



**PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION
IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS: REFLECTIVE PRACTICES
IN LOW-COST PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN
BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE**

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Abstract:

Quality in education has become a cause for concern to every stakeholder in education. The study sought to assess the provision of quality education in low-cost private secondary schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The study adopted the interpretivist paradigm in qualitative approach, using a case study design. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used for collecting thematically analysed data from purposively sampled four school heads and six teachers from low-cost private secondary schools. The study established that in pursuit for quality education, selected schools employed qualified teachers who engage in continuous professional development programmes to sharpen their teaching skills. The findings revealed that the schools understudy are making efforts to offer practical science and computer lessons using the limited resources to ensure the provision of quality education. It emerged that selected schools use e-learning and multimedia resources which arouse learners' interests and increase the retention rates. It came out that the schools understudy have environmental clubs which work together with school health departments in attending to sanitary issues. Whilst selected schools practiced heterogeneous grouping, the findings revealed that learners with physical disabilities are not enrolled in those schools due to lack of appropriate physical facilities and there are no teachers with relevant expertise to teach learners with special needs. The study revealed that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education provided guidelines in the form of policy documents and circulars to monitor the provision of quality education

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in the selected schools. Despite the efforts made by low-cost secondary schools in providing quality education, the study found that high staff turnover is negatively affecting the quality of education due to lack of continuity in learning. The findings indicated that inadequate learning resources and infrastructure such as libraries, computer and science laboratories, internet services, and lack of teachers with special needs expertise adversely affected the provision of quality education. The study concludes that lack of financial resources is a hindrance in the provision of quality education in low-cost secondary schools. The study recommends that a comparative study on provision of quality education should be conducted in private trust secondary schools.

Keywords: quality education, low-cost secondary schools, resources

1. Introduction

Education is considered a pillar for prosperity in every nation as it has the potential to revive and boost the national economy and eradicate poverty. Every nation endeavours to provide education to all as advocated by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4 (UNESCO, 2011). Most developing countries are still struggling with the provision of free education for all the citizens. While governments can provide free education, the current reality globally is that most governments are failing to do so, and private schools have been established to provide quality education affordable to most parents (Heyneman & Stern, 2013). McAleese (2013) highlights that quality education brings about innovative and creative graduates capable of improving the country's economic growth through increased productivity. Graduates with quality knowledge and skills have a better chance of being employable and being successful entrepreneurs (McAleese, 2013).

The inclusion of private schools in the education sector has received significant support from the parents as they perceive highest quality education from these private schools and also believe that learners from private schools will always perform better than their counterparts from public schools in all the aspects (Hsieh & Shen, 2010). In agreement, Mugisha (2008) postulates that, compared to public sector schools, private schools seem to address the needs of the learners more effectively and exceed in performance by almost every measure and parents are now shunning or abandoning public schools in favour of private schools. Most parents believe that there is quality education in private schools.

2. Background

According to UNESCO (2011), the quality of education is one of the strongest means to eradicate poverty and inequalities in any country. Governments' mandate is to ensure that all public schools are able to attract all classes in the society and provide the quality

of education that is desirable to its citizens (Tooley, 2009). Those who go to private schools should do so because they are looking for exclusivity or other aspects such as religion, but not that the public schools are failing to provide quality education (Tooley, 2009). However, the failure of public schools to provide quality education has led to the sprouting of private schools aiming to provide quality education that is not obtainable in most state-owned institutions (Heyneman & Stern, 2013). UNESCO (2011) points out that South Africa has seen an acute increase in private schools from 1% in 1985 up to around 7% in 2000. Furthermore, UNESCO (2011) highlights that the private sector schools have played an increased role in providing quality education although they have been blamed for charging high fees.

