

School Effectiveness at the Secondary Level of Education in Zambia: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The factors affecting school effectiveness in secondary schools in Zambia are quite numerous. This article aimed to find out the most considered areas. The method involved a qualitative review of different articles and theses on school effectiveness. Findings included six key dimensions—leadership and management, teacher quality, curriculum and instruction, school climate and culture, student support and well-being, and external factors investigated using extensive research and empirical data. This entails that school success is built on a combination of a variety of factors. The article aims to add to the ongoing conversation about enhancing educational outcomes and empowering students for success in the future.

Keywords: Zambia, school effectiveness, secondary schools, factors.

Introduction:

Understanding the essential elements that contribute to school effectiveness is crucial in the pursuit of educational excellence. Secondary schools, which are important stages in students' academic and personal development, have a difficult time helping their students achieve their full potential in the classroom. Even though many variables affect how well schools perform, it is important to focus on the particular elements that significantly impact the educational environment.

In Zambia, a school to be termed effective, it has to produce higher level of pupil pass rate for each end-of-year final examination. The term "school effectiveness" was first used in the early 1950s. Schools that were considered to be effective did so because of their efforts to drive change and raise student achievement. Scheerens, et al, (2003). However, defining school effectiveness is difficult because so many factors effecton how well a school performs. One study might only look at a select few, leaving out the others that might have seemed less significant at the time.

The achievement of educational goals and determining the ideal conditions that can be supported by policy, school administration, and teaching are central to understanding school effectiveness, Scheerens, J. (2004). It can also be defined as the degree to which a school outperforms other sister schools that receive equal inputs in terms of both output and outputs and the extent to which a school achieves its goals to a greater extent. Effective schools are those that outperform expectations in both academic subjects and students' personal and social development. Similarly, Bashar and Yasin (2020) defined effective schools as those that can raise the level of education received by their students to that required to realize global objectives.

In its simplest form, school effectiveness entails selecting an outcome—like exam achievement—and then comparing average differences between schools after

accounting for any pertinent variables, like the students' entrance achievements. Researchers are interested in school inequalities and how much other factors, such as student social background or curriculum organisation, explain them. Goldstein, (1997).

Objective:

To find out the key dimensions of school effectiveness in secondary schools in Zambia.

Methodology:

The research method applied in this study is the reviewing of the literature on factors of school effectiveness. In this method, the books, postgraduate theses and dissertations, articles, written on this subject previously are examined. The review process began with an electronic search of key databases, such as JSTOR, Google, and Google Scholar. The keywords were only limited to dimensions/factors of school effectiveness. The dimensions that prominently came out are discussed in this article.

Dimensions of School Effectiveness:

1). School Leadership

School success depends on good leadership. It requires steadfast and forward-thinking leadership that establishes clear objectives, fosters a positive school climate, and encourages an atmosphere of constant improvement, Leithwood et al., (2004). Effective leaders have a significant impact on teacher and student performance, according to Mazuba (2016) and Kandeke (2015). Their leadership techniques, such as establishing high standards, offering instructional direction, and encouraging professional development, significantly increase the effectiveness of the school, Hallinger & Heck, (1996).

For a school to be effective, resources must be managed effectively. This includes the efficient distribution and use of resources like cash, space, and staff, Harris & Muijs, (2005). Effective resource management makes sure that resources are allocated fairly and in line with the instructional priorities of the school. A structured framework for decision-making, accountability, and effective operation of the school is also provided by clear policies and procedures, Leithwood et al., (2004).

2). Teacher Quality

Mulowa K, (2017) in her thesis argued that the expertise and qualifications of the teachers play a key role in the success of the school. Teachers are better able to provide high-quality instruction when they have advanced degrees and subject-specific knowledge Darling-Hammond, (2000). They have a thorough understanding of the material they are teaching and are adept at meeting the various learning needs of their students. Furthermore, according to Hanushek (2005), teachers who possess strong pedagogical abilities and an understanding of efficient instructional strategies have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes.

For improving school effectiveness, teacher collaboration and ongoing professional development are essential. Teachers can share best practices, create standard assessments, and align instruction across classrooms through collaborative planning and reflection, Bryk & Schneider, (2003). Such cooperative initiatives support a culture of ongoing learning and development. In addition, offering teachers worthwhile professional development opportunities that are concentrated on instructional strategies and student-centered approaches supports their development and improves their capacity to meet the varied needs of students, Ingersoll & Strong, (2011).

