

# Availability of Print Curriculum Materials and Its Consequences for the Quality of Education in Schools Located on Newly Resettled Farm Areas in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

In recent times the entire public education sector in Zimbabwe underwent a significant deterioration in quality. In 2009 the state appointed National Education Advisory Board similarly noted with concern the increasingly worsening state of education in the primary and secondary schools in rural and urban areas. However, worryingly, official and scholarly attention focused on the mainstream conventional schools, ignoring a sub-category of uniquely circumstanced rural schools, located on newly resettled farming areas. To inquire about the state of education in these schools, the researchers employed a mixed methods design, sending out open-ended questionnaires to twenty school teachers and headmasters at four primary schools in the newly resettled farming areas in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The questionnaire focused on the availability of print curriculum materials and the coping strategies used by teachers working in schools on newly resettled farms. The study established that schools on newly resettled farms face acute shortages of textbooks in all subjects for both pupils and teachers. Where the print curriculum materials are available, they are in most cases of very limited quantity and variety. The study also established that this shortage of print curriculum materials negatively impacts on the quality of curriculum delivery as teachers resort to teacher-centred and transmissive approaches as a way of coping with the shortage of learning resources. Following these findings, the study recommended that the educational authorities in Zimbabwe should adopt a positive discrimination model of resource distribution whereby schools in the newly resettled farming areas are given preferential consideration when it comes to resource allocation.

**Keywords:** newly resettled farm schools, print curriculum materials, education quality

## 1. Introduction

Since 2001, Zimbabwe has been undertaking a fast track land reform program which was started by the Svosve people when they forcibly took possession of a white owned farm north east of the country (Sachikonye, 2003). This marked the beginning of a continuing and now a largely government sanctioned process whereby white owned commercial farms are taken over by blacks. Following such takeovers, black African families typically moved with their families to settle on the newly acquired farms.

The foregoing suggests that children of school going age who had been attending established schools elsewhere accompany their parents and guardians to settle on the new farms. Worryingly, these children have to continue with their education in an environment where there is hardly any educational infrastructure, including schools. This clearly makes educational provision in these newly resettled farms a major challenge.

In response to the ensuing educational challenges and increasing demand for education on these farms, the Zimbabwean government allowed school lessons to be conducted in disused tobacco barns, vacated homesteads, dilapidated compound structures, temporary thatched structures and even under trees (Moyo, 2001). The nearest established primary and secondary schools were to act as 'mother or parent schools', providing technical and material support to these satellite schools. It is these satellite schools which we refer to as newly resettled farm schools in this study.

While much has been written about the conventional schools, there seems to be official and scholarly silence about the state of education in the schools on newly resettled farms. In its inaugural report, the National

Educational Advisory Board (2009) notes the deterioration of secondary and primary education in Zimbabwe. According to this report, most of the schools in Zimbabwe face acute shortage of infrastructure, furniture and curriculum materials. Such findings mainly relate to the situation obtaining in conventional schools, therefore they are unlikely to apply to the new farm resettlement schools which seem to be uniquely circumstanced.

The scenario obtaining in the primary and secondary sector in Zimbabwe, as noted above, seems to represent typical educational concerns in developing countries (Morgan, 2007). In most of these countries, including those in Africa, provision of adequate resource materials remains a basic limiting factor to curriculum delivery. Yet as several scholars testify, effective instruction depends to a large extent on the teacher, the learner and curriculum resource materials within the learning environment. Recent research in learning shows that print curriculum materials in the form of teachers' resource books, educational media (e.g. charts), reference books, magazines, journals and pupils' textbooks are necessary for effective learning to take place. Finn (2001) argues that the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, in the form of textbooks, is very critical for any successful implementation of the curriculum. Without these resources the teachers' task would be difficult if not impossible. The World Bank (2004) policy study on education in Sub-Saharan Africa, in agreement with the above observation, notes that the most effective investment in educational quality in most African countries is a sufficient supply of well-written and properly designed textbooks.