In 1979, the Zimbabwean government enacted an Education Act which brought about a three-tier system which destroyed the two-tier system of European and African nationals (Kanyongo, 2015). According to Kanyongo, this Act which saw the inception of private schools in Zimbabwe, although these initially catered for the elite and mostly whites, because of the fees structure in these schools. To monitor the quality of education in these private schools, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) initiated the supervision of the operations of all private schools. According to Sango, Chikohomero, Saruchera and Nyatanga (2017), District Schools Inspectors (DSIs) and Subject Inspectors (SIs) supervise all private schools in order to maintain quality and check if teachers comply with the educational policies. In support of this view, Boaduo (as cited in Mapolisa and Tshabalala, 2013) opines that the process of improving teacher instruction competences and the quality of instruction depends not only on teachers but also on how they are supervised. Supervision is an essential tool for maintaining quality in education, however, it is unfortunate that the instructional supervision is used as a fault-finding mechanism, which leads to teachers not receiving the necessary guidance and substantive support (Mapolisa & Tshabalala, 2013).

Of late, there have been many complaints by the society that these mushrooming low-cost private schools seem to have a contradiction in the desire to make high profits against their desire to provide quality education. A comparison between the ever-increasing enrolments and very slow developments in infrastructure has raised concerns among parents and the community at large. A study by Madzivanyika (2018) in Harare Metropolitan Province on the impact of independent and private schools revealed that most owners of these schools invest very little in maintaining infrastructure and providing learning and teaching materials. In accord to this assertion, Mangwaya, Ndlovu and Manyumwa (2014) who conducted a study on the impact private schools in Gweru concluded that learners enrolling in these low-cost private schools have been on the increase since 2009, crowding these schools with limited facilities and inadequate resources. There is a mismatch between learning resources and high enrolments in the low-cost private schools.

High staff turnover in the low-cost private schools is another issue that worries parents and learners. A study in Harare Metropolitan Province by Madzivanyika (2018) reveals that most of these low-cost private schools give short contracts to teachers to

avoid paying them some benefits which then has led to a very high turnover. The society claims that teachers leave low-cost private secondary schools for elite private schools. Studies conducted have dwelt much on the impact of private and independent schools on the education system in Zimbabwe disregarding how quality education is provided in low-cost private secondary schools. It is against this background that this study sought to explore the provision of quality education in these low-cost private schools.

3. Methods

This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm as it sought to bring an insight into the problem and gave the researchers a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its unique complexity context instead of trying to generalise the base of understanding for the whole population (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative approach gave the researchers an acumen on human emotions such as pain and anger since the researchers acted as research instrument for data collection through interviews and observing the behaviours of participants (Dornyei, 2007). The case study approach facilitated the exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored (Holloway, 2005). Purposive sampling allowed the choice of participants based on their knowledge and experience in the phenomenon. The semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather data which were thematically analysed (Berg, 2007).

To increase the credibility and dependability of the study, data was triangulated from multiple sources (Bryman, 2008). Trustworthiness was achieved through prolonged engagement, investment of sufficient time to achieve a certain purpose, learning more from participants and testing for misinformation introduced by distortions of the self or participants and building trust (Creswell, 2013). In order to comply with ethical considerations, the main purpose of research was clearly explained to the participants who gave verbal consent to participate in the research. Participants were allowed to participate freely and willingly ensuring the right to protection, safety, dignity and the right to withdraw at any phase of the study (Silverman, 2009). For the purposes of anonymity, the participants were coded as H1-4 for School Heads and T1-6 for Teachers.

4. Results

Quality in education should be prioritised as failure to do so deprives the learners of their basic right. The researchers sought to find out the participants' views on factors contributing to the provision of quality education in low-cost of private secondary schools, ways in which the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education ensures that low-cost private secondary schools provide quality education and challenges that are encountered by low-cost private secondary schools in providing quality education.

4.1 Factors contributing to the provision of quality education in low-cost private secondary schools

This section presents the participants' views on factors such as staffing and qualifications of teachers, availability of teaching and learning resources and physical resources, integration of e-learning and multimedia resources, parental involvement, sanitary hygiene and inclusivity in schools.

4.1.1 Staffing and teacher qualification

Staffing and teacher qualification are key elements of quality education. Responses from all the participants revealed that the schools have adequate staffing, which comprises the staff from the Public Service Commission and supplemented by those recruited by the responsible authority.

The participants had some of the following responses on skills and competences considered when hiring teachers.

T2: "Minimum education qualification is necessary, as well as a satisfactory working experience and a diverse background of other co-curricular activities to balance the learner's educational needs."

H2: "There is need to carry out class interviews whenever hiring teachers in order to test the pedagogy and skills the teacher has."

