



ASSESSING FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF ORPHANED CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

The study sought to find out the factors affecting academic performance of orphaned children in Bindura District primary schools in Zimbabwe. The descriptive survey design was used in this study. The population was 300 teachers and 50 orphaned children. A sample of 80 teachers and 10 children randomly selected participated in this research study. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews. The SPSS programme was used to analyse the data. The study found out that orphaned children did not perform well academically during class work. They did not do homework assigned by the teachers. The study found out that teachers did not have knowledge or skills to assist orphaned children during teaching and learning. The study recommended that teachers should be equipped with skills to manage orphaned children academically. The study recommended that foster parents need to be made aware through workshops how to assist orphaned children with class work assigned to be done at home. More research should be done on how orphaned children can be motivated to learn.

Keywords: academic, performance, orphan

1. Introduction

In Zimbabwe, as of 2012 an estimated 1,3 million adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS. The orphans attributed to AIDS were 947,010 (Markowitz 2014). UNAIDS

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(2000), observed that a number of children are orphaned due to HIV and AIDS and an estimated 34 million Sub Saharan children would be orphaned by 2010. According to the Herald (1994), the Mashambanzou drop in centre had to build a larger playroom for children of HIV/AIDS positive parents because the existing had become small. From the story, it is clear that more children had parents suffering from HIV/AIDS. In another story from the Herald (2003), a Guruve grandmother was taking care of thirteen orphaned grandchildren and was facing difficulties in paying school fees and providing stationery. A situation, which is prevalent in number of households where there are orphans and the education of the orphaned children suffers. According to SAFAIDS, (1994; 3):

“Children affected by HIV/AIDS are left as orphans or brought up with many children in the family because of orphaned cousins, so will have fewer resources, or maybe carriers hence are taken out of school. They will have poor employment possibilities since their education was affected.”

According to the World Health Organization (2006:5), a number of factors affect academic performance of pupils such as high illiteracy amongst parents, late entrance into school by children, peer influence, lack of parental guidance, teacher pupil relationship and household chores. Farrant (1980:18) believes that children’s academic performance is affected by child’s intelligence, illness or disability, home background, malnutrition and emotional maladjustment. However, the situation is worse for the orphaned children since they are disadvantaged because they come from families who must deal with poverty, poor housing and a sense of being alienated from society (Lindgren 1990).

2. Purpose of the Study

The study sought to find out factors affecting academic performance of orphans at primary school level.

3. Research Questions

- Does family background affect academic performance of orphaned children?
- Does teachers’ attitude contribute to academic performance of orphaned?
- Does lack of learning resources for example, exercise books, pencils and pens affect orphaned children’s academic performance?

4. Review of Related Literature

A number of factors contribute to the academic performance of orphans. The areas reviewed are, factors related to home background, factors related to teacher's attitudes, and factors related to lack of learning resources. Potridge (1969) observed that there was a close relationship between unhappiness in the home and academic performance at school. Conditions such as drunkenness, starvation and violent quarrelling among parents affect pupils' academic performance. The situation is worse for the orphaned children as many of them are adopted by members of the extended families and in some cases, their presents in these families may be the root of the problem. Mwamwenda (1996:35) advocates, "*a child becomes pre-occupied with problems at home for example marital problems experienced by parents*". The child spends time thinking about problems at home rather than concentrating on his or her schoolwork. Eldridge (2002:29) argues, "*Often the way that children behave reflects how they feel about themselves or what is happening in their lives*". The unstable family background would affect their academic performance negatively. However, there are some orphans who are from a stable home background.

Hunter and Williamson, Jackson (2002) noted that children might be affected by living in households that takes in orphans, which may increase demand on household resources and create the potential of material deprivation and conflict, jealousy and resentment. Orphaned children in these households suffer, as their basic needs requirements are not met. Most of the things provided would favour the original children of that household.

Matshalaga (2004) adds elderly grandmothers are increasingly had to bear the burden of caring for large numbers of children with little or no support from the extended family. The grandmothers' struggle in order to provide basic needs for these orphans, unfortunately because of the economic hardships the extended family may not be helping, orphaned children cared for by grandmothers may live without the basics like food and clothes. Can a child perform well academically if she/he comes to school hungry? Jenks (1992) has the opinion that family background accounts for more than half of the variance in the student's performance. This view is supported by Gerka (1979) when he stated that home factors such as values, attitude, language, cognitive skills, family structure and parent child interaction affect pupil performance in school. For the orphaned child the family structure would have been altered hence he/she may be affected emotionally.