On the basis of what has been said above, developing countries therefore need to first address the issue of curriculum materials provision as an initial necessary step in tackling the wide range of challenges that face education in these countries. Yet this can only be done if the situation obtaining in specific educational environments in relation to the provision of curriculum materials is known. That is why this study sought to establish the state of affairs in schools in new resettlement areas, a category of schools about which little is known. The following major questions guided this study: What is the extent of availability of print curriculum materials in new farm resettlement schools? Are the curriculum materials available in sufficient variety to cater for the needs of a variegated student population? What coping strategies do teachers use in the face of constrained learning resources?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Textbooks are at the heart of the educational enterprise, as they offer students "a rich array of new and potentially interesting facts, and open the door to a world of fantastic experience" (Chambliss & Calfee, 1998:7). Literature provides evidence of the significant role of textbooks as "primary vehicles for delivering content knowledge, and for determining in large measure what goes on in a class" (Hummel, 1998, cited in Lebrun, Lenoir, Laforest, Larose, Roy, Spallanzani & Pearson, 2002), as well as for assessing what students do and do not learn (Freeman & Porter, 1989, cited in Oakes & Saunders, 2004). It has been identified that access to and availability of textbooks are particularly significant factors in predicting academic achievement (Heyneman et al, 1978, cited in Oakes & Saunders, 2004).

In developed countries, print curriculum material is no longer the major source of knowledge for both teachers and pupils owing to access to alternative e-based knowledge sources. This is not the case in developing countries where textbooks remain the predominant if not the sole source of knowledge for both the teacher and the student. For print curriculum materials to adequately cater for the diverse needs of the inherently variegated student population, they need to be available in their widest possible range. Otherwise textbooks will only be relevant to few students. In this post-modern world of technological advancement, rapidly changing markets and increasing competition, teachers are faced with new academic and pedagogical challenges. In order to prepare students, teachers must teach more challenging and extensive content. The availability of high-quality print curriculum materials to guide instruction is an important part of meeting these challenges. Therefore, curriculum reforms need to take place in such a way that gaps between the curricular framework and the textbook are bridged and the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds are reflected in curricula and textbooks. Curricula and the textbooks should be more meaningful and relevant for the life experiences of the students and should prepare them for real life.

Certainly textbooks need improvement; what aspect of the profession of schooling doesn't? And teachers need help in making intelligent use of the textbooks we have and those the future will hold for us. Students too, especially, the more capable ones, should be led to see textbooks as only the beginning, a springboard for further explorations into other sources of knowledge (Maxwell, 1985). While these issues are important in an examination of the central role textbooks play in teaching and learning, this study focuses on whether textbooks and teachers' resource books are actually available in sufficient quantity and variety, for both teachers and learners, in new farm resettlement schools.

The centrality and importance of textbooks, especially in the context of developing countries, has been reiterated and highlighted by various writers. In this connection, Maxwell (1985) considers textbooks to be the organizing centers for the instructional program and as the most important element in classrooms, determining what is taught, and how well it is taught. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also recognize the central importance and role of textbooks in the context of developing countries and disadvantaged contexts. The World Bank (Oakes and Saunders, 2004) suggests that reforms be initiated in relation to textbooks in developing countries. Textbooks are recognized to be a “critical part of education, as necessary as the classroom itself, and as indispensable as the classroom teacher” (De Guzman, cited in Oakes & Saunders, 2004). Similarly, research in Zimbabwe indicates that teachers tend to use textbooks as the major if not the sole source of knowledge. They mostly teach to impart basic knowledge or textbook content to students. Such an approach typically results in poor academic performance (Mohammad, 2004).