H3: "A teacher must have undergone any pedagogical educational course, highly qualified, experienced and be able to teach up to Advanced Level."

The documents supplied by some schools on staffing profile showed that all teachers have minimum teaching qualifications, most of them having relevant degrees and a handful with master's degrees relevant to the subjects they taught.

On continuous development programmes, participants had this to say:

H4: "Teachers are encouraged to advance themselves by enrolling in universities to attain higher qualifications. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) teachers are advised to take advantage of state funded degree programmes such as those offered in Bindura University."

T5: "Staff members are encouraged to attend subject panel meetings to share ideas on their respective subjects, so that they improve their subject knowledge."

T6: "The school usually encourages all STEM teachers to attend the state funded programme designed to impart teachers with necessary latest STEM skills. Teachers are also self-advancing professionally as they are enrolled with different universities."

It emerged that staffing and teacher qualifications influence the provision of quality education, hence, most of the schools employed qualified teachers in pursuit for quality education. School heads highlighted that there are certain basic requirements that a teacher should meet in order to be admitted at the school if quality has to be maintained. It emerged that teachers in low-cost private schools engaged in continuous professional development programmes to sharpen their teaching skills while other members of staff were enrolled in different universities in order to improve their qualifications. According to the school heads and teachers, all schools are making efforts to ensure the teachers get continuous professional development programmes so that they remain competent.

Pertaining to the effects of staff turnover, participants expressed the following comments:

T1: "The impact of the staff turnover is felt at a high level, if teachers keep on changing, learners have to start afresh on certain concepts and this affects the assimilation of concepts."

T6: "The prevailing economic situation has forced many teachers to leave the country for greener pastures and this has affected the learners greatly especially the writing classes as they are moved from one teacher to another, there is lack of continuity. Adapting to the changes might take time and this affects their preparation time which in turn affects the quality of outcomes at the end of the year."

H2 commented that:

"Sometimes teachers employed by the responsible authority go for some months without their pay because of financial constraints and this forces them to leave this school for greener pastures. This affects the quality of education offered by the school, as there will be no continuity."

H4: "When teachers leave the school more often, learners have a hard time in adapting to the new teachers and their new teaching techniques and strategies and this affects the quality of educational outcomes at the end of the course."

There is evidence that high staff turnover is negatively affecting the quality of education within the selected schools. Participants cited the issue of late payment of teachers' salaries due to lack of funds as the main cause for high staff turnover. It was also revealed from the responses that high staff turnover negatively influenced quality education due to lack of continuity in learning.

4.1.2 Availability of resources

Resources play a pivotal role in the provision of quality education. School heads and teachers were asked if there were adequate teaching and learning resources to enhance the quality of education offered in their schools. Their responses were as follows:

H1: *“Resources will never be enough; the school is currently struggling to have adequate resources since it is still new. To a greater extent, this compromises the quality of education offered by the school.”*

T2: *“The school has insufficient resources; however, it is making efforts to try to meet the demand. The school bought a photocopier, so that some of the teaching and learning material is photocopied for learners to have access to essential material to improve the quality of education.”*

T3: *“The resources are limited, some subjects like science and those introduced in implementation of the new curriculum in 2017 do not have textbooks. This affects teachers a lot, as they will rely on borrowing textbooks and downloading material from the internet.”*

T6: *“Learning materials are a challenge and the enrolment keeps on ballooning leaving the school with a great need for resources.”*

On the availability of library, computer and science laboratories, some of the participants' views were as follows:

H1 and T4 echoed the same sentiments, pointing out that their schools are new and still growing and currently do not have such facilities but rely on the mobile library and mobile computer facilities that can be accessed once a week at most. Limited science materials are usually ferried from class to class by the science teachers to wherever they have a science lesson. Other participants responded as stated below:

H4: *“There is no library, no computer laboratory and no science laboratory, when experiments are done, only the teacher has the materials to demonstrate to the class.”*

T3: *“The school does not have a functional library, neither does it have a science laboratory but it has a computer laboratory although most computers are not working.”*

Expressing their opinions on how the quality of education in their schools is affected by the non-availability of resources, the participants had this to say:

