



CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF POVERTY ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: CASE OF TSHAZI SECONDARY SCHOOL IN INSIZA DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Access to education is one of the important basic human rights in all societies. In Zimbabwe, the provision of education has been one of the most critical issues of government social policy especially since after independence in 1980. Poverty has however remained a stumbling block for most people to attain this basic right. This study sought to investigate the causes and effects of poverty on academic achievement in the Thandanani community in Insiza district. The study sought to expose the challenges poverty stricken students face in their quest for education, subsequently leading them to drop out of school. The methodology guiding this study was a case study. Data was gathered using questionnaires, face to face interviews and document analysis. The study revealed that death of breadwinners; unemployment and lack of education are the prime causes of poverty in the Thandanani community. The results of this study indicated that poverty negatively impacts on the academic achievement of students. The study therefore recommends that school authorities stagger payment of school fees in order to accommodate the less privileged students. The study further recommends that the donor community channel resources to education and feed students who came from impoverished backgrounds.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background To The Study

Access to education is one of the important basic human rights in all societies. In Zimbabwe, the provision of education has been one of the most critical issues of government social policy especially since after independence in 1980. Poverty has however remained a stumbling block for most people to attain this basic right. Poverty is a universal social problem that cuts across nations, race, locations, culture and religion. It has been in existence from the time of the establishment of

the human race on planet earth. Poverty stricken members of the human race have always struggled in a number of ways to attain decent living standards. Poverty presents a number of challenges to its victims such as access to proper health facilities, education, nutrition, employment and the realization of personal aspirations.

Of particular concern to this study are challenges that poverty stricken students face in their quest for education. The plight of poverty stricken students is exasperated by stringent school policies that pertain the payment of fees, attitudes by teachers and fellow students, shortage of food, school wear and stationery. An unsupportive home environment further complicates the poverty stricken students' drive to acquire decent education. The current economic crisis where the prices of basic goods are very high adds more suffering to the already poverty stricken students.

Insiza district, where Tshazi Secondary School is located is in Matabeleland South province, one of the ten administrative provinces in Zimbabwe. It has a total population of 86 000 and this makes it the fifth largest district in Matabeleland South (Mabiza *et al.*, 2004). Insiza district lies in the heart of natural region IV which is characterised by low rainfall and high temperatures. For Insiza, average rainfall stands at 450 millimetres per year and varies markedly from one year to another, changing significantly the volume and the pattern of surface flows (Love *et al.*, 2010). Due to the limited rainfall Insiza District has been severely affected by failed crops leading to recurrence of drought seasons. As a result of the erratic and unreliable rainfall, this district has frequently relied on relief handouts from the donor community. Due to lack of rain, food security has become of major concern to Insiza district. The success rate of rain fed agriculture in natural region IV has been known to be in the order of one good harvest in every four to five years (Sango, 2007). Crop produce from subsistence farming cannot sustain the family for the whole year. This raises the need for the family to supplement in cereal produce though buying mealie-meal from retail shops. They sometimes end up taking up menial jobs in neighbouring rich families in order to meet their basic requirements for food. Students who take up such jobs may lose part of their learning for food. Students who take up such jobs may lose part of their learning time. This seriously compromises their academic achievement.

Higher needs such as esteem needs like education can become dominant only when lower needs such as hunger and thirst have been gratified. According to Maslow's theory, a hungry child cannot pay attention in class since his or her images will be dominated by food. This brings attention in class since his or her images will be dominated by food. This brings to light hindrances poor children experience as they pursue their education.

Region IV, where Tshazi Secondary School is located has been for years declared a drought prone zone. This is evidenced by a number of charitable organizations that have been giving food aid in the past. Presently, the World Vision organization is carrying out a Primary Schools Supplementary Feeding Programme. The programme benefits children between the ages of three to thirteen years who belong to either a school or a pre-school that is attached to a primary school.

