaged in curriculum development, though some from the district administration do not work together to plan curriculum matters, because they are not properly trained.

3.3. Poor Teachers’ Status in Rural Areas

Teaching as a profession is most undervalued in many African countries and this includes Zambia. Generally, teachers are not paid particularly well, and in many cases people who cannot find other work become teachers. Teachers are forced to find additional income to augment their salaries, which seriously impacts their overall performance (Starr & White, 2008). According to Lembani (2019), “In the rural areas in Eastern Province of Zambia, teachers will take to a small type of farming with vegetables and a few cattle.”

According to Lembani (2019) believes that Headteachers “feel dislocated and alienated from debates about policy-making and they feel marginalized and ignored by education authorities such as the national, provincial and district administration. Teachers also crave for professional contact and support by the authorities. According to Chikumbi et al (2017b). “Many teachers do not feel supported by the education system at both state and district levels.” The majority view is that education leaders have very little understanding about rural school life and how to address teaching and learning challenges.

This was in consonant with Starr & White, (2008) who were of the views that “district and national education officials from the Ministry of General Education feel antipathy towards rural schools and this was in congruence with Lembani (2019) who shared the view that the national and district officials “have no understanding of being a teacher or a Headteacher, let alone a rural school teacher or Headteacher and that is a criticism”. A great deal of emotion is evident in these statements. The commentary refers to veiled modes of sanction, punishment, inducement, and concern (Starr & White, 2008).

3.4. Poor Career Opportunities

The career advancement and opportunities for further study are often unavailable or very difficult to come by in rural areas, and opportunities for promotion are very slim (Michael and Stephen, 2017), According to Lembani (2019) revealed, “delays in the payment of teachers’ salaries can sometimes extend up to two months.” These are some of the reasons for the lack of motivation, desperation, and discontent, which result in the incredibly poor quality of education (Ingersoll, 2001). Participants regard the availability of promotion posts at schools in rural

areas as an important factor to relocate to and remain at rural schools. Apart from prestige and self-esteem, management positions also imply increased salaries and allowances resulting in, according to Michael and Stephen (2017), “teachers going to rural areas because of opportunities such as promotional posts.” As such positions and benefits are not available or adequate, teachers are not motivated to relocate to rural areas (McEwan, 1999). Teachers expressed a strong preference for urban settings, which may be attributed to various reasons. Lembani (2019) said that “one major factor could be that the quality of life in rural areas may not be as good as in urban areas and this is due to high poverty levels in rural areas.” The quality of classroom facilities, accommodation, and school resources is also a major concern (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002; Towse et al., 2002). A further problem relates to health. Teachers perceive that living in rural areas results in greater exposure to disease with less access to health care services.

According to Lembani (2019), “teachers also see rural areas as offering fewer opportunities for professional advancement.” Hence, Hedges (2002) is of the opinion that urban areas offer easier access to further education and Teachers find it more difficult to secure their entitlements from the District Education Board Secretary’s Administration offices. Hedges (2002) further describes the reluctance of teachers to accept rural positions as follows: “There is a profound fear among newly-trained teachers with a modern individualistic outlook that if you spend too much time in an isolated village without access to further education, you become ‘a village man and consequently you lack personal development.’ This term strongly conveys the perceived ignorance of rural dwellers in the eyes of some urban educated people.”

According to Lembani (2019), “there is a need for educational administrators to have an adequate knowledge of a rural background before posting teachers who can fit into the school community and who will stay in the rural area.” Brown and Swanson (2003) confirm that “problems in supporting newly qualified teachers and a lack of career development opportunities in rural settings often combine to make the teachers’ effectiveness difficult in comparison with their urban counterparts.”

3.5. Perception of the Value of Education

On the demand side of education, rural children in Zambia may be less interested in attending school due to high opportunity costs and low returns (PAF, 2014). According to Lembani (2019), parents in rural areas such as in Chadiza District of Eastern Province of Zambia often have a relatively low level of education, as a result, may attach low value to schooling and be less able to help their children acquire the education they may need. In addition, homes in rural areas are often ill equipped to allow children to study, they often lack facilities such as electricity. Harmon and Weeks (2011), note that rural dwellers are predominantly known for physical manual work. Because of this, they may not see the value of education. Though, this is also as a result of lack of role models in rural areas. Instead, children are seen as extra hands to herd cattle or participate in various other economic and cultural activities in the communities.