T1 and H3 concurred that the quality of education in their schools was affected by the scarcity of resources. They argued that their results could be better than what they are now if they had essential resources. T3 and T5 indicated scarcity in these constantly changing set books like English and Ndebele literature set books. Schools find it difficult

with their limited resources to keep on purchasing the set books yearly, hence, the critical shortage lingers yearly. Besides the change of set books, the learner-book ratio is very high with six or more learners sharing a single textbook making it difficult for learners to do their private study at home. Participants further expressed the following sentiments:

T6: "The quality of education is affected because when the learners do not have the learning materials like textbooks, it is difficult for them to do their homework, also failing to read ahead for the upcoming lessons. This gives the learners and the teacher a hard time and the achievement of objectives sometimes becomes impossible."

H4: "The quality of education is greatly affected by the non-availability of resources, for example, without adequate resources learners rely solely on the teacher and no research can be done outside the classroom."

When asked about the influence of physical resources in the provision of quality education, some of the participants responded as follows:

T2: "The school is still new and there is a critical shortage of physical resources which frustrates both the learners and the teachers."

T4: "School furniture is adequate for all learners; therefore, learners do not move around in search for furniture during lesson time. This improves the quality of education as most of the time is devoted to lessons."

T5: "The issue of furniture affects learning, we used to have adequate furniture but the enrolment is increasing due to the current economic hardships. Most parents are now withdrawing their children from boarding schools and bringing them here. This negatively affects learners as they now struggle to get chairs and desks. This consumes their lesson time especially in the morning or when they move out for practical lessons, they have to start searching for furniture."

H1: "School furniture is critical, if it is not enough, a lot of time is wasted as learners try to acquire the chairs and the desks and this disturbs lesson time. It also creates a sense of instability within the learners and compromises the quality of our education."

H2: "The school is still developing, therefore, some structures that might be expected by both the teachers and learners are not available leading to demoralisation, however, the school is developing at a fast rate and there is hope that sooner than later the infrastructure will meet the basic standards."

The views gathered give evidence that there is insufficient teaching and learning resources. The participants are aware of the impact of the unavailability of learning

resources in the provision of quality education in selected schools. It was highlighted that in as much as schools under study are trying their best to provide quality education, the resources they have at their disposal hinder their success. It also emerged from the responses that some low-cost private secondary schools do not have physical facilities such as libraries, computer laboratories and science laboratories. However, responses showed that schools are making efforts to offer practical science lessons, having mobile libraries, and offering computer lessons with only a few computers.

4.1.3 Integration of e-learning and multimedia technology

Technology has transformed education in an amazing manner. School heads and teachers were asked to comment on the integration of e-learning and multimedia technology in their teaching processes and their responses were as follows:

H1: *“For the time being, there is Wi-Fi which is only offered to teachers and higher classes. Since Wi-Fi bundles are very expensive to purchase, lower forms have no access to the service so members of staff do research on their behalf.”*

H2: *“It is done through research using Wi-Fi, teachers research and cascade the information down to their learners, and with the COVID 19 outbreak, we are planning to do e-learning with classes preparing for public examinations.”*

H3: *“All teachers are computer literate; they incorporate the use of projectors and there is use of Wi-Fi for learners as well.”*

T2, T5 and T6 echoed the same sentiments highlighting that most teachers use Google learning materials, do power point presentations for their lesson notes and use word documents for their records of work. T5 and T6 highly emphasised use of internet which allows learners to do research, which in turn leads to faster syllabus coverage allowing ample time for revision.

Participants were asked if the use of multimedia resources in teaching enhances the quality of education in their schools. These were their responses:

T1: *“Most learners are keen to use the resources and the correct use of them has paid off because we had pleasing results at the end of the year.”*

T2: *“It greatly enhances the quality of education as it appeals to most of learners’ senses especially the use of videos from the internet also stimulates the learners’ interests.”*

T5: *“Yes, it does. It provokes interest in learners. Every time a teacher goes with a laptop to the lesson, all the learners will be attentive and eager to learn. It stimulates interests among the learners improving the quality of the learning process and produces good results.”*

T6: *“Learners benefit a lot from the few computers that the school has and from their personal gadgets. They find their own research interesting all the time. The use of projectors during lessons draws the learners’ attention, which has led to improved academic achievements.”*

In addition, H1 had these views:

“While researching, learners get access to various types of sources of data. The information acquired results in better understanding of concepts and helps them to produce better assignments. This positively influences the education that the learners are getting.”

