Pushing and shoving: Tales of contestation at selected satellite schools in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Satellite schools are a relatively new phenomenon within the context of education in Zimbabwe. At the turn of the century, Zimbabwe dominated media headlines because of the land reform. The land reform in Zimbabwe involved the transfer of land from the minority white commercial farmers to the landless majority black citizens. Resultantly, the land reform created a demand for schools in the former commercial farms that led to the establishment of satellite schools. The researchers drew from the Social Identity Theory of leadership to unpack these contestations faced by administrators at the selected satellite schools. Data for this study were generated using conversational interviews that were triangulated with focus group discussions. The researchers made use of mini-focus group discussions. A purposive sample of six mother school heads and six satellite school heads was selected for this study. The researchers utilised thematic analysis to analyse data from the conversational interviews and focus group discussions. The study established that there were contestations between the mother school heads and the acting heads of the satellite schools. Further contestations were evident between the satellite school acting heads and the traditional leadership. Additionally, there were contestations amongst political parties for influence at satellite schools. The researchers contend that some of the sources of the contestations at the selected satellite schools were attributable to the social identities of the acting heads of the satellite schools. From the study findings, the researchers recommend the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education must adopt a clearer organisational structure concerning the supervision of satellite schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Satellite schools, a relatively recent development in the Zimbabwean education system, have emerged as a consequence of the land reform program that garnered significant attention at the turn of the century. While much research has been conducted on the success or failure of land reform in Zimbabwe, this study seeks to shed light on the educational implications resulting from this transformative policy. With the redistribution of land from white commercial farmers to the landless black population, the establishment of schools became essential in the previously white-owned commercial farms. As a solution to the demand for education, the concept of "satellite schools" arose, serving as bridging institutions in areas affected by land reform. Prior to land reform, commercial farms lacked schools due to the relatively small number of children in these areas. White farmers either transported their children to schools located far away from the farms or enrolled them in boarding schools. However, the advent of land reform necessitated the creation of new educational institutions, referred to as satellite schools, to cater to the educational needs of land reform beneficiaries. Each satellite school was linked to a well-established "mother school" for administrative purposes, forming an extended network of education provision. This phenomenon of satellite schools finds some similarities to the establishment of rural day secondary schools in the 1980s, following Zimbabwe's independence, which aimed to address the demand for secondary education in rural areas. However, satellite schools distinguish themselves by their close association with mother schools, leveraging shared resources and staff members. In essence, satellite schools can be regarded as an extension of the mother schools to some degree, drawing upon their expertise and utilizing their examination centres for external assessments.

Research Aim

The aim of this research was to explore the contestations faced by administrators in satellite schools in Zimbabwe, specifically examining the role of social identities in shaping these contestations and provide recommendations for effective supervision and management of satellite schools.

Problem Statement

The emergence of satellite schools in Zimbabwe, resulting from the land reform and the subsequent demand for education in former commercial farms, has introduced complex dynamics and contestations within the educational system. However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the nature and sources of these contestations, particularly the influence of social identities on the interactions between mother school heads, acting heads of satellite schools, traditional leadership, and political parties. This knowledge gap hinders the development of effective supervision and management strategies for satellite schools. Therefore, this research sought to address these gaps by exploring and analyzing the contestations faced by administrators in satellite schools, with a specific focus on the impact of social identities, in order to inform the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's efforts in establishing clearer organisational structure and supervision frameworks for satellite schools.

Satellite schools in Zimbabwe

Satellite schools are a relatively new phenomenon within the context of education in Zimbabwe. At the turn of the century, Zimbabwe dominated media headlines because of the land reform. Land reform saw the redistribution of land from commercial farms owned by a minority of white commercial farmers. The land from commercial farms was redistributed to