3.5. Unfavorable Living Conditions

According to Mulkeen and Chen (2008) “the rural-urban disparity in living conditions is the major constraint on attracting teachers to rural areas. Many reports from the Ministry of General Education in Zambia reveal that teachers express a strong preference for urban postings because living conditions in general are so much better in urban than in rural areas”. Teachers’ concerns include the rural working environment, the unacceptable quality of teaching facilities, the poor state of classrooms, dilapidated library facilities or the total absence thereof, lack of access to leisure activities and public facilities, lack of easy access to professional improvement, lack of quality education for their children and poor health facilities.

3.6. Unfavorable working conditions

UNESCO (2005) explains that the rural working environment tends to demotivate teachers who are posted in rural schools. Most of these teachers feel isolated and lonely. For instance, they are rarely visited by their supervisors from the education district and provincial offices. These teachers are made to think that their superiors have little concern for their welfare or the state of education in such locations and places.

3.6. Ethnocentrism and nepotism

Teachers in Zambian rural areas, furthermore, have to contend with issues of ethnocentrism and nepotism. Ethnocentrism in Zambia is said to be eminent in most ethnic communities. For instance, Mulkeen and Chen (2008) observed that teachers deployed to an ethnic area different to theirs are confronted with adaptability problem. Often teachers of the same ethnic group as their immediate supervisors are favored in many ways. With regard to issues of training opportunities and study leave, supervisors in such places often recommend their ethnic relations as opposed to those who may be of a different ethnic group to theirs. In other instances, the local language

is commonly used in offices. This may socially and professionally disadvantage teachers who do not speak the language in use. We argue that differences in language and ethnicity can create barriers for teachers' immersion in rural communities. For example, "...when outside teachers who do not speak the local language are deployed in rural schools, cultural conflict is bound to occur (Meijer, 2016). Often, they feel superior or inferior to the local people and refuse to take the time to learn about the culture of their host community. This is further complicated by the presence of the multiple ethnic or linguistic groups within a country. Teachers may be reluctant to relocate to an area where the first language is different from their own. For instance, in Zambia, student teachers come from various ethnic groups across the country, with different first languages. This poses problems for their deployment in areas with a different dominant language group. (Mulkeen and Chen, 2008).

3.7. Distance to School

Distance from home, to where the school is located, is usually a challenge for both teachers and pupils in Zambian rural schools. According to the study conducted by Lembani (2019), "Learners cover long distance to school – some of the children cover long distances through sandy, floody plains to get to the nearest school which in most cases is 7-15 kilometers and teachers walk long distances (246 Km from Nguvu Primary School for example) to get their monthly salaries, which take them an average of two weeks before they get back to their schools."

According to Harmon & Weeks (2011) in agreement with Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) stated that long distances covered by both teachers and pupils have the following double effect: Teachers fail to handle their normal teaching load as they reach the classroom tired. Similarly, pupils tend to lose concentration, and in many cases doze off while the class is in session. In addition, access to schools becomes even more difficult during the rainy season as most meeting places and venues becoming inhabitable. Grass thatched buildings tend to either leak or water finds its way easily into buildings due to poor drainage. Walking from home to school becomes a problem as most rivers and streams get flooded making it difficult for children to access education. As such, learning time is lost in many rural parts of Zambia during this season.

3.8. Witchcraft and Superstition

Generally, in the African traditional societies, witchcraft has undoubtedly been regarded as an instrument of power. The practice is reported by many people to be common in most rural parts of Africa and Zambia is not an exception. In the Zambian rural context, teachers from urban areas who are posted to rural schools fail to cope in such places. They tend to shun rural schools and abandon their posting when they hear about, or experience witchcraft attacks. Experiential based reports show that many schools in rural areas are abandoned for among other reasons related to suspicions of witchcraft (Banda, 2017).