Secondary school students do not benefit from this programme despite their family socio-economic background and status. However, the researcher feels that Secondary School students need more food than their primary school counterparts since they belong to the adolescence stage. During adolescence boys and girls experience physical changes that prepare the body for reproduction. It is during this stage when the body requires proper diet that will facilitate

maximum physical, sexual and mental development. Malnutrition as a result of poor diet might lead to ill health which contributed to absenteeism at school.

Tshazi Secondary School is the only school that offers secondary education in the Thandanani cluster of schools. Its feeder area comprises of seven primary schools. This therefore suggests the high possibility of long distances which some students travel on a daily basis on their way to and from school. Walking over long distances might lead to late coming at school and at home after school in evening. Fatigue and hunger might lead to drowsiness during learning as a result of walking over long distances. Children from rich families would usually cycle to school. This puts them at the advantage of arriving at school early without having lost any considerable amount of energy.

The government of Zimbabwe has made an effort to help the economically disadvantaged access education through the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). However, this programme meets part of the educational expenses for the poverty stricken students, leaving the balance as a responsibility of the family.

The timeous payment of school fees, provision of stationery and presentation in complete school uniform are heavy requirements for poverty stricken students to meet. School authorities set deadlines for payments of school fees and levies. Failure to meet these deadlines warrants suspension from attending lessons. Poverty stricken students fall victim to these harsh and to some extent insensitive regulations. The right to education is every Zimbabwean's right as enshrined in the Bill of rights in the constitution of the country. Not all citizens acquire education since many poor children end up dropping out of school due to financial constraints.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Poverty is detrimental to academic achievement at Tshazi Secondary School in the Thandanani cluster of schools in Insiza District. Poor students suffer from starvation at home, have no proper uniforms and fail to meet payment deadlines. These problems negatively affect their learning progress.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the causes and effects of poverty on academic achievement at Tshazi Secondary School in the Thandanani cluster in Insiza District.

1.4. Research Objective

The purpose of this study was achieved through pursuing the following objectives.

1.4.1.1 To identify the educational level of poverty stricken students' parents in Thandanani cluster

1.4.1.2 To establish the academic performance of poverty stricken students at Tshazi Secondary School in the Thandanani cluster

1.4.1.3 To identify the cause of poverty in Thandanani cluster

1.4.1.4 To evaluate the effects of poverty on academic achievement in the Thandanani cluster schools.

1.5 Assumptions

This study was based on the assumption that the participants would provide honest and reliable data and that the sample used was representative of the population. The study also assumed that, the instruments used were valid and reliable for data collection. The study also assumed that poverty stricken students do not perform well at school.

1.6 Delimitations

The study is focused on students from Tshazi Secondary School in Thandanani cluster in Iniza District and not from any other area in Zimbabwe. Focus is centered on dropouts as result of poverty and not of delinquency or teenage pregnancy.

1.7 Limitations

Some school authorities, teachers and respondents would opt not to co-operate with the researcher. The study was also handicapped by financial constraints that limited the amount of information gathered. Due to rising costs of traveling expenses and stationery, the researcher limited the frequency of traveling and the amount of questionnaires for circulation.

The limitations cited above were minimized by the researcher through creating good rapport with school authorities and respondents, so that they co-operate with the carrying out the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Browne (1992) defines poverty as an absolute lack of the minimum requirements necessary to sustain and maintain life, health and physical efficiency such as food, water, clothing and shelter. According to the [IMERCSA FACTSHEET Number 12 \(2000\)](#) poverty is a deprivation in health and survival, lack of knowledge, denial of opportunities for a creative and productive life as well as deprivation in income. What emerges from these citations is that poverty is a condition where an individual struggles to afford, shelter, health and education. Poverty is normally consistent over a long period in one's life.

2.2 Theories and Models of Poverty

Various theories and models of poverty have been identified and have been grouped in the following categories.