the majority landless black population. While several scholars have focused on the success or lack thereof of land reform in Zimbabwe, this study was focused on the implications of land reform on education in Zimbabwe. The land reform in Zimbabwe led to a demand for schools in the previously white-owned commercial farms. The demand for education in former commercial farms necessitated the establishment of new schools known as 'satellite schools' (Langa, 2012; Hlupo & Tsikira 2012; Mutema, 2012; Tarisayi, 2015). Satellite schools were established to bridge the gap in the provision of education in areas that underwent the process of land reform. Previously, there were no schools on commercial farms as the number of children residing in these areas was not enough to sustain the establishment of schools. Mutema (2012, p. 102) explains "previously there were no schools around commercial farms as white farmers had very small families and they either drove their children to schools far away from their farms or sent them to boarding schools." Hence, it can be argued that the land reform created a demand for schools in previously white-owned commercial farms in Zimbabwe. Hlupo & Tsikira (2012, p. 604) state, "a satellite school as a budding school operating under the auspices of a well-established mother school." Each satellite school is attached to registered and well-established school known as a mother school. The satellite schools were a product of the realisation that there was a need to provide education to the children of land reform beneficiaries on the new farms. Satellite schools can be viewed as extensions of the already established nearby school for administrative purposes (Mavundutse, et al., 2012). The satellite school phenomenon can be viewed in the same light as the establishment of rural day secondary schools in Zimbabwe in the 1980s just after independence to address the demand for secondary education in rural areas. However, satellite schools were peculiar in that there were linked to mother schools at their inception. In this study, a satellite school means a newly established school that was established post the Zimbabwean land reform program which has attachments to an established school in terms of staff and other resources. Satellite schools have been established among land reform beneficiaries and communal farmers in Zimbabwe. The staff of the satellite schools were drawn from the mother schools and thus appeared on the pay sheet of the mother school. In addition, the satellite schools utilized the examination centres at their mother schools for external examinations such as Grade 7 and Ordinary Level examinations. Therefore, satellite schools can be viewed as apparently an extension of the mother schools to a certain extent. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education avers that there are 1796 satellite schools in Zimbabwe (MoPSE, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The researchers were guided by the Social Identity Theory in this study. The Social Identity Theory was originally applied in the field of psychology. McLeod (2019) explains that social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Social identity as originally conceived by Henri Tajfel argued that groups (eg social class, family, football team, etc.) to which people belong were an important source of pride and self-esteem. Thus, groups give us a sense of social identity, that is a sense of belonging to the social world. Bauman (1988) argues that an individual's identity answers the questions: "Who am I?" "How should I live?" "Who do I want to become?" These questions are unpacked concerning other people, relative to their context as well as cultural beliefs. Essentially, according to Hogg, Terry, & White (1995), individual identities are socially constructed. Therefore, the researchers utilized the Social Identity Theory to interrogate the identity of acting heads of satellite schools in Masvingo. The identities of acting heads of satellite schools were understood to be socially constructed within their context as office bearers in an acting capacity. Additionally, Hogg (2006, p. 111) avers that the Social Identity Theory involves "a psychological analysis of the role of self-conception in group membership, group processes,

and intergroup relations." Fundamental to the Social Identity Theory is the notion of self-conception. Steffens, et al., (2020, p. 36) state "the social identity theory of leadership argues that leadership effectiveness centers on leaders and followers seeing themselves as part of a common group (i.e., as sharing a social identity, a sense of "we" and "us")." Steffens et al., (2020, p.36) further state, "it argues that key to individuals' openness to each other's influence is seeing themselves and others not just in terms of personal identities (as "I" and "you") but also in terms of a shared social identity (as "we" and "us")." Thus, this study drew on tenets of the Social Identity Theory to unpack the sources of contestations at selected satellite schools in Masvingo.

METHODOLOGY

The study on the contestations at satellite schools in Zimbabwe fell under the interpretivist paradigm. Cohen, et al. (2007, p. 19) argue that "within the interpretivist paradigm, the role of the researcher (scientist) is to understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants." Essentially, the researchers sought an understanding of the phenomenon. The study was qualitative and utilised a case study research design. McMillan & Schumacher (2006, p. 395) state that "qualitative studies are used for theory generation, policy development, improvement of educational practice, explanation of social issues and action stimulus." Principally, in this study, qualitative studies are utilized to explain social issues that are contestations at satellite schools in Zimbabwe. McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 395) aver that "a case study design focuses on one phenomenon, which the researcher chooses to understand in-depth regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study." Gerring (2004, p. 342) explains case study research involves, the "intensive study of a single unit to understand a larger class of (similar) units … observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period." Consequently, "case studies provide an opportunity for the researcher to gain a deep holistic view of the research problem, and may facilitate describing, understanding and explaining a research problem or situation" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545).