It came out from the school heads and teachers that schools are integrating the use of multimedia resources although challenges are experienced in some cases. All the schools have access to internet either, by teachers, learners or both. Most teachers claim that the use of multimedia technologies has improved the quality of education in selected schools, evidenced by improved results.

4.1.4 Parental involvement

Participants were further asked their views on the impact of parental involvement on quality of education offered by their schools. The participants had this to say:

T1: *“If learners discover that parents are part of the school programmes, it becomes easier for the school to achieve its set objectives.”*

T2: *“Parental involvement improves quality education in that schooling starts at home. Parents supervise their children on assigned work which assists teachers in their everyday teaching.”*

T3, T4, T5 and T6 shared the same opinions and stressed that if what is taught in schools is married with what is taught at home, parents really understanding the school’s expectations, they will work towards the achievement of the school’s goals. T6 emphasised that parents are primary socialisers of the learners, their involvement in school activities gives them a direction on the expectations of the school and they mould their children accordingly. T5 strongly highlighted that parental involvement makes parents feel valued and always give financial support for most of the school activities when a need arises. H3 added that there is need for parents to know the expectations of the school so that they guide their children to meet the demands of the school. Other school heads gave the following expressions:

H1: *“Parental involvement is critical. We need their views, even their criticisms are healthy for the school as they make the institution grow.”*

H2: *“Parental involvement is key. Most cases at school emanate from home. If the school and parents come together to discuss the issues, they can minimise bad behaviour and can focus on assisting the learners in promoting quality in education.”*

The assertions by the participants portrayed that selected schools value the involvement of parents to achieve quality education. All the schools under study have functional School Development Committees and use the open-door policy for the parents. Responses showed that the schools interact a lot with parents and are aware that parental involvement positively influences the quality of education.

4.1.5 Sanitary hygiene

Sanitary hygiene is a fundamental component in provision of quality education. The participants were asked how they ensure the provision of quality education through sanitation and hygiene, and their responses were noted as follows:

H1: *“There is City Council and borehole water, taps are all over the school including the ablution block to ensure there is safe drinking water in many points within the school.”*

T1: *“There is a health committee which ensures that all the ablution blocks and surroundings are kept in check with the assistance of the auxiliary staff.”*

T2, T5 and T6 were all in agreement that the selected schools ensure there is always running water, clean toilets, and clean environment, and there are boreholes to augment City Council water. T6 spoke strongly about the role of the environmental club on sanitation, being responsible of the school surroundings and ensuring that refuse bins are collected on a daily basis. These participants also emphasised that the girls’ toilets have been made more user friendly to cater for their sanitary needs than the boys’ toilets. T3 and T4 corroborated:

T3: *“The school has City Council and borehole water. The school, through the health department provides sanitary pads to girls if emergencies arise.”*

T4: *“There are functional toilets, refuse bins in every classroom and refuse collection is done regularly. There is safe City Council and borehole water and some Jo-Jo tanks to ensure there is always running water in case there are water cuts.”*

There is evidence that the schools under study are considerate of the health and sanitary hygiene issues as they strive to provide quality education. It came out that the schools have functional health departments attending to sanitary issues. Participants disclosed that some schools also have environmental clubs which work together with the health department. Responses revealed that all the schools under study drilled boreholes to supplement the City Council water.

4.1.6 Inclusivity

Inclusivity is one of the key indicators of quality education. The participants were requested to provide information on how the low-cost private secondary schools embraced inclusivity as they provided quality education. They responded as indicated below:

T2 and T3 both stated that they use a mixed ability approach, there is no streaming, and learners are given same opportunities, but disability is ignored to an extent. T3 spoke strongly on disabled learners, underlining that such learners enrol but they often leave the school shortly, as facilities are not accommodative. Other participants gave the following contributions:

T4: "The issue of inclusivity is still in blueprint but not actually implemented. The only consideration as of now is the academic performance inclusivity where the school accommodates both the slow and fast learners."

