

Exploring Challenges Confronted By Zimbabwean Primary Schools in Implementing Multicultural Education: The Case of Zaka District

¹Dr Dekeza Clyton, ²Chingarande, Jane.Kundai

Great Zimbabwe University Robert Mugabe School of Education Box 1235 Masvingo Cell: 0773902651

Ezekiel Guti University 1901 Barrassie Road P.O.BOX 350 Bindura Cell: +263773587961

Corresponding Author: Dr Dekeza Clyton

Abstract: Zimbabwe is a multicultural society based on various factors such as gender, ethnicity, age to mention just but a few. Educational institutions have a mandate to cater for the cultures and interests of various sub-cultural groups in society hence the nexus between multiculturalism and education warrants interrogation. The aim of this study is to explore challenges faced by Zimbabwean primary schools in implementing multicultural education with a view to recommending strategies to deal with existential challenges. A qualitative approach was adopted in which a case study research design was used. A sample of twenty (20) participants was conveniently drawn comprising 16 primary and secondary school teachers as well as 4 primary and secondary school heads. Interviews, focus group discussions and observation were used to collect data in this study. Data was presented and analysed based on themes generated from the collected data. The study established that both primary and secondary schools encounter similar challenges in implementing a multicultural curriculum such as, lack of bilingual teachers to teach learners from different cultural set ups in indigenous languages, lack of infrastructure to cater for learners with different disabilities and negative attitudes of teachers and learners towards traditional games. To go round the identified challenges the researchers recommend that the Ministry of primary and secondary education should deploy teachers competent to teach learners in indigenous languages and conduct workshops to conscientise teachers on the tenets of multicultural education. Another recommendation made is that the government should provide adequate funding to schools to construct physical infrastructure that cater for learners of different disabilities.

Key words: Multiculturalism, Education, Culture, ethnicity, gender, infrastructure, language

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I. Introduction and Background

Implementation of multicultural education is one of the contemporary reforms that have been advocated for in a number of countries the world over. The need for multicultural education in modern society is hinged on the fact that society is multicultural on the basis of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation and social class hence some social groups may be discriminated and prejudiced in educational institutions. In the case of African countries like Zimbabwe, there are two main reasons that necessitate the implementation of a multicultural curriculum. Firstly, it is a fact that African countries are multicultural and multi-ethnic hence the need to tolerate and appreciate cultural differences in schools and the wider society. Secondly, most African countries were once colonies of European countries which imposed an alien curriculum in Africa and alienated the local people's culture and experiences (Muchenje and Heeralal, 2014:325). With the attainment of independence, it became imperative that independent African states offer a curriculum which is sensitive and responsive to the needs of all learners with respect to race, gender, ethnicity and social class background. Abdullah (2009:160) stresses that despite cultural differences, people need to come to terms with the fact that they need to co-exist in harmony. The researchers contend that multicultural education can go a long way in fostering the values of tolerance, respect of individual differences, equality and justice which are the hallmark of a democratic society. Zimbabwe is a multicultural nation (Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and culture, 2004:4; Nziramasanga Commission, 1999:358). In an attempt to address the educational needs of culturally diverse learners, Zimbabwe promulgated and adopted a number of policies to support multicultural education, which include the Zimbabwe Education Act (Education Act, 1996), the Disabled Persons Act (Disabled Persons Act, 1996), the Zimbabwe Gender Policy, 2004 as amended 2013 (The Zimbabwe Gender Policy, 2004). These acts and policies aim to provide equal access to education to all learners irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, religious and social class background. For instance the Education Secretary's Policy circular No P36 of 1990,

which is an appendage of the Zimbabwe Education Act of 1996, encourages schools to provide equal access to education for all learners with a diverse cultural background. With all the policies which purport to support the implementation of multicultural education, this paper seeks to interrogate challenges confronted by rural primary schools in Zaka District in implementing a multicultural curriculum with a view to recommending strategies that can make implementation of a multicultural school curriculum a reality.

The Concept Multicultural Education, Goals and Benefits

The concept multicultural education is problematic to define because it means different things to different people. However some common definitions proffered by multicultural education gurus are given below to have an appreciation of what this elusive concept entails. Banks (1999:1) and Manning and Barath (1996) view multicultural education as a reform movement designed to make major changes in the education of students by affirming that all students should have equal opportunity to learn in school. Mandoga and Chakandinakira (2014:265) define multicultural education as a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. In addition Gumbo (2001:235) views multicultural education as an organising principle for systematic school reform. From the definitions above, it can be drawn that multicultural education stresses equality of educational opportunities to learners from diverse backgrounds as well as foster democratic values such as tolerance, co-existence and social justice.