The researchers generated data in this study using interviews. Creswell, & Poth (2018, p. 163) state, "An interview is considered to be a social interaction based on a conversation." Farrow, Iniesto, Weller, & Pitt (2020, p. p. 47) explain "interviews are a qualitative research method and typically take the form of a conversation where questions are asked to elicit information. The interviewer poses questions to the interviewee, in an alternating series of usually brief questions and answers. The questions may be highly structured, open-ended, or somewhere in between the two." From the various forms of interviews, the researchers chose conversational interviews and focus group discussions. Given (2008, p. 127) state, "conversational interviewing is an approach used by research interviewers to generate verbal data through talking about specified topics with research participants informally and conversationally." Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick (1998, p. 6) aver "Conversational interviews are a powerful way of gaining access to an individual's interpretations of their personal experiences (ie., their social world)." The researchers opted to utilise conversational interviewing because political contestations in schools are often sensitive for the participants. Given (2008, p. 127) states, "in emphasizing features of mundane conversation, conversational interviewers strive to facilitate a research environment in which participants feel free to participate in extended discussions of research topics in a less hierarchical environment than that convened in structured interview settings." Mockovak (2016, p. 1637) argues interviewers "used flexible, conversational interviewing methods to relax respondents, encourage open conversations, improve response, address respondent concerns, and ideally obtain high-quality data." The researchers triangulated data from the conversational interviews with focus group discussions.

Thus, the researchers used triangulation of data generation methods as well as data sources (mother school heads and acting heads of satellite schools). Drawing from the views of Krueger (1994), Morgan (1997), and Krugger, & Casey (2014), the researchers utilized 'mini-focus groups'. Mini-focus groups are utilized when the participants in a study are experts in a certain area. The mother school heads and acting heads of satellite schools were considered experts by the researchers. Three mini-focus groups made up of four participants were carried out by the researcher. Each focus group had four participants (two heads of mother schools and two acting heads of satellite schools). The mini-focus groups enabled the researchers to gain rich and in-depth information as all participants were able to make their contributions. Data from the conversational interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 6) state that, "thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." Kumar (1999) avers that thematic analysis traditionally consists of sifting data to detect recurring patterns. Bradley, et all. (2007, p. 1766) explain that "themes are general propositions that emerge from diverse and detail-rich experiences of participants and provide recurrent and unifying ideas regarding the subject of inquiry."

FINDINGS

The findings from this study are presented below using sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Contestations between the mother school head and the acting head of the satellite school

Findings from this study showed that there were apparent contestations between the acting head of the selected satellite schools and the heads of the selected mother schools. The narratives below from the conversational interviews show both contestations and the potential sources of the contestations. Hove, a mother school head selected for this study explained,

"Having a satellite school under your school comes with a few challenges. I am expected to micromanage the acting head of the satellite school while at the same time trying to run my school. The district office expects me to supervise the acting head of the satellite school, but I am not the one responsible for their performance appraisals. How do I supervise the acting head of the satellite school without doing their performance appraisals?"