In the same connection, some research studies, have established a positive link between student achievement and the availability of textbooks (Fuller & Clark, 1994; Fuller & Heyneman cited in Oakes & Saunders, 2004). Further a study by Heyneman (2006) in a third world context confirms that availability of textbooks is the single most important positive factor in predicting student academic achievement. Westbury cited in Oakes and Saunders (2004) observes that the textbook is in fact at the heart of the school and without the ubiquitous text there would be no schools, at least as we know them today. Although one may argue that good teachers are more important than good textbooks, we live in an imperfect world where outstanding teachers are rare. As Beeby (2001) notes, in developing countries, teachers are generally over-burdened, underpaid and have little more education than their own learners. Teachers therefore need all of the assistance that can be built into carefully prepared textbooks.

Heyneman (2006) further indicates that after decades of effort, most developing countries have not succeeded in providing their school systems with educational materials needed to support the curriculum. This is a serious problem for curriculum planners because experience shows that up – grading the curriculum, even if combined with in – service teacher training, is not sufficient to effect major changes. The gap between the objectives that schools in developing countries are meant to achieve and the reality in their classrooms must be bridged by textbooks and teachers’ resource books. Teachers’ resource books and pupils’ textbooks are of greater importance to primary schools in Africa than to their colleagues in the industrialized world since most teachers of the former have received neither a complete formal education nor teacher training. The advantage of such print materials, as observed by Budde (1998) is that they supplement the teacher’s own knowledge and promote the proper sequencing of learning activities in the classroom. Print curriculum materials such as textbooks are even more important to learners. Research by Budde (1998) in low income countries indicates that an improved supply of textbooks does raise learners’ achievement. Comparative studies conducted by Budde (1998) in eleven (11) countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America (four in Asia, three in Africa and four in Latin America) showed that improvements in the availability of textbooks for primary school learners led to better performance in 33% of the cases. The current study intends to find out the availability of pupils’ textbooks and teachers’ resource books in new farm resettlement primary schools.

### **3. Methods**

The study followed a mixed methods research design, utilizing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data on the availability of print curriculum materials as well as teachers’ copying strategies. Four (4) schools were randomly selected from a list of all schools located on newly resettled schools in the Midlands province. Five teachers were randomly selected from each of the four schools to make a total sample of twenty respondents.

The self-administered questionnaire consisted of a mixture of closed and open-ended items. The questionnaires were distributed to the five respondents at each school. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten of the respondents, selected on the basis of availability to clarify issues raised in the survey data.

### **4. Results**

Data gathered through questionnaires is presented and analysed below.

Table 1. School A: Textbook position in all subjects by grade level

Grade	No. of pupils	Subjects									
		Maths	English	Shona	Env. Science	RME	Social Studies	Art Educ.	Music	Physical Educ.	Home Econ.
1	34	3	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
2	26	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
3	18	4	3	2	2	1	3	1	1	0	0
4	30	8	4	6	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
5	42	6	8	10	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
6	35	12	14	8	6	4	6	1	1	1	1
7	40	10	16	16	4	6	5	2	1	1	1

Table 1. indicates that at School A, there are no Physical Education and Home Economics textbooks for grades 1 to 5. The same scenario obtains with regards to Art and Music textbook availability for grades 1, 2, 4 and 5. While there are more English, Mathematics and Shona textbooks for grades 5 to 7, the pupil – textbook ratio is still considerably high. This state of affairs seems to confirm the UNICEF Report (2004) that noted that new resettlement farm schools do not have adequate textbooks. Responding to an interview item on the adequacy of textbooks, both the school head and the deputy head decried the shortage of these resources at their school. The school head also indicated, in response to another interview question, that teachers' resource books were in short supply at the school. Specifically the head noted that while there was a copy of the teachers' resource book for Mathematics, English and Shona, there were no teachers' resource books for all other subjects. The head further attributed the low Grade 7 pass rate at the school to lack of adequate pupils' textbooks and teachers' resource books. Follow up interviews with the deputy school head on why the school cannot buy more textbooks revealed that parents of children at their school were former farm workers displaced by the fast track land reform program who did not have a stable income base.