3.9. Poor Infrastructure and Facilities

The face of rural schools in Zambia is unattractive. If the community must construct classrooms, they are often grass thatched, mud structures built out of local or temporary materials, which are perceived as inferior by outsiders (People's Action Forum, 2014). These places are far or nowhere near meeting the minimum accepted standards of a school. Sometimes learning takes place in community meeting centers, church buildings and open spaces which makes school activities unsuitable and uncomfortable for both teachers and learners.

Most of the facilities in rural schools, especially in primary schools, are mostly in an unacceptable state. Many buildings were erected using mud blocks many years ago. In some areas classes are still being held in the open during summer and when it rains, learners are crowded into a few classrooms. Many schools lack the essential infrastructure to function as safe, efficient, and effective schools. This is in congruence with Agbor (2012), rural areas in Zambia also have poorly developed infrastructure and limited access to the critical social services required by students. Social services are considered to be benefits or services provided by government (including education, food subsidies, healthcare and subsidized housing) (Business Dictionary, 2017a). There are numerous studies that indicate multiple inputs affecting a learner's achievement, among them infrastructure; class size and textbooks (Gater & Isaacs, 2012).

The lack of infrastructure and access to social services negatively affects the quality of education in rural areas (Agbor, 2012). Gater and Isaacs (2012) found that schools facing the highest poverty are unlikely to have a school hall, playing fields or sufficient security.

Most rural schools have no water, sanitation, or lighting systems. These services need to be addressed by the government as a matter of urgency. Allen (2014) reported, "the physical state of classrooms is very poor; the floors are full of holes, roofs and ceilings are broken and the facilities are in a poor state of repair. If it rains the roofs leak and classrooms are always wet." Window panes are broken or missing and those classrooms that have doors cannot be locked, which creates a security risk. Few schools are fenced in, which makes it easy for intruders

to enter and vandalize the school. Textbooks need to be transferred to the few classrooms that can be locked. It then takes up time during the first lesson of the day to get these textbooks to the respective classrooms where the books are needed. According to Lembani (2019), In two of the schools that he participated in his doctoral-academic research in rural schools of Eastern Province of Zambia, furniture was stolen and classrooms were often used as toilets and also as platforms for immoral activities such as sexual activities especially in those classrooms that could not be locked. It is unimaginable that teaching can take place under these conditions. It is clear that this is one of the major reasons for the prevailing crises in the education system in Zambia.

4.0. Access to electricity

Many rural areas lack access to electricity which has a negative impact on many aspects of learning and teaching in Zambian rural areas. For instance, the teaching of science subjects may be negatively affected if the science laboratory has no electricity. Ordonez (2011) explains that the world today has become a global village through science and technology, thereby, making electricity a necessity and no longer a luxury. In forestalling the problem of electricity, the Zambian government has always embarked on rural electrification programs through the Rural Electrification Authority. Solar power is being installed in rural and remote areas that are not connected to the national hydro power grid. In Zambia, some rural schools have been powered by solar including teacher's houses. Despite these advances, the challenges still remain. Few places have benefited and majority are still lacking access to electricity and this has negatively on learning and teaching of the learners in rural areas.

4.1. The Constraints of Accommodation

Shelter is a basic need that every person needs for more significantly safety. From the theory of Maslow's hierarchy, one can assume that before reaching the top two tiers of the pyramid (that is esteem needs and self-actualization), a person should first achieve reliable and sufficient income, suitable accommodation, security, stability, confidence, a well-looked-after family and good relationships at work. In the rural context, this theory implies that for rural teachers to be satisfied with their jobs, accept responsibility in the place of their employment, and gain a sense of achievement and personal growth and in turn retain their position, basic needs must first be fulfilled. Undoubtedly, residential accommodation is crucial to all human beings (Maslow, 1943). According to Lembani (2019), the unavailability of quality accommodation and boarding facilities is a significant problem in many Zambian rural areas and it greatly affects the retention rates of both rural teachers and learners. In many cases in rural areas, the government are unable to provide staff housing to all teachers. They provide sub-standard accommodation which requires frequent maintenance. This results in teachers having to endure low-standard accommodation or, alternatively, pay for housing that is far away from the school where they teach, which then also requires reliable transport. In some rural schools, it was found that several teachers left due to severe accommodation problems (OSISA, 2013). Many isolated rural schools are not able to retain their newly posted teachers, because of poor school infrastructure and housing conditions, including leaking roofs, peeling paint and untidy surroundings.