H2: "The school is non-selective, teachers also come from different ethnic groups and there is no discrimination."

H3: "There is an inclusive policy as guided by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. There is enrolment of learners with different abilities and facilities are user friendly."

On whether inclusivity influences the quality of education offered by the schools, school heads and teachers had this to say:

T2: "Quality education in relation to that aspect of inclusivity is greatly affected since the school is unable to provide the facilities and teachers to accommodate all learners with different needs, then we can safely say we are failing to provide quality education since quality involves inclusivity."

T3: "Academic inclusion is necessary as learners have different needs. The inclusion of disabled learners might help the learners to accept each other in the society without any discrimination. As such, inclusion influences the quality of education as learners will try to sail through, assisting each other throughout. In our case, this is not happening meaning quality is questionable."

T5: "Largely, the quality of education in our school is affected since the school is doing away with a certain group of people existing in our society. We cannot say there is quality if inclusivity lacks. The facilities themselves are selective, they cannot accommodate the physically disabled."

H1: *“It cannot be concluded that the school offers quality education if it does not cater for all learners’ needs. The school should therefore include everyone for it to provide quality education. The school is therefore trying to offer quality education through inclusive education.”*

While it emerged that the selected schools practiced heterogeneous grouping the responses further revealed that learners with physical disabilities are not enrolled in those schools due to lack of appropriate physical facilities to accommodate such learners. In addition to that, the participants’ responses indicated that there are no teachers with relevant expertise to teach learners with special needs.

4.2 How the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education ensures that low-cost private secondary schools provide quality education

Monitoring the provision of quality education is significant in any educational system. Hence, the participants were asked to give insight on how the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) ensured that the low-cost private secondary schools provide quality education to its clients. Some of the responses given were as follows:

T1: *“Unlike in the past, MoPSE is now very much involved through supervision visits. The same instruments used in assessing government schools are used in our schools to check for quality.”*

T2: *“There is hiring of qualified teachers, which is mandatory according to the MoPSE policy, the school is obliged to higher qualified personnel. The MoPSE also brings to us the issue of manpower development, where we saw several science teachers benefiting as they were sent to Bindura University of Science Education to advance their studies under the state sponsored programme. This was meant to improve the quality of education in all STEM subjects.”*

T3 and T5 shared the same sentiments on recruitment policy followed by the school when recruiting teachers. They concurred that their schools use MoPSE guidelines whenever recruitment of non - government teachers is done. T3 spoke sturdily on the assessment procedures that are done by the MoPSE when assessing instructional delivery. The participants underscored that after the assessment the MoPSE provides feedback that spells out the strengths and weaknesses of each teacher. One of the school heads acknowledged:

H3: *“The MoPSE might not have a direct control of the school, but all the operations of the school are guided by the MoPSE policies. The school follows the current syllabi recommended by MoPSE, uses MoPSE guidelines on supervision of both teachers and learners, guidelines on school financial management and recruitment guidelines.”*

The above sentiments from the participants were confirmed by documents which were analysed, they revealed that selected schools were enforcing the MoPSE policies. It was noticed that in every selected school there was a calendar of events showing some internal supervision schedules and MoPSE termly visits. The circular pertaining to minimum work to be assigned to the learners per week were also available in the selected schools.

It was revealed that MoPSE provided guidelines in the form of policy documents and circulars to monitor the provision of quality education in the selected schools. The data presented confirmed that the assessment instruments for both teachers and learners are provided by MoPSE including guidelines for financial management. It came out that the government, through the MoPSE hires teachers for the low-cost private secondary schools and provides guidelines for hiring additional teachers which the responsible authorities might need. Hence, there is evidence that MoPSE is constantly monitoring the provision of quality education in the schools under study.

4.3 Challenges encountered by low-cost private secondary schools in providing quality education

The participants were probed to shed light on the challenges experienced by the low-cost private secondary schools in providing quality education. Their responses included the following:

T1: "Challenges are there and the main one is economic situation. We have difficulties in acquiring resources internally sometimes, leading to the need to import some and it is difficult to get foreign currency."

