Research Article

School Effectiveness in Terms of Learners' Growth and Academic Achievement Amidst Socio-Economic Challenges; A Case of Makululu Day Secondary School, Kabwe District, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the school effectiveness of Makululu Day Secondary School in terms of learners' growth and academic achievement amidst the socio-economic challenges faced by the school community. It further explored the strategies used by the school to improve the academic achievements and overall growth of the students. A qualitative research method was employed using a case study design. Eight teachers were involved using stratified simple random sampling, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The results were thematically analysed and they showed that the effectiveness of Makululu Day Secondary School was factored by good teaching and learning strategies employed by the school, learners' emotional welfare, and community cooperation.

Keywords: *School Effectiveness, Secondary School, Academic Resilience, Socio-economic challenges, Holistic education*

Introduction

Makululu Day Secondary School has emerged as one of the top secondary schools in terms of promoting learners' growth and academic achievement despite the socio-economic challenges faced by the school community in Kabwe District, Zambia. Learners' growth and academic achievement at Makululu Day Secondary School symbolise perseverance and the profound impact of education in challenging circumstances. This school stands out not just because it was established relatively recently, in 2017, but also due to its exceptional performance, which exceeds that of several well-established schools in the region. Makululu Day Secondary School serves as a sanctuary for resilient students who navigate the intricate challenges of broken homes and extreme poverty in a town facing economic turmoil, where most parents struggle to fulfill their children's educational needs. The Makululu community displays temporary housing alongside scarce infrastructure and excessive population density, which together depict the severe socio-

economic hardships its residents face (Bwalya & Kabubi, 2019). A predominant portion of Makululu shanty compound residents consists of ex-miners from a long-defunct mining sector. Certain people participate in minor business ventures. The inhabitants face relentless challenges due to deficient sanitation systems combined with unpredictable electricity and water services.

An intricate web of resource scarcity presents formidable obstacles for children growing up in these conditions who attempt to escape poverty through education. Makululu Day Secondary School caters to a student population that is predominantly comprised of individuals from child-headed households. A significant number of students find themselves under the care of siblings or extended family members because their parents reside in distant locations. Parents engaged in farming activities in distant rural areas struggle to earn a livelihood and often rely on older siblings to care for their children or let them manage on their own. The unique family setup burdens students with the dual challenge of pursuing academic goals while handling age-inappropriate responsibilities. Students from agricultural communities encounter multifaceted educational challenges due to parental absenteeism combined with economic pressures. This educational institution faces numerous challenges stemming from the broader socio-economic conditions that affect its student body. The prevalence of dysfunctional households creates additional emotional and psychological barriers for students, which they need to overcome to participate in their education fully. The educational institution faces the dual responsibility of delivering academic instruction while creating a supportive environment that acknowledges and tackles the intricate challenges stemming from students' socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Makululu Day Secondary School in terms of learners' growth and academic achievement in the face of the socio-economic challenges experienced by the school community in Kabwe district, Zambia.

Literature Review

This review discusses studies from Central to Southern Africa and other regions of the world within the context of a broader discussion on education in resource-constrained settings. Several researchers have attempted to find means of improving academic performance among students who live in broken homes, are impoverished, or have low social status (Asante, 2019; Elias & Haynes, 2008). Several studies have demonstrated the long-term impact of socio-economic factors on educational outcomes. The studies by Hapompwe et al. (2020) and Johnson and White (2019) indicate that the tolls of fractured households, including the negative effects on both academic performance and the emotional well-being of students, persist. Furthermore, poverty (and its effects on the lack of available vital educational resources) has also been the topic of numerous scholarly conversations (Meki et al., 2017; Johnson & Smith, 2018; Mwalimu, 2014). There is no doubt that parental involvement in the education of a child is an important component in attaining academic success (Davis & Johnson, 2016). Parental involvement in the educational process is key to how broken families can provide a more supportive learning environment (Hapompwe et al., 2020; Lee & Zuilkowski, 2017; White & Smith, 2017).

