

Factors Enhancing Basic Education: Implication on Pupils' Capability in Botswana Primary and Junior Secondary Schools

Luke Moloko Mphale

Department of Primary Education,
Faculty of Education, University of Botswana.

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate factors enhancing basic education and their implication for primary and junior secondary schools pupils in Botswana. The study was mainly a descriptive survey design. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. Data were collected through individual 13-item structured questionnaire which was validated. The reliability level was 0.7 using Cronbach Alpha Statistic. Random sampling was used to select the participants. The sample comprised hundred and thirty teachers from primary schools and seventy teachers from junior secondary schools. Data were analysed using frequency tables and percentages. The findings of the study showed that learning environment and teacher education have a positive impact on the provision of quality basic education. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that for Botswana to achieve some of the Millennium Development Goals priority should be given to better learning environment and quality teacher education.

Keywords: basic education, teacher education, professional development, Botswana.

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades the world experienced drastic changes in terms of political and the socio-economic developments. The changes affected the status of human development. Some of the social services such as health and education were improved to align with the living standard. After the inception of *Education for All*, countries around the globe developed Millennium Development Goals. One of their mandates was to provide universal basic education by 2015. To achieve this, changes in education systems took place which affected the teaching and learning in schools. New education policies were introduced which changed the operations and the roles of primary and junior secondary schools in their provision of education. The roles support the basic education goals of supporting the development of pupils as human beings, and their growth into ethically responsible members of society, and the promotion of learning and equality in society (Rovaniemi, 2006). The task of basic education encompasses education for early childhood, primary, youth, adults and secondary school students in many developing countries.

BASIC EDUCATION

The description of basic education as understood by nations was initiated by what transpired during the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtein, Thailand in 1990. Basic education was described as one intended to meet basic learning needs which include instruction at the first or foundation level, on which subsequent learning can be based. It encompasses early childhood and primary education for children, as well as education

in literacy, general knowledge and life skills for youth and adults; it may extend into secondary education in some countries (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990).

Based on the above definition countries and educationists came up with their understanding of basic education. Rovaniemi (2006) describes basic education as the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings that aim at meeting basic learning needs. According to Botswana's education system basic education is one that fosters intellectual growth and creativity. It further enables every citizen to achieve his/her potential; develops moral, ethical; and social values (Republic of Botswana, 1994). It comprises pre-primary education, adult literacy programmes and primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). It is seen as that education which prepares Botswana for the real life.

Therefore, it can be argued that basic education is any educational activity that takes place either formally, informally and non-formally. The learner could be an infant, a youth and an adult. The objectives of basic education are to promote learning and acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They are able to promote the principles of national development, sustained development, rapid economic growth, economic dependence, social justice and a desire for continued learning. Research has indicated that basic education has benefited public health, demography, economy, human rights, governance and political stability through increasing people's understanding (OECD, 2001). Donker (2005) notes

that the value and role of knowledge is different in every culture but good basic education is essential in every culture and at all levels. Dala (2012) maintains that universal basic education is the best method to deliver relevant education to all learners.

According to millennium development goal report Botswana claims to have achieved 100% universal access to basic education as it offers free education (but school fees was re-introduced in 2006 under a new approach called cost-sharing), expanded institution capacity in both primary and secondary schools and reduced the walking distance to school to an average of 5km and 10km for primary and secondary schools respectively (Hanemann, 2005). Literature reviewed indicates that there are several factors that enhance basic education which include improved teacher quality, teacher– pupil ratio, provision of adequate infrastructure and funds (Odekunle and Okuwa, 2012).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Providing education for all is one of Botswana’s national goals. While the country claims to have achieved 100% universal access to basic education, there is evidence of some children who complete both primary and secondary education without having grasped the basic concepts of numeracy, literacy, general knowledge and life skills (Molutsi, 2013). The importance of having acquired the basic knowledge and skills for real life cannot be overemphasised. It is against this background that the study investigated factors that enhance basic education.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. What factors enhance basic education in Botswana’s primary and junior secondary schools?
2. Are there any differences in the way primary and junior secondary schools enhance basic education?