SAFAIDS (2000) argues that some children are affected emotionally by the trauma they have experienced in seeing one or both parents die. Can a child who is

emotionally maladjusted to perform well academically? UNICEF Zimbabwe Progress Report (2000:9):

“The socio-economic ravages caused by HIV and AIDS have given a rise to an environment that can be best described as child unfriendly. Subsequently the worst outcome in terms of both survival and development of young people has seen an increasing number of cases of abuse, physical, emotional and sexual and economic exploitation as well as deterioration of standards regarding general conditions”.

The economic hardships have caused orphaned children to be exposed to different forms of abuse in the homes, sexual, emotion and physical. However, can an abused child perform well academically? Matshalaga (2004:17)

“Orphans take agricultural and domestic chores in order to produce income and feed their households. Often children take on responsibilities that compete with their educational requirements”.

Emovan (1972) advocates that some children score poorly because they had to help their families by hawking and thus less time is devoted to reading. According to what Emovan (1972) is saying pupils spend more time selling in the streets and by the time they get home they are tired and cannot do their school work.

“Social factors, which have a bearing on the student, will affect ability to perform well academically. These are the subculture of the ethnic community to which the child belongs, be it race tribe linguist community or religious group, pupils social class or stratum, his family and peer group.”

The community in which the child lives in contributes to school performance of pupils. The impact of the community on the education of pupils is determined by how they value education. Can an orphaned child placed in a community that does not value education perform well?

Pupil's social class, it is true that children from high-class families perform better than those from low class. Orphaned children placed in high class families do they perform better than those from low class foster parents. Eygen and Kauchak (1992) argue that family income consistently predicts not only intelligence, but also test scores, grades, truancy and dropout rate.

4.1 Teacher's Attitude

According to Wallace (1983:52), "...the quality and sensitivity of method practices and experiences initiated in the classroom will inhibit or encourage development of individual differences". The personal relationship a teacher builds with a child is very important. Wallace (1983) goes on to say that all children respond well in an atmosphere of love and trust and a highly sensitive child will be particularly aware of the teachers attitude and degree of openness and acceptance of his or her ideas. Gearheart (1996) has the opinion that to a considerable extent, what teachers expect is what they get. Numerous other studies have examined the influence of the teacher student interaction and have established that teacher's expectations do have potential to impede or facilitate student's achievement. Burnham (1997) argues that there is a hierarchical implication behind the pair of words, and a teacher is in a superior position to the learner. The learner is dependent on the teacher. The idea that the learner is incomplete and still in the process of learning distances even further the learner from the teacher.

Craig (1997:101) observed, students with poor self-image most likely perform poorly, thereby reinforcing both the negative self-concept and the teacher negative expectancy. Hunter (1998) argues that for a skill or some information or a value or a change of behaviour to pass from a teacher to a learner, the two must have confidence in each other and believe in themselves. Steedman (1987) characterizes the primary school teacher as the mother made conscious. This in other words means that a primary school teacher is like a mother to the primary school children he/she must give them motherly love. Steedman (1987) highlights the significant emotional bonds, which exist between children and teacher particularly in the classroom. Some teachers have no respect for pupils; they ridicule, belittle and humiliate pupils in front of peers. This may not augur well with children and fearing further embarrassment some resort absenteeism (Graig 1997).

4.2 Lack of Learning Resources

According to Farrant (1980), learning resources include any media or materials that help learning. These include things that aid learning directly such as textbooks, exercise books, pencils and pens. These are essential for learning to take place. Matshalaga (2004:53) states "*Most caregivers provide for orphans in Zimbabwe under conditions of severe poverty. Caregivers thus have difficulty meeting child basic needs.*"

UNESCO Report (1984) echoes the same sentiments that children affected by HIV are left as orphans or brought up with many other children in the family with fewer resources. Wallace (1983) advocates that resources like exercise books, pencils, rulers and reading books, all these are necessary in some measure for learning to take

place and lack of these hampers learning. Could this be true for orphans in Bindura District? Kelly (1982) has the opinion that a teacher cannot be flexible if resources are not available. A research by Matshalaga (2004) revealed that most grandmothers who had orphaned children to care for could not afford school uniforms. According to her research (2004), teachers interviewed revealed that children who did not feel well dressed suffered from loss of self-esteem and tended to be withdrawn. As a result, their academic performance is affected. Matshalaga (2004) goes on to say even those grandmothers that could afford school uniforms could not have a regular supply of soap and could not keep the uniforms clean. Is it possible for a child with dirty uniform to socialize freely with others and interact well with the teacher? Is she/he able to say his/her opinion about matters in the class?