4.2. Learning and Teaching Materials

Despite an increased expansion in the education sector in Zambia, more has to be done to provide learning and teaching aids in Zambian rural areas. The quality of teaching aids and facilities in rural areas is demoralizing. For instance, most of the chalkboards are dilapidated and sometimes it is difficult to find any chalkboard in rural schools. This is compounded by the lack of chalk and other teaching aids (MCDSS, 2015). Teachers usually take initiative and use pieces of iron sheet, fastened to trees or walls, to act as boards. In the absence of chalk, charcoal or dry cassava becomes an alternative. Generally, lack of learning and teaching facilities in rural areas demotivates teachers, and pupils learning under such conditions may not wish to enter the teaching profession. This is in congruence with PAF (2013), "Research" shows that the way teaching and learning materials are prepared and availed to the educationists determines the suitability of the educational program, it can either motivate teachers and attracts more learners, but this was challenge in Zambian rural schools."

4.3. Transport and Communications

Adequate and dependable transport and communication are of particular significance in expanding and strengthening educational provision and improving its quality, transport is also important in the daily movement of pupils and teachers to and from schools in urban areas and in the periodic movement of large numbers of boarding pupils (MOGE, 2012), but in Zambian rural education this still remains one of the major challenges, which results into 'late coming and reporting' to school of both pupils and teachers, which mostly disturbs the smooth running of the educational programs, and it is frequently attributed to transport problems, hence, it affects the quality of education (Sibalwa, 2016). At the level of school management and administration in rural areas, there has been inefficient transport and communication services which is always a constraint in rapid communication between and among Ministry of General Education headquarters and district offices, and all rural

schools. Chonjo, Galabawa and Gepson (2017) in congruence with Lembani (2019) revealed, “Daily pressures such as lack of transportation and communication have negative effects on rural education in Zambia.”

4.4. Access to information

Most rural areas in Zambia have few or no library services, radio and television signal at all. Many institutions and agencies play their role in the education process, but few as pivotal as the library. According to Austin (2018), all the key players in education need a library for efficient and effective delivery of the educational programs. Depending on availability this service can either be a physical library or an online access to multiple libraries, or both.

The process of education consists of learners, teachers and a world of knowledge. The world of knowledge appears in the form of printed and non-printed electronic media, which are carefully selected and organized in an institution referred to as a library. Klapper (2017) explains that knowledge is a resource for a foundation for teaching and reforms in education. This resource plays a crucial role in the educational development of individuals at all levels. In addition, Boskoff (2015) says that the library is a learning laboratory that provides opportunities for pupils to develop information skills and develop a commitment to informal decision-making. In spite of this fact, many rural schools in Zambia still struggle with a shortage of library resources. School libraries are mostly underdeveloped or non-existent, and where they do exist, they are characterized by a lack of materials, ranging from modern books to furniture to suitable buildings.

On the other hand, new avenues to information and knowledge through information communication Technologies (ICTs) are opening up for rural areas. In the past, it was assumed that the waves of globalization would not reach rural areas. UNESCO (2005) revealed that the statistics about rural communities, showed that as many as 25% of rural families now have mobile phones which they are using to obtain necessary information and perform some transactions.

4.5. System and Administrative constraints

In Zambian rural areas system failure also undermines teacher and learner morale, it also hinders the learning and teaching process (Baleghizadeh & Gordani, 2012). Teachers and learners said that they “feel neglected by the authorities and perceive that they are treated unfairly regarding access to promotion, transfers, and benefits, favorable learning infrastructure, well qualified teachers.”

It is also discovered that in rural areas learners are sometimes more open to child abuse, as teachers has authority.” Many cases of learner abuse are never officially reported in rural area especially in situations where rural teachers are influential members of the local community.