T2: "We have challenges like shortage of infrastructure such as computer laboratory and library. There is also a serious shortage of textbooks as the sharing ratio is too high. There is lack of funding for most of the school activities and lack of support from the administration as some teachers' endeavours are not given priority."

T3: "Lack of funding and lack of resources are main problems. There are also some conflicts within the school, between the government employed staff and those employed by the responsible authority, these are caused by different working conditions and treatment that teachers get. Lack of furniture disturbs learning time and infrastructure still needs attention. Learners have no access to internet and teachers should be trained to embrace maximum use of technology, improving their teaching methods in their everyday teaching."

T6: "The current situation makes it difficult for the school to function properly. The inflation rates make it impossible for the school to acquire enough learning and teaching materials. Some teachers employed by the responsible authority go for months without their salaries because of financial constraints."

H1: *“Funding is the main challenge, sometimes the responsible authority fails to meet all the institutional demands. The rate at which the MoPSE is employing is a challenge to the school, as the responsible authority is obliged to fill in the gaps. This puts more pressure on the already strained funds as the responsible authority would have to pay those teachers. There is lack of resources such as textbooks, infrastructure and specialist facilities such as the library, computer laboratories and the science laboratories.”*

H3: *“Finances are a challenge. The economic situation is negatively affecting the teaching process, there is limited research as the school sometimes fails to purchase enough internet bundles to access Wi-Fi services. There are no external sources of finance making it difficult to make ends meet.”*

The assertions from the school heads and teachers reveal that selected schools encounter numerous constraints, the major one being financial challenge, as their only source of revenue is from fees paid by learners. It emerged that there is shortage of textbooks especially for subjects introduced when the implementation of the new curriculum started in 2017. Participants revealed that some schools are unable to acquire enough furniture to match the increase in enrolments and this impacted negatively on the quality of education that learners receive, as there would be serious lesson disturbances as learners move from one place to the other during lesson time in search of furniture. It was also revealed that lack of internet connectivity, specialist facilities such as the library, computer and science laboratories adversely affected the provision of quality education in selected schools. It came out that selected schools were struggling to pay the salaries of teachers employed by the responsible authority because of financial constraints. It was mentioned that sometimes teachers paid by the responsible authority would go for some months without their salaries paid, as funds will not be permitting and this demotivated the affected teachers who ended up not performing as expected. As a result, the quality of education is seriously affected in those schools.

5. Discussion

The study found that staffing and teacher qualifications influence the provision of quality education, hence, most of the selected schools employed qualified teachers in pursuit for quality education. It emerged that teachers in low-cost private secondary schools engaged in continuous professional development programmes to sharpen their teaching skills while other members of staff were enrolled in different universities in order to improve their qualifications. The results indicated that the selected schools are making efforts to ensure that the teachers are involved in continuous professional development programmes so that they remain competent. The findings concur with Rice’s (2003) observation that teachers who have earned degrees have a positive impact on high school achievement especially when the degree earned were in the subjects they teach. The results also support Deming’s proposition that institutions should encourage self-

improvement for everyone because the organisation does not only need good people, but people who are continually improving themselves with education (Sallis, 2002).

The study established that the schools understudy are making efforts to offer practical science lessons, computer lessons with the limited resources they have and providing mobile libraries to ensure the provision of quality education. It emerged from the study that low-cost secondary schools have internet connectivity and use e-learning and multimedia resources which arouse learners' interests and increase the retention rates in learners, hence, impacting positively on the quality of education. The findings of this study are consistent with the views of Fayani, Ayo, Ajayi and Okorie (2015) who state that the use of e-learning and multimedia technologies contribute to the provision of quality education in low-cost private secondary schools. In their effort to provide quality education, it emerged from this study that selected schools value parental involvement, have functional School Development Committees and use the open-door policy for the parents. The findings are similar to results of the study conducted in England by Harris and Goodall (2008) who found that there is a growing recognition of the need to involve the parents in raising educational aspiration of learners.

There is evidence from the study findings that the schools understudy are considerate of the health and sanitary hygiene issues as they strive to provide quality education. It came out that the schools have functional health departments attending to sanitary issues. It was revealed that some schools have environmental clubs which work together with the health department. The results showed that all the schools understudy drilled boreholes to supplement the City Council water. The findings of the study are in line with the declaration by UNICEF (2014) that a major way of achieving illness reduction is by providing schools with safe drinking water, improved sanitation facilities and hygiene education that encourages the development of healthy behaviours of life.