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The research design that was used in this study is the descriptive survey. The researcher used descriptive survey, as it was probably the best method of collecting data for the purpose of describing a population large enough to be observed directly. The survey method also maximizes the neutrality of research and consistency of the findings by using instruments such as questionnaires and interviews. Best and Khan (1983) justify the use of the survey design in conducting research on the basis that it is easy to conduct and the results obtained from a small sample can be generalized.

5.2 Population

The population was made up of one hundred grade four to seven teachers in Bindura Urban Primary Schools and about nine hundred orphaned children

5.3 Sample

The researcher selected 80 teachers to completed questionnaires and 10 orphaned children to be interviewed.

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. To analyse the data the SPSS programme was used

6. Results

The results of the study were:

- Teachers were not aware of the educational needs of orphaned children. A number of them indicated that they need special training in order to understand and be able to help the orphaned children.
- Most guardians did not attend school consultative meetings and this had a negative effect on the delivery of effective education. The guardians were not aware of what is going on at school.
- Orphaned children could not afford to buy resources like exercise books, textbooks, pencils and pens.
- Orphaned children had problems paying school fees.
- Teachers favoured well-dressed pupils and had a negative attitude towards orphans who lacked proper uniform.
- Most orphaned children lived with grandmothers and these grandmothers did not help with school work.

7. Discussion

The results of the study will be discussed in this section. Teachers were asked to indicate if they need special training in handling orphaned children. The result shows that 75% of the teachers are in need of special training. These teachers agreed that orphans are children who need special attention. Teachers need to be aware of how to deal with orphans because what the teachers do in the classroom may make or break a pupil. According to Wallace 1983:27) *“the quality and sensitivity of methods practices and experience initiated in the classroom will inhibit or encourage development of individual differences”*. Orphaned children are different from other children in the sense that they have particular problems of their own. Teachers need to understand their home. If the teacher understands the child and shows love backgrounds. They need love and affection from the teacher, as some lack motherly and fatherly love at that child is able to learn better and is motivated to learn.

Most teachers highlighted that orphaned pupils had no adequate learning resources. Wallace (1983) has the opinion that exercise books, rulers and textbooks are important for learning to take place and that lack of these hampers learning. Schools should be involved in fundraising projects in order for them to help orphaned pupils. The orphaned children should form clubs like the young farmers' club and can grow vegetables and sell to the school or the community. The money generated can then be

channeled to assisting children with exercise books, pens and pencils. The Non-Governmental Organizations can focus their assistance not only in provision school fees but in form of material resource such as exercise book, text books and pencils also.

The interviewed pupils indicated that did not have school uniforms and this affected their learning. The researcher observed that these pupils lacked no confidence and isolated. This also affected them academically as all of them said they were not above average in their class performance. Most of the pupils who had school uniforms showed confidence in themselves. Orphaned pupils living with their biological mothers looked better off compared to their counterparts whose mothers were deceased.

The interviewed pupils lived with their grandmothers. The interviewed pupils indicated that their grandmothers did not help them with their homework. This has implications on their academic performance. The pupils need to be encouraged to ask people around them for assistance with homework such as, neighbors and friends. Some grandmothers are too old or did not have formal education this has implication on assistance with homework to their grand children

8. Conclusion

The study concluded that the education of orphaned children was negatively compromised due to lack of financial, social and material resources. These areas need to be attended to improve the quality of education and the performance of orphaned children.

9. Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- Further research to be conducted with view to reduce factors affecting academic performance of orphans.
- Teachers should be trained to assist orphaned children during teaching and learning.
- The Ministry of Education Sports and Culture to introduce in schools teachers specialized in guidance and counseling.
- Non-governmental organisations should not only provide schools fees but include uniforms, exercise books, text books and pens
- Teachers responsible for guidance and counseling to visit orphaned children at home and talk to guardians.

- Schools organise workshops to assist foster parents best ways of assisting orphaned children with school work.

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