Multicultural education as a transformative programme has clear goals it aims to achieve in order to create equitable and just educational institutions for the betterment of learners from diverse social backgrounds. Thus, Banks (1999:41) and Gollnick and Chinn (1990) outlined some of the goals of multicultural education as shown below:

- Promotion of strength and value of cultural diversity
- An emphasis on human rights and respect for those who are different from oneself
- Exposes students to cultural and ethnic alternatives
- Provides all learners with the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, mainstream culture and within and across other ethnic cultures
- It liberates individuals who know and look at the world from their own cultural and ethnic perspectives from this cultural and ethnic encapsulation
- Helps individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures and respect them and
- Develop multicultural climates in schools and perfect curricula that encourage multicultural awareness

Coupled with the goals of multicultural education are the benefits of the educational programme. Mapuranga and Bukaliya (2013) highlighted the benefits of implementing multicultural education as follows:

- Promotion of inclusion in schools
- Promotion of equal rights in schools regardless of one's culture
- Ability to enroll learners from diverse backgrounds
- Appreciation of cultural diversity and differences as strengths not as weaknesses
- Reduction of racial discrimination

The goals and benefits of multicultural education indicate that the educational programme can be a panacea to multicultural nations like Zimbabwe which have subcultural groups with distinct sets of norms and values which can act as a source of conflict and undermine nation building efforts. Ethnocentric and xenocentric attitudes that normally degenerate into discrimination and conflict in educational institutions can be circumvented if multicultural education is successfully implemented. Thus, Gumbo (2001:240) observes that multicultural education is ideal for liberating those that are imprisoned in their own cultural cocoons and do not want to hatch out to perceive God's wonderful creativity in the microcosm of cultures.

II. Statement of the problem

Although the need to implement multicultural education was officially declared as early as the Swan Report (1985) the momentum to implement the programme was slow then. Abdullah (2009:162) observes that developments in recent years for instance the September 11 bombing in America, the Bokharam abduction of schoolgirls in Nigeria and other terrorist attacks and civil wars saw the call to implement multicultural education gaining momentum. In Zimbabwe, some studies on the implementation of multicultural education were carried out (Mandoga & Chakandinakira, 2014; Muchenje & Heeralal, 2014). The previous studies were however carried out in some provinces and districts in Zimbabwe and none was carried out in Zaka district. The current study therefore seeks to fill this gap by exploring the readiness of rural primary schools in Zaka district to

implement the multicultural education curriculum with a view to suggesting ways to empower schools to implement a multicultural school curriculum effectively.

Major Research Question

What challenges are confronted by rural primary schools in Zaka district in implementing a multicultural education school curriculum?

Sub-questions

- What is the teachers and school-heads' understanding of multicultural education?
- Do teachers have knowledge and skills to implement a multicultural school curriculum?
- Do rural primary schools have adequate infrastructure to implement a multicultural school curriculum?
- What can be done to empower schools to implement a multicultural school curriculum?

Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by the critical theory. Critical theory is a postmodernist perspective (Giddens & Sutton 2013). The theory is associated with the institute for social research founded by Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer (Martens, 2008; 42). It was also influenced by the work of Habermas (1972:23) and Freire (1996:3) who opine that liberation is childbirth hence a painful experience. Critical theory emphasises that social reality is historically produced and created by people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:25). The transformative emancipatory approach adopted by critical theorists like Habermas (1972) and Freire (1996) assume that there are diverse viewpoints with regard to social realities (Martens, 2008:88). The emphasis of critical theory on multiple realities and social construction of reality commensurate with multicultural education's thrust of accommodating and respecting knowledge and experiences of learners from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, gender and social class orientations. It is this nexus between critical theory and multicultural education that the researchers deemed the theory appropriate to anchor this study