The level of sexual abuse is high and is highest among teachers with the most teaching experience. According to Heeralal, (2014), the “disciplining of teachers is often limited by cumbersome systems designed to deal with such difficulties.” Poor communication with schools in rural areas slows down these processes even further. Relatively few teachers are dismissed for discipline offenses. According to Lembani (2019) “sometimes undisciplined teachers from urban areas are transferred to rural areas, where they are prone to further misbehavior.” Evidence indicates that teachers in rural schools face greater challenges, which are incompatible with their urban counterparts. The working conditions in rural areas continue to leave a lot to be desired. Beyond a general improvement in the welfare of teachers, those working in rural areas deserve better circumstances and teaching conditions, especially if the education system is to attract qualified and reputable teachers to return to the profession. This is particularly true if these teachers are willing to work at rural schools in subjects with a shortage of teachers.

4.6. Lack of Socio-Economic Amenities for Rural Teachers

Their socio-economic background may also make teachers reluctant to be deployed to less developed parts of the country. This is particularly the case when these teachers come from better-off urban families and they are not used to the rural life style (Monk, 2017). Teachers who come from well to do families fail to fit in rural environments as they feel denied access to many socio-economic amenities they have been used to. According to Akyeampong and Keith, (2002) explain that rural school teachers often apply for transfers and others forge marriage documents to facilitate their transfers. If denied transfer, they simply abandon their rural teaching positions (Mulkeen and Chen, 2011). In terms of teaching, they usually teach just a portion of their load, as they often find excuses to leave-to collect their pay in town, to go to health centers, to attend funerals and so forth. Above all, absenteeism is a frequent phenomenon among them and this negatively affects rural education in Zambia.

4.7. Gender Issues

There are also specific difficulties related to placing female teachers in rural schools. Female teachers are even less willing, than their male counterparts, to accept a rural posting resulting in rural areas having fewer female teachers than urban areas (Mulkeen and Chen, 2008:4). In some cases, posting single women to unfamiliar areas may cause cultural difficulties and even be unsafe. For an unmarried woman, a posting to an isolated rural area may also be seen to limit her marriage prospects. Single women are not posted to rural areas as a matter of policy in some countries. For a married woman, a rural posting may mean separation from her family, as her husband may be unwilling or unable to move for cultural or economic reasons. Furthermore, the gender distribution of teachers has important implications for gender equity in school enrolment. Across Zambia, enrolment and retention are lower for girls than for boys. The underrepresentation of girls tends to be greatest in rural areas and the most disadvantaged families. The presence of female teachers has an impact on the retention and performance of girls in schools. They can help to make the school environment more supportive and nurturing for girls. Many girls in Zambia are forced to drop out of school because school administrators are not yet sensitive to gender issues. In addition, the presence of females in positions of responsibility and leadership in schools, is an important factor in creating positive role models for girls in the country.

4.8. Initiation ceremonies

Mwanakatwe (1968) in congruence with Lembani (2019) records that initiation ceremonies have always been and are still part of Africa's traditional education especially in rural areas of Zambia and to a lesser extent in urban areas. The essence of initiation ceremonies is to initiate a young boy or girl into adulthood. From Snelson (1974) on tradition education, we deduce that initiation ceremonies teach girls everything concerning their responsibilities and obligations as women, wives and mothers. Similarly, boys are taught everything concerning their responsibilities and obligations as men, husbands and fathers to be. During this process, young adults are secluded from society and are taught various traditional skills expected of them as they enter into adulthood. Through these ceremonies, the cultural heritage of the ethnic group and the clan, the family and the individual are preserved (Mwanakatwe, 1968). During these ceremonies, children who have become of age are withdrawn from school. They are kept in seclusion for a period close to three months-equivalent to a term of schooling in the Zambian school system. At the point of graduating from this school (the initiation ceremony), social roles of marriage are apparent and many of them tend to aspire for marriage as opposed to formal education (Msimuko, 1987). For those who may enroll for formal education, few of them graduate, and the majority drop out along the way. This has been one of the factors contributing to the increase in the levels of youth and adult school illiteracy in rural areas.