Table 2. School B: Textbook availability by subject and grade level

Grade	No. of pupils	Subjects									
		Maths	English	Ndebele	Env. Science	RME	Social Studies	Art Ed	Music	P. Educ	Home/Econ
1	25	4	4	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	28	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	40	2	3	2	2	1	1	0	1	1	1
4	43	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	2
5	38	6	8	10	4	1	4	1	1	1	1
6	30	15	17	14	8	9	2	2	1	2	2
7	25	20	22	10	12	8	4	4	2	2	1

Table 2. shows that grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 at this school do not have adequate textbooks in generally all school subjects. Grades 5, 6 and 7 have reasonable numbers of Mathematics, English, Ndebele and Environmental Science textbooks when viewed in the light of pupil – textbook ratio. Grades 1 and 2 classes do not have a single textbook for Religious and Moral Education, Social Studies, Art Education, Physical Education and Home Economics. Grades 3 – 7 do have, on average, one textbook for each of the same subjects above. Responding to an interview question on why Grades 5, 6 and 7 seem to have preferential treatment in textbook allocation, the school head pointed out that it was necessary to have more textbooks at those grade levels so as to enable teachers to adequately prepare learners for the Grade 7 examinations. Responding to another interview item on why Religious and Moral Education, Social Studies, Art Education, Music, Physical Education and Home Economics do have the least number of textbooks, both the school head and the deputy noted that the said subjects were not core subjects on the curriculum and so if the class teacher has at least a textbook to use that should be adequate. The same argument was used in relation to teachers' resource books which were also inadequate. In an interview, the deputy head noted that only Grade 6 and 7 teachers had resource books for Mathematics, English and Environmental Science. One interesting observation in relation to Environmental Science was that there were enough teachers' resource books for each of the pupils in Grades 6 and 7. Further

follow – up interviews with the school head revealed that a donor had supplied the teachers' resource books in error. The donor was actually meant to supply pupils' textbooks but ended up supplying teachers' resource books instead. The school head and the deputy, although noting the negative consequences of inadequate textbooks and teachers' resource books on pupils' performance, seemed to generally justify this shortage on the premise that new resettlement farm school parents do not have adequate financial resources to buy the requisite textbooks.

Table 3. School C: Textbook availability by subject and grade level

Grade	No. of pupils	Subjects									
		Maths	English	Shona	Env. Science	RME	Social Studies	Art Ed	Music	P.Edu	Home Econ
1	35	1	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	0	0
2	30	2	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	37	4	2	1	4	2	2	0	0	0	0
4	40	2	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	0	0
5	43	5	4	4	4	4	3	1	1	1	1
6	38	8	7	8	3	3	3	4	1	1	0
7	35	11	9	7	5	2	2	1	1	1	1

Data in Table 3 indicate that core subjects such as Mathematics, English and Shona do not have adequate textbooks for Grades 1 – 5. At Grade 1 level there is one textbook for each of these subjects yet learners at this stage need a lot of media, including adequate textbooks to facilitate their understanding of concepts. Grades 1,2,3,4 and 5 classes do have on average one textbook each for Religious and Moral Education, Social Studies, Art Education, Music, Physical Education and Home Economics. Grades 6 and 7 pupils share Mathematics, English, Shona and Environmental Science textbooks using a pupil-textbook ratio of generally 1:5. Such a position does not allow pupils to carry textbooks home for further study and homework. On submitting her completed questionnaire to the researchers, one lady teacher remarked that it was really difficult to individualize teaching in a situation where textbooks were in acute short supply. She went further to suggest that if an opportunity arose she would gladly transfer to any other school provided it was not in a resettlement area.