The fact that the publications acknowledge the importance of guidance and counselling services is evidenced throughout the literature and is of universal importance. These services provide emotional support and enable students to utilise their resources to survive the highly complex personal and academic lives with fine composure. It consequently creates a more extensive educational environment, in other words, a supportive one (Malinda & Mandyata, 2021; Mweemba, 2016; Mulenga & Mukaba, 2018; Talimenthi & Mbewa, 2012). Vulnerable children, a topic highlighted in educational literature, as noted by Davis and Brown (2021) and Johnson et al. (2014), is influenced by the approach teachers take. This mentorship technique proves critical by highlighting the importance of a quality teacher-student connection in fostering resilient academics and personal growth. According to Davis and Brown (2021), this mentorship relationship offers a

unique chance to transfer knowledge and, beyond this, serves as a support system for economically disadvantaged pupils. According to Johnson et al. (2014), positive teacher-student connections significantly reduce the negative impacts of broken households and poverty on child academic progress. It indicates a shift towards an increasing acknowledgment of this technique as a complete and empathetic approach to instruction, recognizing that solid relationships between instructors and students are practical components of balancing out the elements brought about by socio-economic status. Research has also emphasized the importance of teacher-student connections and the significance of teachers' roles in shaping students' academic and personal paths by linking their work to literacy and language needs (Isaacs & Lweendo, 2022; Paschal & Mkulu, 2021; Tawana, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) (Guy-Evans, 2020), which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how various environmental factors impact students' academic success and personal growth. This theory posits that human development transpires through intricate interactions within a hierarchy of nested systems: the microsystem (immediate environments such as family and school), mesosystem (interactions among microsystems), exosystem (external contexts that indirectly influence the learner), macrosystem (cultural and societal values), and chronosystem (temporal changes and transitions).

This approach is especially pertinent to Makululu Day Secondary School, where students encounter complex socio-economic difficulties, including fractured families, poverty, and emotional instability. These issues predominantly reside inside the microsystem and mesosystem; nonetheless, their repercussions permeate into larger systems, affecting learners' access to resources, mental stability, and general well-being.

Utilising Bronfenbrenner's theory, the study highlights the problems encountered by learners and examines the school's functioning inside and across these systems to promote resilience, inclusivity, and academic advancement. The theoretical framework thus undergirds both the analytical and interpretive dimensions of the research, connecting student results to their broader ecological contexts.

Problem Statement

In the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains, educational institutions play a crucial role in the holistic growth and development of children (Saguni, 2019). For this to happen, however, schools must work with parents to meet their children's learning standards (Okello, 2023). Reports have indicated that most schools in Kabwe district, Zambia, have been ineffectual in fostering holistic growth and development to the fullest, with most schools becoming ineffective in meeting the learning requirements of their children because of the inability of some parents to supply the learning needs of their children in schools. Although pupils in rural areas of Zambia's resource-limited settings, such as the shanty compound in Kabwe district, faced socio-economic challenges, some schools, like Makululu Day Secondary School, performed well academically. However, the individual elements and instructional approaches that have impacted this achievement have not been thoroughly investigated. These factors must be understood to replicate and expand successful educational interventions that can significantly improve student achievement in similar situations.

Research Objective

This article focuses on analysing and clarifying the strategies through which Makululu Day Secondary School tackles socio-economic difficulties such as poverty and broken homes. Both also attempt to understand how these strategies affect the students' academic performance and overall growth.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology to investigate how Makululu Day Secondary School addresses the socio-economic issues faced by its students and the strategies it employs to enhance academic achievement and personal growth. A case

study methodology was suitable, as it facilitated a comprehensive and contextual analysis of a single institution within its actual environment (Yin, 2009).

Sampling occurred in two phases. Initially, purposive sampling was employed to choose Makululu Day Secondary School because of its recognised high density of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Secondly, stratified random sampling was used to select eight teachers from a total of thirty, ensuring representation across various academic departments, teaching experience levels, and participation in school-based support programs.

Collecting data included semi-structured interviews with eight teachers that allowed for depth and flexibility. The interview questions were open-ended and carefully crafted to ensure clarity. We also reviewed school policy documents, academic records, and intervention reports to examine how schools address poverty, absenteeism, and home-related issues. Field notes about how schools work, how they discipline students, and how they teach were also checked.

Non-participant observations of educational activities, encompassing classroom interactions, guidance and counselling sessions, and parent-teacher meetings, were executed during a four-week duration.

Credibility was enhanced via member checking, wherein participants evaluated and validated the precision of transcribed interviews and summaries of their contributions, while dependability was ensured by an audit trail that comprised comprehensive recordings of interview questions, analytical observations, and coding determinations.

The transferability was facilitated by including detailed descriptions of the educational environment and socio-economic backdrop, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to analogous contexts. Meanwhile, Confirmability was ensured by the researcher's reflexivity. A reflective notebook was maintained during the data collection and analysis phases to track any biases, positionality, and assumptions that may have influenced the research.

Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from multiple sources which are interviews, records, and observations. It enabled a more nuanced and validated understanding of the school's responses. The themes derived from interviews were cross-validated with policy texts and observational field notes to enhance consistency and interpretation.