3. What implication do contributing factors have on the way pupils grasp basic education concepts in primary and junior secondary schools?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the responses between primary and junior secondary schools on factors enhancing basic education pupils in Botswana.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. A survey according to Creswell (2005) is administered to a sample of people “in order to describe the attitudes, opinions, behavior or characteristics of the population” (p.254). The fact that the study solicited opinions from the respondents made the survey appropriate. The sample consisted of two hundred (200) participants randomly selected from both primary and junior secondary schools around the country. One hundred and thirty (130) teachers were selected from primary schools and seventy (70) from junior secondary schools. Closed and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. The closed-ended items design was based on a 5 point Likert scale, from which the respondents had options to choose from: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree and Not sure*. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was on demographic information and section B sought views of teachers on factors which enhance the quality of basic education. Two colleagues from the department of primary education and department of science and mathematics validated the instrument. The instrument was piloted using teachers from neighbouring primary and secondary schools who were not participating in the study.

FINDINGS

The research findings are presented in tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Responses of primary school teachers on factors enhancing basic education

Statement	Participants Responses									
	SA (Fr)	%	A (Fr)	%	SD (Fr)	%	D (Fr)	%	NS (Fr)	%
Parental support										
1. Pupils’ socio-economic status enhances basic education.	58	45	37	28	19	15	11	8	5	4
2. Parents level of education can be is a major factor in promoting basic education	91	70	22	17	7	5	9	7	1	1
3. Parental support can help to enhance basic education.	94	72	30	23	6	5	0	0	0	0
Pupils’ ability										
4. Pupils’ willingness to learn helps to enhance basic education.	100	77	25	19	4	3	0	0	1	1
5. Pupils’ Intelligence is a contributing factor in promoting basic education.	63	48	26	20	31	24	5	4	5	4
6. Pupils study habit can assist the mastery of basic education concepts	105	81	18	14	7	5	0	0	0	0

Table 1: Responses of primary school teachers on factors enhancing basic education (continuation)

7. Junior secondary pupils grasp basic education concepts easier than primary schools pupils.	68	52	54	42	3	2	2	2	3	2
Learning environment										
8. Adequate learning materials	86	66	44	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Classroom environment is a factor that enhances basic education.	103	79	24	18	2	2	1	1	0	0
10. Class size has impact on the delivery of basic education	86	66	44	34	0	0	0	0	0	0
Teacher education										
11. Qualified teaching staff	119	92	5	4	5	4	1	1	0	0
12. Teaching methods are critical in enhancing basic education.	120	92	5	4	5	4	0	0	0	0
13. Quality of teacher education is a major factor in promoting basic education.	120	92	5	4	5	4	0	0	0	0

Key: % = per cent; NS= not sure; Fr= frequency; SA= strongly agree; A= agree; SD= strongly disagree; D= disagree

Table 2: Responses of secondary school teachers on factors enhancing basic education

Statement	Participants Responses									
	SA (Fr)	%	A (Fr)	%	SD (Fr)	%	D (Fr)	%	NS (Fr)	%
Parental support										
1. Pupils' socio-economic status enhances basic education.	34	49	10	14	14	20	8	11	4	6
2. Parents level of education can is a major factor in promoting basic education	53	76	13	19	2	3	1	1	1	1
3. Parental support can help to enhance basic education.	53	76	16	23	1	1	0	0	0	0
Pupils' ability										
4. Pupils' willingness to learn helps to enhance basic education.	58	83	11	16	0	0	1	1	0	0
5. Pupils' Intelligence is a contributing factor in promoting basic education.	38	54	15	22	17	24	0	0	0	0
6. Pupils study habit can assist the mastery of basic education concepts	59	84	11	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Junior secondary pupils grasp basic education concepts easier than primary schools pupils.	37	53	33	47	0	0	0	0	0	0
Learning environment										
8. Adequate learning materials	53	76	17	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Classroom environment is a factor that enhances basic education.	53	76	17	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Class size has impact on the delivery of basic education	44	63	25	36	1	1	0	0	0	0
Teacher education										
11. Qualified teaching staff	67	96	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. Teaching methods are critical in enhancing basic education.	68	97	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
13. Quality of teacher education is a major factor in promoting basic education.	69	99	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Key: % = per cent; NS= not sure; Fr= frequency; SA= strongly agree; A= agree; SD= strongly disagree; D= disagree