These views were echoed by Tiro, an acting head of a satellite school who participated in this study,

> *"The supervision of the running of satellite schools is a bit complicated. I am considered part of the mother school since my pay slip still comes through the mother school. Getting our pay slips from the mother school virtually means the head of the mother school is my immediate supervisor. Surprisingly when it comes to the performance appraisal, the district area inspector becomes my assessor, and this complicates everything. That means I am reporting to two offices at the same time. If I am being assessed by the same district area inspector as the head of the mother school, then it suggests I am at the same level as the head of the mother school. And there are times that I can outperform the head of the mother school in the performance appraisal and that strain the relations."*

Another source of the contestation between the head of the mother school and the acting head of the satellite school was the differences between their appointment. Mukanya, a head of a mother school narrated,

> *"The head of a mother school is usually a substantive appointment. While at a satellite school, the acting head is not a substantive appointment. Normally a senior teacher is appointed in an acting position. In terms of experience, as heads of mother schools, we have been in the system longer. However, I cannot say the same for acting heads of satellite schools. Surprisingly, the district education officials have the same expectations for satellite school acting heads and mother school heads, which I find disturbing. A substantive head and an acting head [who is a senior teacher] are assessed at the same level and attend the same conferences and workshops. It complicates matters later when I need to supervise the same acting head because of the appearance of being at the same level."*

Sambo, an acting head of the satellite school concurred,

> *"I have been an acting head for over five years but it is not a substantive appointment. I am a senior teacher who is carrying out the duties of a head in an acting capacity. Acrimony tends to arise with the head of the mother school because he has a substantive appointment. Even district education officials do not accord the same respect that they give substantive heads in the district."*

Essentially, from the conversational interviews it was noted by the researchers that there were both subtle and direct contestations between the heads of the selected mother schools and the acting heads of the satellite schools in the Masvingo district. Some of the contestations were attributed to the differences in the type and tenure of appointment of the heads of mother schools and those of the acting heads of satellite schools. The situation was further exacerbated by the opaque supervision hierarchy that exists between the mother school and the satellite schools. The satellite school by virtue of being an offshoot of a mother school appeared to fall under the purview of the head of the mother school. Thus, the acting head of a satellite school is supposed to be supervised by the head of the mother school. However, contestations arose from the complicated organisational structure that involves the head of the satellite is also supervised and assessed by the district education area inspector. The district education area inspector supervised both the mother school head and the satellite school head and essentially presented the impression that there at the same level. Reporting to both the mother school head and the district area inspector presented another form of contestation that was evident at the selected satellite schools in this study. Performance appraisals for both the mother school head and the satellite school head were carried out by the same district education official. Furthermore, it was observed that the district education official held similar expectations for both the mother school head and the satellite school head, implying that they held positions of equal authority. However, this led to complications in the working relationship between the two, as the staff from both schools were listed on the same payroll. Specifically, the payroll for the satellite school employees was managed through the mother school, with the head of the mother school being responsible for collecting and distributing the pay slips. In addition to payroll matters, other crucial administrative procedures and documents were also handled through the office of the mother school head. To provide a clearer understanding of this administrative process, it is necessary to delve into the specific mechanisms that characterize the relationship between the mother school and the satellite school. For instance, there were instances where the mother school exercises direct control or authority over the satellite school, which can be illustrated by the following examples.

Government support and funding was initially allocated to the satellite schools via the mother school. Satellite schools were unregistered and therefore were not direct recipients of government funding. Staff requisitions for satellite schools were also made via the mother schools and thus exacerbating the already complicated relationship between the mother school head and satellite school head. Additionally, some affiliation fees for satellite schools were initially paid by the mother schools instead of billing the satellite schools directly.

Change in the role of traditional leadership as a source of contestation

The change in the role of the traditional leaders in the affairs of satellite schools is another source of contestation according to this study. In the education arena, the land reform begot satellite schools to fill a vacuum in the provision of education. Whereas, in the governance arena, Tarisayi, & Munyaradzi (2019) noted the rise of abstruse parity traditional leadership. The abstruse parity traditional leadership whose appointment deviates from "customary rubrics and indigenous knowledge systems" (Tarisayi, & Munyaradzi, 2019, p. 217). This new type of traditional leadership was elected and therefore deviates from the customary rubrics of appointments only being confined to royal families. Despite this evident ambiguity in its appointment, the abstruse parity traditional leadership played an instrumental role in the establishment and construction of satellite schools. Tarisayi (2017) noted that traditional leadership was pivotal in the mobilization of land reform beneficiaries in the construction of satellite schools. However, the participants in this study indicated that the traditional leadership's proximity to the affairs of the satellite schools was now a source of contestation between the schools and the community. Sambo, an acting head of a satellite school explained,

When satellite schools were introduced, traditional leadership and the community at large played an important role. Traditional leaders were an avenue to harness resources from the community. In most cases, traditional leadership was responsible for approaching the relevant authorities requesting schools. Some traditional leaders provided substantial support for the construction of satellite schools. However, once the satellite schools were established, regulations stipulate that the School Development Committee takes over most of these roles. Losing these roles is sometimes viewed as the school [head] not being grateful for the contribution made by the traditional leaders over the years.