While it emerged that the selected schools practiced heterogeneous grouping, the findings further revealed that learners with physical disabilities are not enrolled in those schools due to lack of appropriate physical facilities to accommodate such learners. In addition, the results of this study indicated that there are no teachers with relevant expertise to teach learners with special needs. The study findings confirm the results of the study carried out in Harare Metropolitan Province by Chuchu and Chuchu (2016) who found that schools did not have adequate resources for total inclusion and the schools enrolled very few learners with disabilities. Such practices have negative impact on provision of quality education.

This study revealed that MoPSE provided guidelines in the form of policy documents and circulars to monitor the provision of quality education in the selected schools. It came out that the assessment instruments for both teachers and learners are provided by MoPSE including guidelines for financial management. It was found that the government, through the MoPSE hires teachers for the low-cost private secondary schools and provides guidelines for hiring additional teachers which the responsible authorities might need. These findings are in line with the Government of Zimbabwe (2001) through the Education Act that spells out the minimum qualifications for all

teachers employed. The results of this study also support the views of Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2013) who indicated that the MoPSE sets, enforces, and supervises standards for private schools to ensure that education is provided in line with the public goals protecting the welfare of the citizens.

The results of this study indicated that selected schools encountered numerous constraints, the major one being financial challenges. There is evidence that high staff turnover is negatively affecting the quality of education due to lack of continuity in learning. It was found that the issue of late payment of teachers' salaries due to lack of funds contributed to high staff turnover. The findings agree with literature observations that proper funding policies enhance good teacher remuneration that motivates teachers (UNESCO, 2011). It emerged that there is shortage of textbooks especially for subjects introduced by the 2017 new curriculum. It was found that some schools are unable to acquire enough furniture to match the increase in enrolments and this impacted negatively on the quality of education that learners receive, as there would be serious lesson disturbances as learners move from one place to the other during lesson time in search of furniture. The findings are commensurate with the proclamation by UNESCO (2005) that there is usually a mismatch of resources and learners mainly due to an ever-increasing enrolment. The results established that lack of internet connectivity, specialist facilities such as the library, computer and science laboratories adversely affected the provision of quality education in selected schools. The findings of this study confirm that some consequences of poor funding in schools is outdated, dilapidated or non-existence of essential infrastructure (UNESCO, 2011).

6. Conclusion

The study examined the provision of quality education in low-cost private secondary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The study established that in pursuit for quality education, selected schools employed qualified teachers who engage in continuous professional development programmes to sharpen their teaching skills. The findings revealed that the schools under study are making efforts to offer practical science and computer lessons using the limited resources to ensure the provision of quality education. It emerged from the study that low-cost secondary schools have internet connectivity and use e-learning and multimedia resources which arouse learners' interests and increase the retention rates in learners, hence, impacting positively on the quality of education. It came out that the schools under study have environmental clubs which work together with health departments in attending to sanitary issues. The study revealed that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education provided guidelines in the form of policy documents and circulars to monitor the provision of quality education in the selected schools. Despite the efforts made by low-cost secondary schools in providing quality education, the study found that high staff turnover is negatively affecting the quality of education due to lack of continuity in learning. The study revealed that lack of learning resources and infrastructure such as libraries, computer and science

laboratories, internet services, and lack of teachers with special needs expertise adversely affected quality education. The study concludes that lack of financial resources is a hindrance in the provision of quality education in low-cost secondary schools. The study recommends that a comparative study on provision of quality education should be conducted in private trust secondary schools.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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Joyce Mathwasa began her career in education after obtaining a teaching certificate specialising in Infant classes. She taught in the Early Childhood for twenty years raising through the ranks to headship of primary schools for fifteen years. She furthered her education attaining a Bachelor's degree in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (University of Zimbabwe); Master in Educational Administration, Planning and Policy Studies (Zimbabwe Open University) and PhD (University of Fort Hare, South Africa). Currently she is a Researcher in the Early Childhood Development School of Excellence in the University of Fort Hare. Dr. Mathwasa is also an Adjunct

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