III. Methodology

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research paradigm. Marshall and Rossman (2006:2) opine that the purpose of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of individuals and events in their natural state, taking into account the relevant context. The research design chosen for this study is phenomenology. Kufakunesu, Ganga and Chinyoka (2012:124) assert that in phenomenological research, the lived experiences of the individuals participating in the study are examined. In addition Chilisa and Preece (2005:44) concur that phenomenological research design delves on studying people's experiences in an attempt to gain the meticulous details of their social circumstances. The phenomenological research design was deemed suitable for this study because it accords the researchers the opportunity to explore views and sentiments of the participants on the implementation of a multicultural curriculum in their schools

The researchers employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to collect information from the participants. Borg and Gall (1989:351) posit that interview enables researchers to obtain data required to meet specific objectives of the study. Similarly Boyce and Neale (2006:3) view an in-depth interview as a qualitative approach that probes deeply to discover information from the point of view of participants. Interviews were conducted with school heads while focus group discussions were held with sampled teachers at each of the four selected schools.

Population and Sample

The population for the study comprised all teachers and school heads in the four selected schools. From this population four school-heads were purposively sampled and 16 teachers comprising eight males and eight females were selected by stratified random sampling technique. The sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the sample is gender balanced (Mandoga & Chakandinakira, 2014:270). Purposive sampling was employed to select school-heads; this was to ensure that information-rich participants were selected for the study (Patton, 2002:230).

IV. Findings and discussion of Results

School heads and teachers' understanding of multicultural education

The first sub-question sought to establish school-heads and teachers' conceptualization of the concept multicultural education. This question was deemed important since teachers and school administrators are the implementers of curricula, their understanding of school curriculum is critical to its effective implementation. The respondents, school-heads and teachers were asked in an interview and focus group discussions to highlight their understanding of the concept multicultural education. Three school-heads indicated that they understood

the concept. When probed to clarify their response, they elaborated that multicultural education meant including different cultures in the school curriculum. They gave examples such as teaching learners in indigenous languages and inclusion of traditional dances in the school activities as part and parcel of multicultural education. One school-head confessed ignorance of the concept multicultural education. He indicated that he was aware of education with production which was the thrust of the Zimbabwean school curriculum in the 1980s. Findings from focus group discussions with teachers on their understanding of multicultural education revealed that most teachers had limited understanding of the concept. In one of the focus group discussions, teachers gave the following definitions of multicultural education:

- Multicultural education means adopting multi-faith approach in teaching Religious and Moral education
- Multicultural education means embracing different cultural activities in the extra-curricular activities of the school

Responses from the participants (school-heads and teachers) revealed that they have a narrow understanding of the concept multicultural education. The subjects and extra-curricular activities viewed as representing multicultural education is limited. Some key subjects of the curriculum such as physical education, music, HIV/AIDS just to mention but a few were left out. They viewed multicultural education as limited to extra-curricular activities and pedagogy, a definition which falls short of multicultural education as defined by the proponents of multiculturalism. To Banks (1999) and Manning and Baruth (1996) multicultural education is a reform movement aimed at making some changes in the education system to provide all learners with equal opportunity to learn. In addition Muchenje and Heeralal (2014:331) view multicultural education as a philosophy which permeates the whole curriculum than confined to limited subjects. The researchers contend that lack of a holistic and inclusive definition and understanding of the concept multicultural education exhibited by the participants could militate against effective implementation of multicultural education in schools

The findings of this study in respect of lack of a comprehensive understanding of the concept multicultural education by the educators is in tandem with findings of previous studies conducted in Zimbabwe (Mandoga & Chakandinakira, 2014; Mapuranga & Bukaliya, 2014; Muchenje & Heeralal, 2014). The findings of the study imply that there is need to conduct workshops to enlighten school-heads and teachers on the concept multicultural education, if the implementation of the educational programme is to materialise.