From the above narration, it can be noted that traditional leadership in Zimbabwe was instrumental in the establishment of satellite schools. Traditional leaders were actively involved in the construction of satellite schools. However, it also emerged that changes in the needs of satellite schools once there are established have become a source of contestation. At the initial stages of the construction of satellite schools, traditional leadership was at the forefront. Yet, after the establishment of the satellite schools, parents now elected their representatives to the School Development Committee. The School Development Committee now took over the roles that were initially carried out by traditional leadership. These changes became a source of contestation as the traditional leadership construed the changes as being ungrateful. Tiro, an acting head of a selected satellite school narrated,

The School Development Committee taking over the roles that were previously done by the traditional leadership has become a source of conflict. Traditional leaders thought that there were going to continue playing a front role in the affairs of the school, but they have been replaced by the School Development Committee. Traditional leaders complain that the satellite schools only needed their active role before they started collecting fees and levies. Once, money started coming into the schools, SDCs [School Development Committees] took

over. These changes have been unfairly blamed on us, school heads but we are just adhering to regulations.

School Development Committees are established in terms of Section 36 (1) of the Education Act (Chapter 25:04). The Education Act provides a legal framework for the participation of parents in the education of their children through the School Development Committees. Additionally, Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 further empowers the School Development Committees to:

> Provide and assist in the operation and development of the schools; advance the moral, cultural, physical, and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school; and promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils and their parents, and it's teachers (Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992:621).

Therefore, according to this legal instrument, the School Development Committee is an organ that promotes the participation and empowerment of parents in the improvement of the quality of education. In addition, SDCs have the mandate to charge and administer levies from parents of students enrolled in their schools. While the changes in the role of traditional leadership are in adherence with the education legal framework in Zimbabwe, there has become a source of contestation. Furthermore, Section 36 (1) of the Education states that the responsible authority of every registered school to which a grant is made in terms of section thirty-five shall establish a committee, to be known as a school development committee. However, despite the legal framework being explicit on the roles that parents play in school development, the previous arrangements that allowed traditional leaders to take an active role have become a source of conflict for the acting heads of satellite schools to a greater extent.

Contestations between political parties for influence at satellite schools

It is common knowledge that schools in Zimbabwe are supposed to be apolitical but findings from this study show otherwise. Narratives from the participants in this study showed that satellite schools were contested terrains due to the contestations for influence amongst different political parties and players. Historically, satellite schools were an offshoot of the gap in education created by the land reform program in Zimbabwe. The land reform program was pursued by the former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe. The land reform program was partisan in the sense that the land reform beneficiaries were mainly the ruling party members and supporters. Therefore, satellite schools as an offshoot of a partisan land reform program have become partisan despite the need for schools to be apolitical. Tiro, an acting head of a selected satellite school narrated,

> *"Education officials reiterate every time that schools are supposed to be apolitical and neutral but it is near impossible when it comes to satellite schools. Satellite schools were founded and supported by members and supporters of the ruling party. Because of this history, it becomes difficult for satellite schools to be apolitical."*