Responding to an interview item on adequacy of textbooks at their school both the school head and the deputy indicated that they constantly receive complaints from teachers with respect to the pupil – textbook ratio. The school head added that with the current textbook acquisition rate, it would take a long time for the school to register a high pass rate at Grade 7 level. Commenting on how textbook shortages are affecting teaching approaches at the school, the head noted that most of the teachers at the school use transmission methods of teaching. Such an observation implies that group work, discussion and other activity methods are no longer used at this school. Responding to an interview question on the availability of teachers' resource books, the deputy head noted that each class had one resource book per subject. According to the deputy head, having one resource book per subject was an improvement when compared to an earlier position in 2009 when there was one teacher's resource book only for English and Mathematics respectively.

Table 4. School D: Textbook availability by subject and grade level

Grade	No. of pupils	Subjects									
		Maths	English	Ndebele	Env. Science	RME	Social Studies	Art Ed	Music	P.Edu	Home Econ
1	28	10	12	8	6	5	5	5	2	2	2
2	23	9	11	10	12	7	8	8	1	1	3
3	33	8	7	5	5	8	9	9	1	1	2
4	35	14	12	11	9	6	6	5	2	2	2
5	41	17	18	9	8	8	7	7	1	1	1
6	38	20	21	18	5	5	6	7	2	2	3
7	30	25	22	20	8	6	5	5	2	3	2

Data in Table 4 show that there are adequate Mathematics, English, Ndebele and Environmental Science textbooks for all grades at this school. While the pupil – textbook ratio is not 1:1 yet, the sharing levels in these subjects are, on average 1:3. The situation is even better at Grade 6 and 7 levels. Music, Physical Education and Home Economics do not, however, have adequate textbooks for all grades. Responding to an interview item on how the school has managed to acquire textbooks in all subjects, the school head pointed out that the school approached UNICEF in 2006 with a request for textbooks in all subjects. UNICEF has since started supplying textbooks to the school. According to the head, the school was looking forward to another supply, not only of textbooks, but also furniture from the same organization.

Asked to comment on how the textbook situation in the school has impacted on student achievement both the head and the deputy noted that, although no substantial change has been noted in Grade 7 results, pupils' performance in tests and exercises has improved considerably. They attribute this improvement to improved teacher morale due to availability of textbooks. According to the deputy head pupils can now do homework since they are able to carry textbooks home. Both the head and the deputy indicated, through interview responses, that the school has sufficient teachers' resource books. More specifically the two officers indicated that each subject had a teachers' resource book which guides teachers in their day to day planning and in the teaching of lessons.

## 5. Discussion

In the newly resettled farm schools textbooks for all subjects are sorely inadequate, with some subjects like Physical Education, Home Economics, Art and Music not having a single textbook in the majority of the schools. The pupil – textbook ratio for core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Shona is fairly high. The same scenario obtains for teachers' resource books in all the schools. English, Mathematics and Shona have one teacher's resource book each while all other subjects do not have any teachers' resource book at all.

Given the core status of English, Mathematics, and Shona in the Zimbabwean curriculum, the limited availability of print curriculum material in these subjects has significantly negative implications for curriculum delivery. Although many factors potentially account for pass rates, low Grade 7 pass rate in the resettlement schools may be attributed to inadequate textbooks and teachers' resource books. The textbook situation at School B is generally not pleasing. For Religious and Moral Education, Social Studies, Art, Physical Education and Home Economics there is only one textbook for each grade level. The school head and the deputy did not seem to be perturbed by this state of affairs. They ranked the subjects either as core or as non-core. The latter, according to the head and the deputy, did not require adequate textbooks and teachers' resource books because they are not examined at Grade 7 level. Furthermore, that the head and the deputy justified textbook and teachers' resource book shortage on parents' lack of financial resources is worrisome. This type of attitude suggests that until parents are financially stable there is nothing that the school can do about acquiring sufficient textbooks and teachers' resource books. Such an attitude portrays a school administration that is not willing to try other unconventional means of sourcing financial and material assistance from donors and other well – wishers. School C, with its relatively high pupil population, had the least number of textbooks for all the subjects from Grades 1 to 5. Grades 6 and 7 pupils did not have adequate textbooks and teachers' resource books either. Although the deputy head observed an improvement in availability of teachers' resource books, the school head noted that it would take a long time for the school to register high Grade 7 results. In School D, there are adequate textbooks and teachers' resource books for all grades. This has been facilitated by the link the school has established with UNICEF. The school is looking forward to more deliveries of textbooks, teachers' resource books and furniture. Availability of textbooks and teachers' resource books seems to have raised teacher morale in this school as evidenced by the reported improvement in pupils' performance in tests and exercises.

