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Extra –Lessons: Is there a conflict of interest? The case of Gweru Urban schools.**DR. KUREBWA MERCY AND PROFESSOR. MUSHORIWA TARUVINGA DAMBSON****Manuscript Info****Manuscript History:**

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This article examines the state of extra-lessons in Gweru Urban primary and secondary schools. Data was collected from teachers, parents and pupils, through individual interviews and focus group discussions in tandem with the qualitative research approach which was employed in this research. Participants were purposefully selected and data were analysed thematically. The results revealed that extra-lessons were rampant in schools. While extra-lessons resulted in improvement of student achievement, the study revealed that teachers' motives in having extra-lessons were not compatible with good teaching practice in that teachers were compelled to cheat and teach for examinations. Furthermore, parents were robbed of their hard-earned cash through extra- lessons. Families were also left with little time to socialise with their children because most of the time was spent on academic activities. More so, some of the teachers and pupils participated in extra-lessons for the wrong reasons; notably, socialising, drilling pupils in examination techniques and fund raising by teachers, which defeats the whole purpose of education. The paper recommends staff development of teachers, improving teachers' remuneration, and allowing teachers to give extra-lessons within the confinements of government policy. Further studies in primary and secondary schools country-wide are also recommended so that policy-makers can bring sanity to the practice of extra-lessons in schools.

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Background.

Education lies at the heart of development. Education is widely understood by developing countries' policy-makers to be a key determinant of individual productivity and economic –wide growth (Dang & Rogers, 2008). Education is seen to be the fastest impartial conduit to upward social mobility as individuals with higher credentials often receive higher return in the labour market and occupy more prominent societal positions (Brehim & Silova, 2014). Cognisant of this critical role and the glaring benefits of education, parents are making frantic efforts to make their children participate in extra-lessons as a means of leapfrogging them to better performance. The demand for private tutoring has increased (Bray & Kwok 2003). Bray (2009) argues that increased competition for places and passing of specific national examinations has driven parents to seek extra-lessons for their children. Private tutoring prepares them for entrance examinations (Bray & Kwok, 2003). Family members regard private tutoring as a kind of educational investment for upward social mobility, under great meritocratic and credential pressure.

The researcher observed that recent developments in Zimbabwe show a high demand for extra-lessons. Pupils are seen during the holidays, weekends and afternoons in casual dressing or in uniform going to attend extra-lessons. Extended teaching is also observed where pupils get to school at 6.30 am and dismiss at 4.00 pm. Private tuition is a necessity for primary and secondary school pupils (Dang, 2007). A number of researches on private tuition have

been conducted but the researchers intend to limit this research to Gweru Urban primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, the proliferation and the popularity of extra-lessons in the secondary and primary schools propelled the researchers to unravel the perceptions of teachers/pupils and parents on the effects of extra-lessons. In this study extra-lesson is used synonymously with private tuition and private lessons.

Review of related literature.

Many students in developing countries are attending private tuition classes the trend is growing in most of the countries (Bray, 2007). The private tutoring can be considered the third emerging education sector in addition to public and private school sectors (Dang & Rogers, 2008). Private tutoring is defined as fee-based tutoring that provides supplementary instruction to children in academic subjects that they study in the mainstream education system (Dang & Rogers 2008). Bray & Kwok (2003) also define private tutoring as supplementary tutoring in academic subjects which is provided by the tutors for financial gain and which is additional to the provision by mainstream schooling. According to Davis (2004) private lessons are informal and more flexible; and are in two categories namely, face to face individual tutoring or group tutoring. Asankha (2011) suggests that the first type of private tuition education is one-to-one instruction in which teachers visit students or students visit teachers and the second type of private tuition is provided by qualified teachers to small groups of students. The class size can vary from two to fifty students depending on the popularity of a teacher and the student population in the area.

Dang & Rogers (2008) present three characteristics of private tutoring, notably:

- academic-oriented;
- monetary transfer (from tutees or their parents /guardians to tutors) and
- tutoring content or mastery of some cognitive skills being in line with tutees' day-time schooling.

The role of private lessons

Dang & Rogers (2008) summarised the reasons for this phenomenon as private supplementary tutoring that can complement and repeat what students have learned in their daytime schools and help them revise their daytime lessons, deepen their understanding of the underlying concepts or theories through drilling exercises. Its main functions are to help students cope with examinations and to improve their academic achievements. The aim is to stretch the capabilities of students who are preparing for specialised examinations, or improve learning outcomes for low-achieving students. Tansel & Bircan (2006) argue that students who take private tutoring believe that their chances of successfully moving through the educational system will be increased.