Teachers' knowledge and skills to implement a multicultural school curriculum

This question generated mixed responses. Six (37.5%) teachers indicated that they were capable of teaching culturally diverse classes, 4(25%) teachers revealed that they were not confident to teach culturally diverse learners and another group 6 (37, 5%) categorically stated that they were ill-equipped to handle multicultural classes. When asked by the researchers to elaborate their various responses to the question, the 6 (37.5%) teachers who indicated that they were capable to teach culturally diverse classes qualified their response by indicating that they covered some components of multicultural education at college during pre-service teacher training. They also indicated that the updated curriculum emphasises on Ubuntu in subjects like Heritage Studies and Family and Religious Studies which they viewed as multicultural education. The researchers observed that the claim by 6(37.5%) teachers that they were capable of teaching multicultural classes was based on the misconception of the concept multicultural education. This category viewed multicultural education as represented by certain subjects like Heritage Studies. This view falls short of Manning and Baruth's (2008:9) conceptualization of multicultural education as an educational strategy that permeates the entire school curriculum rather than being singled out as one course or teaching unit approach. In addition Muchenje and Heeralal (2014:331) observed that the multicultural character of Zimbabwe should be reflected in all subjects of the school curriculum. Against this backdrop the researchers concluded that the claim by some teachers that they could teach culturally diverse classes was based on the limited understanding of what multicultural education entails. Thus, implementation of multicultural education by ill-equipped teachers is doomed to fail.

The four (25%) teachers who indicated that they were not comfortable to teach learners from diverse backgrounds elaborated their response by highlighting issues they viewed as militating against their ability to handle multicultural classes such as lack of training in multicultural education during pre-service training, not proficient in languages of children from diverse cultures, high teacher-pupil ratio, lack of infrastructure and equipment as well as negative attitudes towards the programme. Lack of training in multicultural education was raised by all the 4(25%) teachers, they confessed that they did not cover anything related to multicultural education at college hence felt ill-equipped to implement a multicultural school curriculum. This finding concurs with findings of previous studies (Muchenje & Heeralal, 2014; Mandoga & Chakandinakira, 2014; Gumbo, 2001) which revealed deficiencies in the curriculum of teachers' colleges with respect of multicultural education. The researchers being experienced educators argue that teachers must have the requisite knowledge and skills to integrate the learners' diverse cultures into classroom experiences. Thus, Alismail (2016:139)

opines that pre-service training is a critical factor in assisting educators to recognise the effects of cultural, religious, gender and racial diversity on students. It has been observed that effective training of pre-service teachers in multicultural education is critical in turning the new teachers into multiculturalism advocates geared to achieve equity and social justice in culturally diverse classrooms (Alismail, 2016; Muchenje & Heeralal, 2014).

Another factor raised by the teachers as hampering effective implementation of multicultural education is the negative attitude of teachers towards new educational programmes. The 4(25%) teachers revealed that teachers have negative attitude towards multicultural education because they are burdened by the updated curriculum which they viewed as too congested in terms of subjects. In one of the focus group discussions with teachers the following sentiments were expressed:

We have never been taught about multicultural education in our pre-service teacher training. All things being equal we could improve ourselves on multicultural education and pedagogy through surfing the internet but we do not have time to do so because of the demands of the new curriculum. It is too broad that by the end of the day one is exhausted that you can hardly do anything.

This finding is in line with Muchenje and Heeralal' (2014) study which also revealed that negativity towards multicultural education on the part of educators hamper effective implementation of the educational programme. In the same vein Wilson (2012) in Mapuranga and Bukaliya (2014) highlighted that some educators hold negative views about multicultural education. The researchers thus contend that negativity towards multicultural education can be dealt with by introducing a full module of multicultural education in teachers' colleges and universities to expose pre-service teachers to the basic tenets of the educational programme

Lack of resources to implement multicultural education was cited by the 4(25%) teachers who expressed that they were not confident to teach culturally diverse classes. They indicated that there were no text books specifically for multicultural education coupled with lack of policy on the implementation of multicultural education. To this category of teachers if such critical issues are addressed they could be in a better position to implement multicultural education.

The last category of teachers 6 (37.5%) indicated that they were ill-equipped to implement a multicultural school curriculum. Their main reasons for lack of knowledge and skills to teach learners from diverse cultures were lack of training in multiculturalism during their pre-service training, lack of workshops to in-service teachers on the principles, goals and benefits of multicultural education. They indicated that they support the educational programme but lament lack of the requisite knowledge and skills to implement the programme effectively.

Infrastructure and Implementation of Multicultural education in schools

The question sought to solicit views of school-heads and teachers on the availability of infrastructure to promote multicultural education in the sampled schools. From the participants 2 (50%) school-heads and 10(62, 5%) teachers concurred that schools had adequate physical infrastructure to implement multicultural education. They indicated that there were adequate classrooms that there was no hot sitting in these school an indication of adequacy of physical infrastructure. They also pointed out that there were adequate sporting facilities such as football and netball pitches and some equipment to cater for various sporting activities that appeal to learners from diverse backgrounds. The importance of physical infrastructure in the provision of quality education such as multicultural education was emphasised by Wilson (2012) in Dekeza and Kufakunesu (2017). Similarly Ejiwale (2013) lamented use of archaic facilities in schools which do not commensurate with the values of quality education.