It is noted that the majority of schools make attempts to supply more pupil textbooks at the higher grade levels, ostensibly to prepare the pupils for the Grade 7 examinations. This is clear from the subjects that are involved which include English, Mathematics and Shona and Environmental Science. Nevertheless, this late intervention is not likely to be very useful as the damage would already have been done by the severe shortages of textbooks at the earlier grade levels. It may be naïve to hope that students would make up for the loss suffered between Grades 1 and 4 when a little more textbooks are availed to them at Grades 5, 6 and 7. Indeed pupils who get to start using textbooks late in the school system are not likely to benefit much from them and their school performance will always be below their true potential. Ironically, more textbooks might be more beneficial in the very early grades when children are in the critically formative stages of the school cycle. Older pupils are also likely to deal with textbook shortages better as they are more mature and possibly more resourceful than beginners.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the above discussion the following conclusions can be made about the availability of pupils' textbooks and teachers' resource books in new farm resettlement schools:

- 1) Subjects that are considered core, namely, English, Mathematics, Shona/Ndebele are prioritized when buying textbooks and teachers' resource books.
- 2) Grades 6 and 7 are further prioritized with respect to the provision of textbooks and teachers' resource books.
- 3) Transmission methods of teaching are heavily relied upon because of textbook shortage
- 4) Pupils are not able to carry textbooks home for further study and homework.
- 5) Grades 7 pass rates are generally low because of inadequate print curriculum materials like textbooks and teachers' resource books.
- 6) Teacher morale in newly resettled farm schools is low due to inadequate textbooks and teachers' resource books.

In light of the foregoing, the centrality of textbooks and teachers' resource books in newly resettled farm schools seems indisputable. The Zimbabwe government's establishment of schools on resettled farms was indeed a noble initiative, but such a development needed to be implemented in the light of available resources in general, and textbooks and teachers' resource books in particular. Learners in newly resettled farm schools do not have access to knowledge other than through teachers and textbooks. Hence without textbooks and teachers' resource books, not much learning can take place.

From the above conclusions, the following recommendations can be made:

- 1) The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture should prioritise the provision of textbooks and teachers' resource books in new farm resettlement schools. In this respect a system of positive discrimination, with respect to textbook and teachers' resource book allocation, in favour of newly resettled farm schools should be adopted if the quality of education is to be improved in these schools.
- 2) Newly resettled farm school heads should approach non – governmental organizations for assistance with respect to the provision of textbooks and teachers' resource books.
- 3) 'Parent / Mother' schools should be encouraged to share textbooks and teachers' resource books with their "satellite" counterparts in new resettlement areas. In addition to this, the heads of 'parent' schools should assist new farm resettlement schools to source textbooks and teachers' resource books from their traditional suppliers.
- 4) Teachers in newly resettled farm schools should conduct workshops on how to improve the rate of textbooks and teachers' resource books acquisition in their respective schools. Ways of encouraging parental involvement should also be mooted at such workshops. In addition to the above, such workshops could also discuss how available resources could be used, in teaching / learning situations, to improve student academic achievement in their respective schools.
- 5) Schools should be urged to balance their provision of textbooks between grade levels as selective preference for upper grades has very little contribution towards rectifying the disadvantages suffered by learners from the crippling shortages of print materials in the early formative grades of primary education.

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