The above narration provides a context to the contestations among political parties for influence at satellite schools. Tarisayi (2017) noted that the land reform mainly benefitted supporters of the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). It is a political party in Zimbabwe that has been in power since the country's independence in 1980. ZANU-PF is known for its nationalist and socialist ideology and has played a significant role in shaping Zimbabwe's political landscape and policies. Thus, it is not surprising that areas that underwent the land reform are considered strongholds of the

ruling party. Additionally, land reform beneficiaries are considered indebted to the ruling party for giving them the land and hence their steadfast support. This steadfast support was unfortunately extended to expectations from the selected satellite schools and their staff. Satellite schools by their history with ruling party supporters already alluded to above become more susceptible to abuse by politicians from the ruling party. Resultantly, any teacher or satellite school that reminded the politicians that schools and civil servants are supposed to be politically neutral became vulnerable. The Constitution of Zimbabwe prohibits civil servants from being partisan or furthering the cause of any political party. Essentially, teachers and staff at satellite schools become vulnerable as they had to choose between political neutrality (and being labelled opposition party supporters) or aligning with the ruling party. The abuse of schools by politicians and political parties in Zimbabwe is not new as revealed by several media and civic society reports. Dube (2013) reported on the abuse of schools by political parties ahead of elections in Zimbabwe particularly in the country's rural areas. Politicians ordered the closure of schools and forced pupils to attend political rallies. The gross abuse of schools and school property led Veritas and the Association of Rural Teachers Unions of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ) to approach the courts in 2018. Veritas (2018) reports that on the 28th of June 2018, the Masvingo High Court issued a provisional interdict prohibiting ZANU-PF from;

> … forcing schoolchildren to attend rallies; causing the closure of schools for any of its rallies or activities; compelling teachers to attend rallies, to wear party regalia, to prepare performances for children to deliver at rallies, or to make contributions towards rallies; holding rallies on school premises; using school property for political purposes.

Thus, it can be argued that the findings of this study on satellite schools as venues for political contestation are consistent with media reports in Zimbabwe. In addition, the findings echoed the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Report (2017) that made the following conclusions, "it was also noted that there was an abuse of school property and other public property as the ruling party tried to secure attendance at their political rallies.

There was the use of vehicles from schools and other public institutions which is undesirable." Hence, from this study's findings, interference by political parties further buttresses the view that satellite schools were a contested terrain in Zimbabwe.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

From the foregoing presentation and discussion of findings, it can be concluded that satellite schools in Zimbabwe were a contested terrain. This study revealed that there were several sources of contestation at satellite schools. There were evident contestations among political parties to influence the affairs of satellite schools. Additionally, the study noted contestations between the mother school head and the satellite school acting head. The contestations between the mother school head and the satellite school acting head were compounded by a muddled organisational structure. The muddled organisational structure can be argued to be deviating from the principles of management. The principle of 'Unity of Command' by Henri Fayol states that employees should receive orders and instructions from one boss only. If two (or more) superiors command a worker at the same time, he will get confused as to whose command should he follow. While both the mother school head and the satellite school acting head had the same supervisor, the former was supposed to play an oversight role of the latter. Another source of contestation revealed by the study was between the school and the traditional leaders. Traditional leaders were instrumental in the founding and construction of

satellite schools but their role was late taken by the School Development Committees. According to this study, the overriding of traditional leaders by the School Development Committees strained relations between the satellite schools and the traditional leaders to a certain extent. From these findings, the researchers conclude that satellite schools in Zimbabwe were virtually a contested terrain. The researchers noted that the source of some of the contestations at the selected satellite schools was attributable to the social identities of the acting heads of satellite schools. To address the contestations at satellite schools, the researchers recommend that political parties adhere to the Constitution of Zimbabwe and respect the political neutrality of schools. Furthermore, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education must adopt a clearer organisational structure concerning the supervision of satellite schools.

Support And Agreement

As author(s), we have no support or appreciation for the process of conducting the research.

Conflict Statement

We declare that we, as authors of the study, have no interests/conflicts.

Publication Ethical Statement

All the rules stated in the framework of "Scientific Research in Universities and Publication Ethic Codes were followed throughout the process (planning, implementation, data collection and analysis). None of the actions stated under the title "Actions that violate scientific research and Publication Ethics " which is the second part of the codes that must be considered. During the writing process of the manuscript, the rules of scientific ethics and citation were followed, no falsifications were made to the collected data, and this study was not sent to any other academic publication environment for evaluation.

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