A critical analysis of the reasons given by the school-heads and teachers as indicators of adequate physical infrastructure indicate that the conclusion that schools had adequate physical infrastructure was based on the participants' narrow understanding of multicultural education. They did not state whether schools had specialist rooms such as computer laboratories, science laboratories, home economics, metalwork and wood work which cater for the development of learners' practical skills. Mapuranga and Bukaliya (2014) observed that lack of resources such as computers which allow learners to access different cultures compromise the realization of multicultural education goals in schools. Similarly Mandoga and Chakandinakira's (2014) study revealed that implementation of multicultural education is militated against by lack of resources like physical infrastructure. On the other hand 2(50%) school- heads and 6(37.5%) teachers indicated that they were not sure of the concept multicultural education hence could not confidently assess whether schools had adequate physical infrastructure to implement a multicultural education school curriculum effectively. When the researchers asked the respondents on the availability of special classrooms and ablutions to cater for the disabled, the response was negative. When asked about the average class size in the sampled schools the respondents revealed that class sizes ranged from 45 to 60 pupils. On probing on the factors contributing to such big classes, the respondents gave various reasons, inter-alia lack of classrooms to accommodate other classes in the event of splitting big classes to manageable sizes. By implication this meant that physical infrastructure is a challenge to the effective

implementation of multicultural education. High teacher-pupil ratio was also revealed by previous studies as one of the factors that militate against implementation of a multicultural school curriculum (Mandoga & Chakandinakira; Mapuranga & Bukaliya, 2014).

Strategies to improve the implementation of multicultural education in primary schools

This question sought to solicit suggestions from the participants on how best multicultural education can be implemented in the sampled schools. The following responses were put forward by the participants (school-heads and teachers):

- There should be a clear policy on the implementation of multicultural education
- Training of school-heads and teachers in dealing with learners from diverse backgrounds
- Provision of adequate physical infrastructure to cater for academic, practical and co-curricular activities for culturally diverse learners
- Avail adequate and relevant teaching-learning resources
- Reduce teacher-pupil ratio to allow teachers to attend to individual needs
- Adequate support of the programme by the school administration

V. Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to solicit views and sentiments from school-heads and teachers on the extent to which primary schools are ready to implement multicultural education. From the findings it emerged that both school-heads and teachers' understanding of the multicultural education is skewed. The limited understanding of the concept multicultural education was reflected in the way the participants characterised it, where emphasis was placed on extra-curricular activities like traditional dance. The participants' understanding of multicultural education lacks the holistic nature of multicultural education, that it permeates all subjects, extra-curricular activities and the whole school environment. It also emerged that teachers were ill-equipped to implement a multicultural school curriculum, a deficiency blamed on teachers' colleges and universities curricula which do not cover multicultural education adequately. The study revealed that rural primary schools lack physical infrastructure such as computer laboratories, workshops and specialist rooms for the disabled which compromise implementation of a multicultural school curriculum. The study also revealed that effective implementation of multicultural education is hampered by high teacher-pupil ratio which hinders teachers to pay attention to the needs of culturally diverse learners. The respondents suggested a number of strategies to improve the implementation of multicultural education which includes inter-alia provision of adequate physical infrastructure, teaching-learning resources and training of school-heads and teachers in managing culturally diverse classes and school environments.

VI. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

- School development committees in rural primary schools should ensure that there is adequate physical as well as teaching-learning resources to enhance implementation of multicultural education
- The Ministry of primary and Secondary education should come up with a clear policy to guide implementation of multicultural education
- Curriculum for teacher training colleges and universities should include multicultural education modules
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary education should conduct workshops to in-service school-heads, teachers and school development committees on the goals and benefits of multicultural education to facilitate the implementation of the educational programme
- The Ministry of primary and secondary education should reduce the teacher-pupil ratio to allow teachers to attend to the needs of all learners in multicultural classrooms
- The government should improve conditions of service of educators to instill a positive attitude towards new educational programmes

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