Ethical considerations were meticulously upheld. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Pseudonyms were employed in all transcripts and findings to safeguard participant anonymity. The pertinent institutional review board secured ethical clearance, and the school administration granted authorisation.

For data analysis, the six-step technique was used on the information collected (Boyatzis, 1998; Patton, 2015). Finally, two themes and seven codes were generated as shown in Figure I below.

Findings
Identified Challenges (Socio-economic)
Teachers at Makululu Day Secondary School, indicated that broken homes were a key problem among students, in line with the findings of Hapompwe et al. (2020). Subsequently, the teachers emphasised the significant influence of broken family systems on children and the complex difficulties in such cases. It was realised that fractional households have a profound impact not only on educational accomplishments but also on the general well-being of the students. Broken family structures, being disruptive, posed numerous challenges to students' ability to concentrate, participate, or cope with the exigencies of their situation.

Additionally, the difficulties arising from broken families were accompanied by economic deprivation, which proved to be a barrier for students at Makululu Day Secondary School. Often, teachers would share how poverty substantially affected students' ability to obtain essential school materials, such as textbooks or uniforms. The economic limitations directly affected the field of academics since poverty often led to insufficient access to nutritious food. This crucial insight highlights the interrelation between the shortcomings in socio-

economic situations and the fact that poverty not only hinders access to educational resources but also impacts the overall well-being of Students (Ebersöhn, 2017).
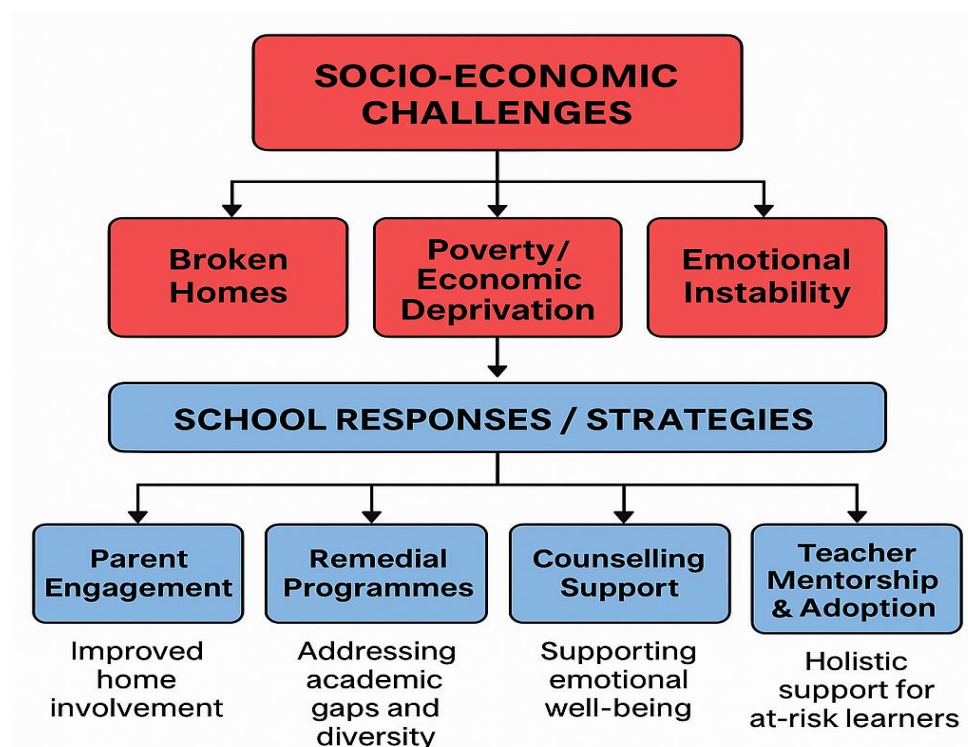

Figure 1. Thematic depiction of socio-economic difficulties encountered by students at Makululu Day Secondary School and the institutional measures employed by educators to facilitate learners' academic and emotional growth.

Solutions Provided by Teachers

Teachers at Makululu Day Secondary School have devised a comprehensive solution that involves engaging with parents. Parents are also highlighted as 'the most important partners in the 'learning journey' (Feiler, 2009), and programmes such as frequent meetings between teachers and parents, proper seminars and workshops to guide parents on how to help with their children's education effectively are emphasised.