2.2.1 Individual Deficiencies Theories

These theories focus on the individuals responsible for their poverty situation. In general individual deficiencies theories argue that poverty can be avoided by working harder and making

better choices. They also contend that poor lack incentives for improving their own condition because of an over-reliance on welfare systems. These theories have received a lot of attention and have been cited in writings on how to improve one's well-being through well planned goals. Critics of these theories argue that they are a lame excuse for social inequality (Fischer *et al.*, 1996).

2.2.2 The Culture of Poverty Theories

These theories state that, it is the characteristics of poor themselves, their values and culture that cause poverty. Poverty is created by the transmission over generations of a set of maladaptive beliefs, values and skills that are socially generated but individually held (Bradshaw, 2006). These theories hold the poor responsible for their fate. However, they are questioned over their explanation of blaming the poor for their poverty as if to imply that if the poor would change their values, then poverty would cease.

2.2.3 Economic and Political Distortions

These theories attribute poverty to the economic, political and social system which causes people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well being (Bradshaw, 2006). They argue that the economic system is structured in such a way that poor people fall behind regardless of how competent they may be. These theories also explain poverty in terms of the inability of the poor to influence and take advantage of the political system. Research has shown that the poor are less involved in political discussions, and their interests are more vulnerable in the political process and they are excluded at many levels.

2.3 Causes of Poverty

The IMERSCAS factsheet number 12 of (2000) states that in the SADC region, most countries experience an average annual population growth rate of more three percent against the background of slow economic growth and continuous dilapidation of the natural resource base. The increase in population further exerts pressure on the meager financial, material and natural resources of a nation, causing more families to become poorer. For example, in Zimbabwe, as the population increases annually, the number of employed citizens declines, leaving the few employees with an ever increasing number of dependents.

Bird and Shepherd (2003) conducted a research on chronic poverty in Zimbabwe's rural areas. Their study revealed that 20% of the poor heads of households had schooling beyond primary. More than 60% had not completed primary school. This study reveals the extent to which lack of education leads to poverty. An uneducated person cannot get a gainfully paying job due to lack of skills required to perform complicated tasks. As a result this individual does menial jobs which pay very little.

According to Bird and Shepherd (2003), another cause of poverty is the death of the male head of household. Chief among the causes of death is HIV and AIDS. This has resulted in many working class parents dying, leaving behind orphans who have no one to fend for. Many poor families according to the study are the child headed households. Children who head families can not sufficiently fend for their younger brothers and sisters. They may end up selling the property

that was left behind by their parents in order to settle for food and other basics. The remaining children end up living poverty stricken lives.

2.4 Effects of Poverty on Academic Achievement

Poverty negatively affects academic achievement in a number of ways. Poverty retards proper human development in physical, mental language and social domains. One's educational achievement is also grossly affected by poverty in sense that poor parents fail to provide adequate financial and material resources that are a pre-requisite to admission at school. Gibson (1981) says that, "...the poor tend to suffer from severe health problems directly linked to mental and physical impairments and other birth defects." This means that the shortage of adequate nutritional food leads to malnutrition which impedes proper mental and physical development.

Davidoff (1987) points out that poverty is associated with a number of educational disadvantages that entail poor attitudes to school, low academic skills, little interest in formal lessons and pessimism on the part of parents. In this way, lack of motivation on the part of students and parents leads to academic incompetence by poor students and active parental support. The absence of these two aspects yields low levels of academic achievements.

What emerges from this review is that poverty is an overall forum of deprivation cutting across the physical, mental economic and social needs. The causes of poverty are varied. Theorists explain the causes of poverty from different perspectives however no a single theory can sufficiently explain this phenomenon's. Literature also exposed the various ways in which poverty negatively affects academic achievement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The methodology guiding this study is a case study. The case study also allows the researcher to explore a bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth at collection involving multiple sources of information (interviews, observations, documents and reports (Cresswell, 2007). In this study, the data gathered was about secondary school children who came from impoverished backgrounds.