Tables 1 and 2 reflect views of teachers on factors enhancing basic education. Regarding parental support 85.35% of the teachers agreed that parental support can enhance basic education, while 14.65% disagreed. Pertaining to pupils' ability the respondents showed 91.01% level of agreement and 8.99% disagreed that pupils' ability can be a contributing factor. Concerning learning environment 99% of the teachers believed that learning environment can enhance basic education, while 1% disagreed. On teacher education 98.25% teachers agreed that teacher education can enhance basic education, while 1.75% disagreed.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

From the research findings above, it is certain that there is no significant difference in the responses between primary and junior secondary schools on factors enhancing basic education pupils in Botswana. As regard parental support the primary school teachers indicated that 62.33% strongly agreed, 22.67% agreed, 8.33% strongly disagreed, while 5% disagreed and 1.67% was not sure. Secondary schools teachers' views showed that 67% strongly agreed, 18.67% agreed, 8% strongly disagreed, while 4% disagreed and 2.33% were not sure.

Concerning pupils ability primary school teachers showed 64.5% strongly agreed, 23.75% agreed, 8.5% strongly disagreed, while 1.5% disagreed and 1.75% were not sure. Teachers from secondary schools feelings showed that 68.5% strongly agreed, 25.25% agreed, 6% strongly disagreed and 0.25% disagreed. On learning environment primary school teachers showed 72.5% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 1% strongly disagreed and 0.5% disagreed. Secondary school teachers' views showed that 69.5% strongly agreed, 30% agreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed. On teacher education primary school teachers showed 92.5% strongly agreed, 4% agreed and 4% strongly disagreed. Teachers from junior secondary schools opinions showed that 98% strongly agreed and 2% agreed.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the research findings it is clear that better learning environment and teacher education are seen as the most important variables in enhancing basic education as rated 99% and 98.3% in both Botswana primary and junior secondary schools respectively. The impact of those factors on basic education has been identified by numerous studies (Strauss, 2013; Christie, 2005). The type of learning conditions and education teachers receive has an influence in pupils' academic achievement. What takes place in the classroom, the input of the teacher and the teachings are critical variables for improving pupils' academic performance (Hanemann, 2005).

Parental support is the other factor that can enhance basic education. Parental involvement in the activities of the school has a positive impact on students' academic achievement and the success of the school (Christie, 2005). It also boosts the morale of teachers because of the partnership that will have been established between the school and the community. Pupils' ability has been treated as the least factor. There is evidence from research which shows that pupils' ability can play a critical role in improving academic achievement (Nicholas and Sutton, 2013). Among pupils' ability is pupils study habits. Study habits can have a positive impact on the learning of a pupil. The positive study habit such as attending to their school work, reading books to search for relevant information, scheduling time for doing homework, attending tutorials and asking teachers questions where they do not understand the concepts taught can assist pupils in mastering basic concepts. Another factor is pupils' willingness to learn. Pupils who value education as a means of obtaining survival skills normally take learning serious. They do extra work with the assistance from their teachers. This ultimately enhances basic education.

Implications on Pupils' Capability in Botswana Primary and Junior Secondary Schools

It may be acknowledged that the prosperity of any country's economic and social development depends on the type of education the learners received. Kogan cited in West (1993) describes education as a social artifact embodying aspirations about the good life for the individual. It is through education that children can develop and realize their potential. Odekunle and Okuwa (2012) claim that unless the citizens of a nation are well educated and appropriately trained the achievement of rapid economic and social development of such a nation cannot be guaranteed. It is through basic education on which other levels of education can be fostered. Basic education is a route towards attainment of higher learning. The pupils from primary and junior secondary schools are to acquire the fundamental skills in reading, writing and numeracy in order to have an impact on their development.

The provision of factors that enhance basic will make the pupils educated and learned. It is universally acknowledged that when parents support their children with their school work improves the children's academic performance (Halsey, 2004). Parents are capable of assisting their children in tutoring and doing homework. This goes hand and hand with the pupils' ability. Students who are able to study on their own, have interest in learning, able to read books and attend to tutorials stand a better chance of progressing from one level to the other.