3). Curriculum and Instruction

The success of a school depends on its curriculum design. All students will have access to a challenging and pertinent curriculum if the curriculum is organized clearly and consistently Darling-Hammond et al., (2012). According to learning standards and educational objectives, it offers a road map for what knowledge and skills students should possess Pellegrino et al., (2001). A well-designed curriculum makes it easier to plan effective lessons and ensures that they are focused, ordered, and purposeful. MOE, (1992), Musonda et al., (2014), Mulenga and Kalobwe, (2019).

An important aspect of a school's effectiveness is the adoption of effective instructional practices. Teachers can respond to the various learning needs of students and offer targeted interventions for students who are having difficulty learning through differentiated instruction and individualized support, Tomlinson, (2001). Student engagement, critical thinking, and deeper understanding are encouraged by engaging and student-centered teaching strategies like active learning, inquiry-based instruction, and collaborative learning, Hattie, (2009).

4. School Climate and Culture

The success of a school depends on its environment. It alludes to the school's general environment and social-emotional climate. Student well-being, engagement, and academic achievement are all improved in a safe, welcoming learning environment that is characterized by respectful and encouraging relationships Cohen et al., (2009). According to these authors, a supportive school environment fosters a sense of belonging, encourages positive behaviour, and lessens bullying and violence. It is what Chileya A, (2016) also agrees with.

Another crucial element in determining how well a school performs is the involvement of parents and the larger community. Muleya et al (2020), Nyambe (2022), Chungu (2022). Positive student outcomes are influenced by strong partnerships with families that are characterized by transparent communication, teamwork, and respect Epstein, (1995). Student motivation, attendance, and academic achievement tend to increase when parents are actively involved in their child's education. Students may have access to more resources, support, and opportunities through community engagement, including partnerships with regional businesses, organizations, and leaders Bryk et al., (2010).

5. Student Support and Well-being

For schools to be effective, social and emotional learning (SEL) must be encouraged. Student social and emotional development, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. SEL programmes boost school effectiveness, Elias et al, (1997); Chungu, (2022); Bushilya, (2021). According to research, SEL has a positive impact on students' behaviour, academic performance, and general well-being. SEL improves students' social and emotional well-being by fostering a nurturing environment, laying the groundwork for academic success.

Effective schools must engage and support their students. Students are more likely to be motivated, participate actively, and succeed academically when they feel connected, valued, and supported in their learning environment, Reschly & Christenson(2006). Student needs and challenges can be addressed by offering individualized support, such as counselling services, mentoring programs, and academic interventions, Sink et al., (2008). Positive school experiences, increased attendance, and improved academic results are all influenced by student engagement and support.

6. External Factors

The effectiveness of schools can be significantly influenced by educational policies and accountability frameworks. MOE (1992). Student outcomes are improved by policies that establish unambiguous educational standards, provide sufficient resources, and encourage professional development Darling-Hammond, (2007). Effective accountability measures can give schools helpful feedback and support in identifying areas for improvement when they are created with a focus on growth and improvement (OECD, 2013). The effectiveness of schools may be hampered by an overemphasis on high-stakes testing and punitive measures also.

Equity and socioeconomic factors are important for improving schools. According to research, it is much harder for students from underprivileged backgrounds to succeed academically, Lee & Burkam,(2002). To encourage equitable outcomes and boost school effectiveness, it is crucial to address inequities in access to resources, opportunities, and support, Darling-Hammond, (2007). A more inclusive and efficient educational system is a result of efforts to close achievement gaps and offer targeted assistance to students who are marginalized and underrepresented.

Discussion

Achieving school effectiveness in secondary schools necessitates a multifaceted strategy that takes into account various elements essential to academic success. From the reviewed papers of the studies done in Zambia, in line with the others done from abroad, it is evident that the six dimensions; leadership and management, curriculum and instruction, teacher quality, school climate and culture, student support and well-being, and external factors are key for school effectiveness. It is crucial to recognize that improving school effectiveness is a journey that calls for constant review, modification, and cooperation. Schools must continue to be adaptable to shifting educational environments, new scientific discoveries, and changing student needs. Secondary schools can become vibrant, inclusive, and productive learning communities that prepare students for a successful future by embracing a holistic approach and placing a high priority on student success.

Conclusion

The quest for secondary school effectiveness is a group effort involving all stakeholders. We can create an educational environment where every student thrives and realizes their potential by fostering partnerships, utilizing research and best practices, and committing to continuous improvement. Therefore, there is a need to help all secondary school students have a better and more equitable future by working together to make schools more effective.

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