The design also adopted a descriptive survey approach with respect to the sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis methods used. The descriptive survey approach was adopted in order to choose a smaller number to represent the whole population. The survey also afforded the study to collect data through the use of questionnaires, interviews and content analysis.

3.2 Target Population

Poverty stricken students from Tshazi Secondary School in the Thandanani cluster in Insiza district participated in the study. An estimated number of 100 students in this rural community school live in poverty. They range between the ages of twelve and eighteen. They were included in the study in order to examine the effects of poverty on school performance. Teenagers who dropped out of school participated in the study. It is estimated that 3- teenagers in the Thandanani cluster community are school drop outs who did not manage to complete secondary education as a

result of financial problems. They participated in the study in order to establish the extent to which poverty contributes to the school dropout rate in the Thandanani cluster.

Tshazi Secondary School teachers were included in the study. The school has an establishment of 30 teachers most of whom are qualified. The study sought their views on the effects of poverty on academic achievement and the competence of poverty stricken secondary school students based in their experience with the students during the learning and teaching process.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

The simple random sampling procedure was used to select poverty stricken secondary school students, parents and school dropouts in the Thandanani cluster. The reason for choosing this sampling was that the sample would represent the larger population.

Secondary school students that took part in the study were randomly selected from the Basic Education Assistance Module application list with 100 names. 50 respondents were selected from this group of students. These students were selected through the ballot method. They picked cards with numbers 1 to 100 in a hat at random. Those that picked cards number 1 to 50 then participated in the study. The same procedure was applied to teachers. Out of an estimated number of 50 poverty stricken parents in Thandanani whose names are registered at Zhulube local clinic, 20 were randomly selected to respond to questionnaires. Out of an estimated number of 30 school dropouts in the area, 12 were randomly selected to respond to interviews.

3.4 Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to compare the academic performance of poverty stricken students with that of non poor students at Tshazi secondary School. The 2012 mid-year test mark profiles were the source of information for document analysis. The technique was used because the mark profile reflects true and unbiased information on the academic performance of students in reality. Results for 20 students were captured and analysed. These students consisted of 10 poverty stricken and 10 non poor students. The results were analysed to compare the pass rates of the two groups of students.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results and analysis of data collected from the students, teachers, parents and school drop-outs. In the 12-14 age group there were 5 males, 7 females which amounted to 12 students (24%). In the 15-17 age group there were 11 males and 17 females which amounted to 28 students (56%). In the 18-20 age group there were 5 males and 5 females giving a total of 10 students (20%). Under normal circumstances people who belong to the 18-20 age group should have finished Ordinary level of education. The 20% drop-outs of this group represented in this study suggest that they either delayed to go to school or they once dropped out of school due to shortage of resources among other reasons and then later resumed their studies. The 15-17 age group which represents 56% of the students is the normal secondary school going age.

The 15-17 age group had 2 male drop-outs and 3 female drop-outs bringing a total of 5 drop-outs (42%). In the 18-20 age group 3 male drop-outs and 4 female drop-outs were recorded which

amounted to a total of 7 drop-outs (58%). The overall total of drop-outs was 5 males (42%) and 7 females (58%). The 58% drop-outs representing females suggests that the community might be placing greater value on educating boys than girls. As a result, educational resources though scarce might be channelled towards boys, leaving girls with no option but to drop out of school before completion.

Parents who responded to questionnaire were grouped in the following categories. In the 30-39 age group there was only 1 respondent, a female (5%). The 40-49 age group had 1 male and 1 female giving a total of 2 respondents (10%). In the 50-59 age group there were 2 males and 2 females which amounted to 4 respondents (20%). The over 60 age group had 6 males and 7 females giving a total of 13 respondents (65%). The grand total of male respondents was 9 (45%) and the total for female respondents was 11 (55%). The 55% female respondents indicate that women are more prone poverty than men probably because they would be preoccupied with household duties than be gainfully employed. That 65% of this population are the elderly shows that the elderly are at a much higher risk of being poverty stricken than the younger people. The reason being that they are not able to work compared to the energetic young people.