According Dam (2000), 89% of primary school children said they took extra classes because:

- they did not understand lessons delivered by their teachers;
- they wanted to study well;
- they wanted teachers to review old lessons and teach new ones;
- they liked studying;
- they wanted to prepare for exams and
- they were forced to study by their parents.

Extra-lessons allow teachers to supplement their meagre salaries with additional income necessary to survive. On the other hand, students are allowed adequate time to cover the national curriculum, which is otherwise difficult to complete during the school day in primary and secondary schools (Brehm & Silova, 2014).

Limitations of private lessons

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Education (2001) and Korean Education Development Institute (KEDI), (2003) reported that 84% of parents consider private tutoring expenses as an economic burden. Recent reports reveal that poor people have become marginalised due to their inability to pay user fees. The right to education of many poor children has been denied because their parents are unable to afford to send them to school (Neefjes, 2002). The same views were noted by Kim (2007), when he said that there is limited access due to house hold budgetary constraints and the distortion of equity in society.

Kim, (2007) considers private lessons as an investment in education with high cost and low benefits. Private lessons offer low contribution to productivity, and are harmful to creativity, imagination and the self-learning process (Kim and Kim, 2002). Further-more private lessons consist of cramming, memorisation and may have little long value.

According to (Park, 2011) difficulty of the exam and the burden of materials to be covered in the exam were the chief reasons why students used private tutoring.

Teachers saw their responsibility as enhancing the knowledge of advanced students and helping disadvantaged students to keep pace with their peers. Utilizing private services will foster greater success on entrance examinations which has had a great impact on the demand for private tuition (Kim, 2007). However, teaching for examinations has its own limitations. According to Popham (2001:21),

Teachers drill their learners relentlessly of types of test items contained in the particular high stakes test so that their learners pass. Such repetitions of instructional activities tend to deaden learner genuine interest in learning. All the excitement and intellectual vibrancy that learners might encounter during a really interesting lesson are driven out by tedious, test-fostering series of drills....Drilling can help learners develop low-cognitive skills and teach them to recite memorized information.

Research Objectives.

- To examine how extra-lessons are conducted in Gweru Urban Schools?
- To unravel teacher / pupil/parent perceptions on extra-lessons?
- To present suggestions on how the practice of extra-lessons can be improved?

Research questions.

- How are extra-lessons conducted?
- How do stakeholders perceive the implementation of extra-lessons?
- How can the practice of extra-lessons be improved?

Research methodology.

This research adopted a qualitative interpretive research approach. Qualitative research helped to obtain in-depth information from parents, teachers, and pupils regarding their feelings, emotions and perceptions in as far as extra-lessons are concerned (Frankel & Wallen, 2000, Creswell, 2008 and Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In this regard, it was imperative that a methodological perspective be adopted to allow the findings to develop “from the data itself rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed” (Creswell, 2002).

The population consisted of all primary and secondary school teachers, pupils and parents in Gweru Urban. The participants were purposefully selected to include teachers and students in both primary and secondary schools. Purposive sampling seeks individuals and sites that can best supply relevant information needed to answer the research questions raised (Creswell, 2008:214). The participants who were interviewed included 8 secondary school teachers, 9 primary school teachers and 8 parents. Three focus groups of teachers, parents and pupils were held respectively. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Data analysis proceeded concurrently with data collection. The overlapping analysis with data collection does not only give the researcher a head start to analysis but more importantly, allows the researcher to take advantage of flexible data collection (Eisenhardt, 2008).

Findings of the study.

Extra-lesson venues.

The research revealed that extra-lessons were conducted by both qualified and unqualified teachers in secondary and primary schools. One teacher confirmed this, “I think 70% of the teachers are participating in extra-lessons”. The research further revealed that extra-lessons were done during the holidays, in the afternoons, mornings for those in hot sitting, evenings and on weekends. Extra-lessons were held under trees in the school yard, in rented premises such as churches and halls, and the majority being carried out at home. Some teachers had this to say about the venues for extra-lessons,

“I converted one bedroom into a classroom.”

“We rent a room at a nearby crèche to conduct lessons during the afternoon.”

“There is hot sitting at my school. When my pupils are coming during the afternoon I take my extra-lesson pupils from 8.00 am to 10.00am and if pupils are coming during the morning, I do my extra-lessons from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm in the school premises under a tree.”

The comments made by the teachers tend to suggest that teachers took advantage of any venue available to conduct their lessons. One teacher concurred with this view and said, "I look for a cheap and accessible venue for me and my pupils". It also emerged from the research that other teachers hired venues when they work in groups to offer secondary school subjects. These rented facilities were used during the holidays when pupils from different schools came to attend lessons.