Pupils learn better in an environment which is child's friendly. An environment where they feel they are welcomed and are cared for. Such environment motivates them to learn. Research has proved that there is a correlation between quality teachers and students academic achievement (Afe, 2001). It is assumed that quality teachers produce good students' results and poor teachers produce low academic achievement. With proper allocation of resources and evaluating teachers regularly promotes student's learning and growth.

CONCLUSION

Education is portrayed as the apprenticeship of human life (Donker, 2005). A country is said to be developed if its citizens possess the basic knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding of the direction the country is expected to take. They cannot be expected to facilitate and implement goals for quality basic education without having acquired basic education concepts. The study has revealed that there are several factors which enhance basic education which include, conducive learning environment, improved in teacher quality, teacher-pupil ratio, parental support, pupils' ability, provision of adequate infrastructure and enough funds. In Botswana context, provision of basic education means

organising learning opportunities both children and adults to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills, and to achieve educational level equivalent to a junior certificate. The principles of Botswana basic education are that it should be considered a fundamental human right and be equitably provided to all citizens irrespective of tribe, gender and ethnicity (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

LIMITATION TO THE STUDY

Owing to time and financial constraints it was not possible to cover all teachers in the field. The study was confined to two hundred (1.7%) respondents out of a population of approximately twelve thousand teachers. Although the sample is relatively small, it is a representative of teachers from all education regions. Again data were collected when teachers were busy marking their end of year examinations. The researcher had to plead with teachers to complete the questionnaire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings, the study recommends that conducive learning environment should be a priority in enhancing basic education, teacher education should be strengthened for the benefit of basic education, the quality of teachers should be improved, teachers and parents should be the key figures in the education of children, schools should be given adequate resources to implement basic education policies and teacher-pupil ratio should be constantly reviewed.

REFERENCES

Afe, J.O. (2001). Reflection on becoming a teacher and the Challenges of Teacher Education. Inaugural Lecture Series 64, Benin City: University of Benin.

Christie, K. (2005). Changing the nature of parent involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(9), 645-646.

Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational Research-Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (2nd edition). Singapore: Pearson.

Dala, B.G. (2012). Implementation of special needs education policies in Nigeria: The journey so far for children with visual impairment. *Journal of Childhood and Primary Education*, 9(1), 198-202.

Donker, P. (2005). Teachers First – dedicated to make primary school teaching the most important job in <http://www.teachersfirst.nl/Teaching>. Retrieved 17/5/2013

Halsey, P.A. (2004). Nurturing parent involvement: Two middle level teachers share their secrets. *The clearing House*, 77(4), pp135-137.

Hanemann, U. (2005). *Literacy in Botswana-Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. Paris: UNESCO Institute of Education.

Inter-Agency Commission: Final Report. World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs. New York: Inter-Agency Commission, 1990, 51-64.

Molutsi, P (2013). Experts Pinpoint Causes of Poor Results. *The Patriot on Sunday Newspaper*, Jan. 27

Nichols, B. & Sutton, C. (2013). Improving Academic Performance through the Enhancement of Teacher/Student Relationships: the Relationship Teaching Model. *A journal of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education*, 1(2).

OECD (2001). *Staying Ahead: In-Service Training and Teacher Professional Development*, Paris: OECD Publications.

Odekunle, O. & Okuwa, O. (2012). Enhancing Quality Basic Education for the Attainment of Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria: Suggested Policy Interventions. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research & Policy*, 3(1), 92-98.

Republic of Botswana (1994). *The Revised National Policy on Education*. Gaborone: Government Printers.

Rovaniemi, (2006). Basic education. Retrieved: May 17, 2013 from <http://www.rovaniemi.fi/Kansainvalinen-sivusto/English/Education/Basic-education>

Strauss, V. (2013). School principals and the rhetoric of 'instructional leadership'. Retrieved: August 27, 2013 from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/04/18>.

West, S. (1993). *Educational Values for School Leadership*. London : Kogan Page.