In summary, most serious challenges facing rural education is the employment and retention of qualified teachers with good teaching records. Teachers are reluctant to work or stay in rural areas due to the lack of access to professional opportunities and taking on multiple duties without proper financial compensation. Distance to schools, witchcraft & superstition, poor statuses of teachers & lack of accommodation, systematic and administrative issues, transport & communication, lacunas in the curriculum, gender issues, initiation ceremonies among others. The constraints of rural education in Zambia are often left unattended to by policymakers and others, despite their myriad pronouncements of commitments in some policy documents such as, "Educating Our Future- Policy document," Vision 2030 among others. If these challenges are not attended to as a matter of urgency, there is little that the country can do to change the overall education picture in rural areas of Zambia (Lembani, 2019). It is also significant to mention that due to poor education standards in Zambia, there is a high level of unemployment, which leads to the abject poverty experienced by many Zambians in rural areas. Statistics clearly indicate the state of crisis of the education system in the country. This crisis can be addressed by government programs and initiatives implemented by the public sector, such as training programs and mentorships.

Recommendations

This study offers recommendations to improve the conditions and challenges faced by the rural education systems in Zambia.

The learning and teaching environment is a major factor in determining the learning process and learner performance. Rural schools' ability to produce quality learners lies in the creation and maintenance of a good teaching and learning environment. Government of the Republic of Zambia must fill this gap to meet the challenges that are encountered by the rural schools and must be proactively involved in upgrading and developing rural schools. Their commitment to education in rural schools can be shown through the provisioning of adequate financial and human resources to these Zambian rural schools.

Rural societies in Zambia are organized in such a way that the implementation of policies or programs is only successful if the relevant community and its traditional leadership is involved and participates (MCDSS, 2015). The state should therefore involve communities in teaching and improvement of rural schools. Active members of the community must be elected onto school governing bodies such as Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) where they would be in a position to monitor teaching and the possible deterioration of school facilities. Furthermore, community members on school governing bodies can recognize teachers' accomplishments and invite them to participate in different activities. A school-community orientation program can support new teachers to rural areas to overcome their feelings of isolation, acquire a sense of community and security, and develop professional competences for rural service. Community support for rural schools, in terms of the provision of school buildings and other infrastructure can be of help to create empowering environments to assist in promoting quality teaching and learning in rural schools.

A workable strategy to target the recruitment of teachers for rural schools should be pursued by the government. The retention of teachers in rural schools must start from the time that student teachers are admitted into training programs. All teachers should receive professional training and should be able to teach pupils from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, universities can enhance and play an important role in offering cost-effective distance-learning courses that enable teachers in rural areas to keep up to date with teaching methodologies and practice. In order to avert teacher attrition, efforts should be made to target candidates from rural backgrounds or those personal characteristics and educational experiences that make them better suited to cope with the challenges of living and teaching in Zambian rural areas to recruit teachers to teach in rural schools.

Research has shown that the most important school-related factor to enhance learner achievement, is quality teachers in classrooms (People's Action Forum, 2014). The government must put policies in place and they must implement incentives to retain quality teachers in rural areas of Zambia.

The Government should construct more staff houses, classrooms and provide sanitation facilities (boreholes, ablution blocks) in the school and must promote curriculum development that meets the needs of learners in rural areas.

The Ministry of General Education should provide transport and radio communication facilities to rural schools to facilitate timely communication.

Rural hardship allowance should be given according to the remotest and rural schools.

Conclusion

Lack of education erodes cognitive abilities, cripples productive capacities and ultimately leads to poverty. Globally, education has been recognized as a human right and many countries are implementing this by aiming to make education accessible to all. Unfortunately, the urban-rural disparity in Zambia continues. In many cases, government interventions aimed at providing universal primary education fail to narrow the urban-rural gap. The largest public investment in primary education, the provision of teachers, is facing several challenges in Zambian rural areas (CSO, 2010), as this article has shown notable demonstration. The Government of the Republic of Zambia must find political and national will to deal with the constraints of rural education.

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