It seemed that the venues had effects peculiar to them as revealed by the teachers, students and parents. Most of the venues lacked facilities to facilitate a conducive learning environment. One student complained about writing on the lap and constant disturbances from other occupants of the home where extra-lessons were conducted. Furthermore the venues such as school premises might expose both the teachers and the pupils to fatigue. While the venue may be accessible one student who lamented about fatigue echoed, "Attending extra-lessons in the morning does not give me time to rest. By the time I attend normal lessons, I will be tired." Thus the venues for extra-lessons present some negative impacts on the learning and teaching situation.

Economic impact of extra-lessons.

Teachers perceived extra-lessons as money making venture. Extra-lessons have become a mixture of entrepreneurship and exploitation, which however many parents were failing to cope and some children losing out (Masuku, 2009). When asked what the major driver behind conducting extra-lessons was, teachers in a focus group gave the following responses;

"Money is the major driver"

"I want money. I am paid a paltry salary which does not help me sustain my family and other dependants. I have to do extra-lessons".

"I don't enjoy teaching but it is a way of finding income."

The study further revealed that teachers had 5 to 10 students whom they taught during the term and 20 to 50 during the holidays. The charges ranged from a dollar a day (\$1) and \$15.00 to \$50.00 per month. However some affluent parents offered more money and other benefits for their children to fully participate in extra-lessons. One parent said, "I will pay the teacher the amount he needs. If my child fails then I will be stranded in this competitive age". The high rate of participating in private lessons is the fierce competition of going to college and the existence of the college entrance examinations as high stakes tests in the process of moving from middle to high school, students had no choice but to pay for private tutoring that prepare them for entrance examinations (Bray and Kwok, 2003). This tends to suggest while money was the driving force behind extra-lessons, parents were also eager to see their children do well. Some teachers in a focus group confirmed that their living standards were improved by participating in extra-lessons. The other teachers bragged of having built homes and bought cars from the proceeds of extra-lessons. One teacher also said, "I made a good decision to leave my fulltime employment. I converted one bedroom into a classroom and I am not regretting at all."

Furthermore, during the teaching and learning situation some teachers gave priority in terms of resources to students who attended their extra-lessons while the rest were neglected? One teacher confirmed this and said, "If I give extra-lessons to a child, I don't want the child to fail because this will be very embarrassing to their parents." Indeed, extra-classes have become a business, enabling teachers to generate extra-income, and this is a key reason for their negative impact in Gweru Urban schools. According to Benveniste et al. (2008:38), the majority of teachers, nearly (70 %) had second jobs and thus supplemented their meagre incomes by giving private lessons, driving taxis, working at the markets, farming, or in other ways.

In addition teachers ended up losing professionalism by cheating during examinations, drilling pupils to pass the examinations and putting minimum effort during normal teaching and learning time so that more content was delivered to those pupils who attended extra-lessons. There following comments were made by the teachers who were interviewed;

"Cheating is rampant for both public and internal examinations, because some of us teachers would not have worked to expected levels. Pressure for children to do well would have mounted. There is therefore a temptation to give pupils examination papers before they sit for examinations."

"I just teach enough in line with my earnings. What do you expect me to do? Life is difficult."

Several insightful elements stand out in this quote, firstly it is implied that teachers lose their professionalism due to their quest for money. While some teachers might have competency to deliver extra-lessons and produce good results some may be found wanting. This was confirmed by one parent, who said;

“I sent my child for extra-lessons but perusing my child’s extra-lesson exercise books showed that the child was doing well. I was shocked when my child failed dismally .My child later told me that she was asked by the teacher to copy work that was compiled by the teacher”.

Secondly, data also indicated that some teachers lacked the dedication and were no longer applying themselves fully during the teaching and learning situation. This lack of ambition seemed to emanate from the teachers poor salaries expressed in one of the quotes that teachers work for a paltry salary. It further suggests that private-lessons were conducted at the expense of normal lessons. One student reported that, “Teachers have a tendency to cover the syllabus during extra-lessons. If one fails to attend, then you are bound to lag behind.”

Private tutoring is seen as augmenting chances of entering better schools (Foondun, 1992:17). However this research has shown that finances are a challenge in most households. The teacher’s financial benefit has a negative impact on the students’ families. Parents lamented of spending their hard earned cash on extra-lessons. One parent had this to say in light of the preceding views, “It’s just a sacrifice to send my child for extra-lessons, and money is a problem.” Arguably, some parents managed to send their children for extra-lessons while some totally failed. This suggests that private tutoring services are more accessible to pupils from families of more advantaged socio-economic status.

Academic impact of extra-lessons.

The findings also indicate that teachers drill their pupils on examination techniques so that they performed well during examinations as opposed to imparting values necessary for life.

“I teach for examinations because I know what is likely to be set. I am a ZIMSEC marker .In fact I drill the pupils so that they pass.”