Data collected on school drop-outs according to the highest educational level indicated that there were 3 (25%) drop-outs at form one level, 3 (25%) at form two level, 6 (5.0%) at form three level and 0 (0%) at form four level. The highest drop outs were recorded at form three suggests that students had tried by all means to pursue their studies to the highest level. However the high financial demands consistent with enrolling for form four such as school fees, examination fees and other related costs barred them from getting to the final year of secondary education.

Parents who responded to questionnaire were also grouped according to their marital status. 3 (15%) of them were married, 5 (25%) were single, 8 (40%) were widowed while 4 (20%) were divorced. That 40 % were widowed suggests that death is the major cause of poverty especially when the deceased was the bread winner. Put together the single, widowed and divorced, the percentage of single parents becomes 85%.this suggests that single parents are more prone to poverty than their married colleagues. This supports the view that single parenthood is a common cause of poverty.

Results showing the distribution of students according to their parent's status indicated that 11(22%) of the students had both their parents alive, 19 (38%) had only the mother alive, 6 (12%) had only the father alive while 14 (28%) had both their parents late. From this data orphans who lost a single parent or both amounted to 78%. This suggests that death is the one of the causes of poverty in the Thandanani community. Results also showed distribution of school drop-outs according to their parental status. Only 1 (8%) drop-out had both parents alive, 3 (25%) only the mother alive, 1 (8%) had only the father alive while 7 (59%) had both parents late. That 59% of the students who did not finish secondary education had both of their parents deceased suggests that one of the causes of poverty is the death of their parents. This leaves young people exposed to the harsh effects of poverty and hence they fail to further their studies.

The study also showed that students have to walk long distances for them to attend school. In the study 8 (16%) students confirmed that they cover a distance of between 1-3 kilometers to school. 15 (30%) had to walk between 4-6 kilometers, 9 (18%) walk for 7-9 kilometers while the longest distances among the respondents was over 10 kilometers which was confirmed by 18 (36%)

of them. Considering the distances covered by these students this can only reveal the fatigue they have to endure and the extent to which this affects alertness at school. Furthermore, these students hardly get enough meals in between times. This study revealed that 12 (24%) only had one meal per. day. 28 (56%) had two meals per day and 10 (20%) had three meals per day. Of concern are the 24% who have one meal a day and the 56% who manage to get two meals a day making a total of 80% of students who do not take the recommended three meals a day. This may directly affect these students' health and school performance.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study found out that although there are numerous causes of poverty in the Thandanani cluster, death, unemployment and lack of education emerged as the prime ones.

Poverty presents a number of negative effects on academic achievement. It was noted that most poverty stricken eat two meals a day, walk long distances to school and arrive late for lessons. Poverty stricken students revealed that they had been suspended from attending lessons for failure to pay fees on time thereby losing valuable learning time. School drop-outs revealed that their main reason for not finishing their studies was financial shortages. School records on student's performance revealed that poverty stricken students performed lower than their poor counterparts. Although the majority of students were beneficiaries of the government's Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), they expressed facing shortages of stationery, school levies and other basic necessities. This would suggest that the financial aid given by government to poverty stricken students does not meet all the educational requirements needed by students.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the aforementioned conclusions, it is recommended that school administrators should find other more positive ways of encouraging poverty stricken students to pay school fees. For example, school heads can stagger the payments of fees in order to allow poverty stricken students to pay in small and affordable amounts throughout the year.

While parents' low level of education may be the cause of their unemployment and low incomes, it is recommended government and donor organizations embark on poverty alleviation programmes that will make poverty stricken parent earn a living. Donor community is urged to consider funding education for orphans and those students who belong to impoverished families in order to reduce the rate of school drop-outs. It is also recommended that government adjust the amount payable to each beneficiary of the BEAM scheme so that it can meet all the educational expenses required for each student.

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