Makululu Day Secondary School teachers actively participated in implementing a remedial programme to address their students' different levels of academic performance. The said initiatives were improved: fashioned to fill in gaps in thoughtful ways suited to each student's educational path. Remedial programmes were designed to complement the excellent general work by addressing the needs of individual pupils at a rate consistent with their individual needs. This method is also evidence of a dedication to inclusiveness and recognition of students' diverse academic backgrounds. By customising educational assistance through remedial programmes, teachers aimed to rectify inequalities in comprehension and create an inclusive environment for all students in the blossoming.

Makululu Day Secondary School implemented grade repetition rules as one way of enforcing repeat policies, given the disruptions education had caused, especially those involving broken households. It was a strategic intervention that would provide students with an opportunity to strengthen their learning, thereby reducing the likelihood of adverse effects from irregular attendance, as observed in studies by Meki et al. (2017). The repeat policy aims to create an all-encompassing educational setting by acknowledging the necessity of adaptability in meeting the diverse needs of

students. Uncontrollable external circumstances necessitated specific adjustments; therefore, to mitigate the disruptions caused by these circumstances, teachers provided students with the opportunity to review and reinforce their comprehension of academic material.

Revealing the impact of broken families on the emotional state of students, teachers at Makululu Day Secondary School noted that strengthening guidance and counselling services was an area that needed improvement. These findings align with the research conducted by Johnson et al. (2014) and White and Davis (2019). The school recognized the need to introduce programs targeting children who face the difficulties of not having a stable family, so it took proactive steps. These programmes were specifically designed to provide a structured environment that enables students to navigate the challenges associated with dysfunctional families. The framework of first institutions was that teaching should create a good learning environment, and so too should the emotional health and well-being of the students be considered relevant. To help children overcome emotional challenges associated with unstable home situations, this approach was employed.

Teachers at Makululu Day Secondary introduced an inspiring and influential idea: they have begun to adopt students from very disadvantaged situations. Good mentorship was demonstrated by teachers who established connections that extended beyond those typically found within the classroom walls. Teachers provide more help, direction, and encouragement available for students struggling to overcome increased challenges due to unstable family or financial situations. It sought a nurturing approach where the educator of any at-risk student would create a supporting and customised connection that would make them feel they were part of the group and included. They also wanted to meet the students' educational, emotional, and socio-economic requirements, not just through the conventional academic training. This method demonstrates that the teacher-student connection is paramount in addressing the problems caused by external obstacles.

Finally, Makululu Day Secondary School is a future monument to the huge power of education in overcoming terrible circumstances. Painstakingly, facts regarding the effectiveness of the school come from the teachers' perspective and experiences, particularly the school's imagination to deal with the problems of the students from disadvantaged backgrounds because of broken homes and poverty. Teachers have put forth the idea that they provide a comprehensive approach to the requirements of students separately. The experiences at Makululu Day Secondary School have served as motivation to remind us that education, which is pursued thoroughly and committed to, can eradicate poverty and provide a brighter future to the most disadvantaged people in our society.

Educational Implications

Educational authorities ought to prioritise teacher mentorship initiatives and establish institutional processes for involving parents as active collaborators in the learning experience. Educational institutions in precarious environments can implement adaptable, learner-focused approaches that cater to the diverse emotional and academic needs of students. Teachers, as demonstrated in this instance, serve a vital function not just as instructors but also as mentors and emotional supports. Enhancing this support structure will be crucial for advancing both academic and comprehensive learner outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research may employ a mixed-methods approach to integrate qualitative insights with quantitative assessments of outcomes (e.g., trends in academic performance, dropout rates, or attendance statistics). Furthermore, analogous studies should be undertaken in other educational institutions located in high-poverty areas of Zambia to facilitate cross-case comparisons and enhance generalisability. Incorporating the perspectives of students and parents would enhance comprehension of the interventions' effects.

Recommendations for Policy

The Ministry of Education ought to contemplate on strengthening school-based counselling services and training additional teachers as para-counsellors in high-risk schools.

The Ministry of Education should consider advocating for national remedial education plans, encompassing adaptable promotion systems and organised intervention programs for underachieving students.

The Ministry of Education should designate specific financing for underprivileged schools for resources, nutritional initiatives, and psychological support systems.

Conclusion

This study examined the response of Makululu Day Secondary School to the socio-economic difficulties impacting its students, including poverty, dysfunctional families, and emotional instability. The findings indicated that, despite systemic difficulties, the school had instituted various effective strategies which include parental involvement, remedial programs, grade retention policies, counselling, and teacher mentorship to enhance students' academic and personal growth. These approaches underscore the tenacity and dedication of educators operating in resource-limited settings.

Conflict

This study had no conflict of any nature.

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