Some teachers complained that children were given wrong skills which were difficult to correct especially for Grades one to three. It was also revealed that some teachers enroll Grades one to seven for extra-lessons. As such they did not have the requisite skills to teach infant classes or junior classes. Furthermore some teachers became too busy and they delegated the extra- lessons to their children or domestic workers with ought relevant skills to teach.

Some participants however praised extra-lessons as being problem oriented unlike in normal classroom learning where teachers were interested in covering the syllabus. The research revealed that the individualised approach to teaching gives pupils a better understanding. Furthermore participants acknowledged that some pupils performed better in examinations and tests. Some teachers in one focus group said,

“In the normal teaching and learning there is limited time for individual attention because the classes are too big. Some schools have hot sitting living very little room for normal lessons”.

“I engage in extra-lessons in order to achieve the best examination results”

This concurs with Banerjee’s (2007) findings that, private tutoring has some benefits such as increasing test scores. Mischo and Haag (2002) also concluded that certain types of private tutoring can improve school performance. Zimbabwe is concerned about academic performance and examination results. As such teachers may be tempted to go to any length to produce examination results. In this respect private lessons are used to boost pupils a chance of a place in secondary schools and colleges. Davis (2002) concurs with the findings and points out that the growth of private tutoring was caused by the intensified comparison of students’ achievement scores.

However this research also indicated that some private learning classes were bigger than normal school classes. One is tempted to conclude that the major agenda for extra- lessons was making money. When some teachers lamented about big normal class sizes it sounds like a lame excuse to confidently partake in extra –lessons.

Social impact of extra-lessons.

It emerged from the research that extra-lessons were becoming a status symbol for the teachers who produce good examination results. Such teachers were gaining popularity from parents leading teachers to self actualisation. One teacher had this confession to make, “It feels good when the community acknowledges my contribution.”However, the study also revealed that some teachers of average competences were looked down upon by parents and pupils. Some parents went to the extent of denying their children entries into classes of those teachers they believed were of mediocre competences. This created unproductive conflict and an aperture among teachers.

It also emanated from the study that the teachers and pupils were over worked and were left with no time to rest. Children spent a lot of time on schooling and extra- lessons and little time was given to other social activities. Parents in the focus group gave the following sentiments,

“Children need to have a balanced life, to play, to do house hold chores and be with their families, but they are left with no choice but to participate in school and extra-lessons”

“Children wake up too early and they come back from school after six pm to accommodate for extra-lessons. After such a busy day children are expected to do their home work leaving no room for children to socialise.”

“My daughter bargained with me and said, mum can I please have time to rest this holiday .I don’t want to attend holiday lessons.”

The above statements show that while there seem to be euphoria to send pupils for extra- lessons, the repercussions of fatigue, exhaustion, lack of interest and stress might come into play due to overworking. This might lead children to resent schooling because pupils are pushed beyond their limits. Furthermore depression, stress and poorer health might result.

On the contrary some teachers and parents revealed that extra- lessons keep children busy and are bound to refrain from mischief. In addition some children confirmed that they enjoyed extra-lessons for various reasons which included having a break from household chores, mixing with friends from different schools, as well as catching up with difficult concepts. However some pupils did not pay attention in school and play truancy because they were aware that they would attend extra- lessons. Some of the reasons advanced by pupils tend to depict that children may engage in immoral activities under the pretext of attending extra-lessons.

Conclusions

The major purpose of this study was to assess the state of extra-lessons in Gweru urban schools and to proffer suggestions on how the practice can be improved. Based on the analysis made, the following results were found:-

- The major reason for teachers’ participation in extra-lessons was to make money and augment their salaries.
- Teachers used teaching methods that were not compatible with the practice of teaching, notably, drilling pupils for test taking skills.
- Low income parents, who form the majority found it difficult to pay fees for extra-lessons.
- Some teachers were tempted to cheat in an attempt to lure parents to send their children to attend extra-lessons in their quest for money.
- Pupils who failed to participate in extra-lessons because their parents could not afford were marginalised.
- Some pupils found extra-lessons tiresome while others found leaving home and attending extra-lessons as a platform to free themselves from household chores.

Recommendations.

Based on the findings of the study, this study comes up with the following recommendations:-

- to bring afore professionalism , teachers needed to be staff developed in order to have positive attitudes towards their work and use teaching methods that are compatible with their profession.
- class teachers should not be allowed to give extra-lessons to their pupils outside the policies propounded by government.
- Government should remunerate teachers adequately so that the teachers are able to sustain their families.

The paper further recommends further studies in primary and secondary schools country- wide so that policy-makers can bring sanity to the practice of extra-lessons in schools.

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