

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

This book focuses on the teaching and learning of secondary English in Zambian classrooms and examines two main issues, which stem from a synthesis of previous research findings and arguments on the state of Zambian education. The evidence of these arguments is documented in subsequent chapters. One aspect of the argument is that a lack of resources has been the major cause of poor attainments and progression at basic school level (grades 1–9: age 7–14), and this together with lack of resources for secondary schools (grade 8–12: age 12–19) inevitably means that the performance of secondary schools has been poor (Chamba, 1975; Brown 1985; Odada 1988, Ochieng-Moya 1985; Harber 1997; Kelly 1999a).

There are two arguments to be raised. First, the poor state of the Zambian economy, the consequent national policies and especially the inadequate resourcing of the school system, are the basic causes of poor educational performance. In addition, success at the secondary level depends heavily on success at the primary level (Nkamba and Kanyika 1998; Kelly and Kanyika 1999; Kelly 1999a). Nevertheless, a number of questions remain with regard to the argument above. First, how exactly does poor resourcing impinge on secondary schooling? Second, what particular causal sequences connect inadequate funding to poor educational outcomes? Third, does poor resourcing make good classroom teaching and learning difficult? And fourth, what in particular are the aspects of good teaching and learning practice that are prevented, or at least made much more difficult, by poor resourcing? It is important to know the answers to these questions if Zambian secondary education is to be improved.

The second issue complements the first and gently challenges the economic determinism of established explanations, as discussed in chapter 2. These explanations present secondary schooling as the helpless victim of the economic situation and of consequent government policies (Kelly 1999a).

The second issue is premised on an alternative possibility that those concerned with secondary schooling might themselves, without necessarily any substantial increase in resources, be active and effective agents in addressing their own problems by mainly focusing on classroom processes that may enhance effective teaching and learning. There is no doubt that the most important factor in improving Zambian education is better resourcing. However, effective classroom practices do not only depend on resourcing, but also on other factors, which may be addressed independently. If stakeholders understand more adequately the weaknesses of classroom practice, which have developed as a consequence of poor resourcing, it may be possible to find some ways of addressing these constraints other than through improved resourcing. Through close analysis of the nature of the problems, it may be possible to find more effective ways of making best use of the limited resources available, including perhaps some aspects of materials currently neglected.

In order to set the context of the study, this chapter examines the main themes. First, the context of the country and place where the study highlighted in this book took place is discussed, presenting Zambian education during the colonial era up to independence. Second, teaching, learning and especially what happens in classrooms is explained, citing programmes that Zambia has undertaken towards improvement. Third, the focus is on secondary schools, explaining why it is important to focus on improvement at this level. Fourth, the focus is also on the teaching of English and the pragmatic importance of concentrating on this subject. Finally, the perspectives of teachers and pupils, which are at the core of this book, are discussed, drawing from research studies on their importance.

Context

The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with an overview of the setting in which the study that this book focuses on took place. Grace (1980, p. 3) argues, 'a socio-historical approach to research can illuminate the cultural and ideological struggles in which schooling is located.' What follows is a descriptive summary of Zambia and its education system, citing some of the programmes that it has adopted as well as its dilemmas.

Zambia, a landlocked country in central southern Africa, has a total land area of 752,614 square kilometres with a population of about 10 million (2000 census) resulting in a population density of 11 inhabitants per square kilometre. Zambia is surrounded by the Democratic Republic of Congo in the north, Mozambique in the southeast, Malawi in the east,

Tanzania in the north, Botswana and Zimbabwe in the south, Angola in the west and Namibia on the southwest border.

Zambia recognised education as the engine for human development, economic growth and a prerequisite to industrialisation. This is evident in both earlier education reforms (1977, 1988), and in later education policies (1992a, 1996, 2000). With a population growth rate of 2.7 per cent per annum and with 42 per cent of the population living in urban areas, the widespread provision of effective social services and education have remained a considerable challenge. The population is highly youthful, with 44.5 per cent of the population consisting of children aged 14 years and below (Central Statistical Office [CSO], 2000).

Zambia is a multilingual and multicultural country. The official language is English, but local languages continue to be spoken at home. The seven main languages spoken are Bemba, Lozi, Nyanja, Kaonde, Tonga, Lunda and Luvale.

Zambia, formerly known as Northern Rhodesia, was under British control from 1895 to 1963. The British South Africa Company (BSAC) administered Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) jointly as British protectorates. In 1924, Northern Rhodesia formally became a British colony. From 1953 to 1963, the British ruled Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi) on a federal basis, with the area known as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The capital of the federation was in Southern Rhodesia. The federation was dissolved in December 1963 and on 24 October 1964 Zambia became an independent republic.

Zambia has changed its constitution twice since attaining independence, and it is customary to speak of the First Republic, which existed between 1964 and 1972, the Second Republic, which existed between 1972 and 1991, and the Third Republic, which came into existence on 4 December 1991. The present republic is characterised by multi-party democracy and a market-oriented economic system. Extensive policy reforms have been carried out since the last quarter of 1991, with a view to replacing notions and practices of centralised planning and state with privatisation and liberal economic policies. Changes in policy have included the teaching of literacy in the local language in the first two years of primary school (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2002) while English continues to be a medium of instruction in all institutions of learning and in all other subjects from first grade at primary school.

Alongside these changes has come the introduction of health and education boards and a call to strengthen human rights. The need for change within the education sector focuses on the issue of change for improvement within schools, as well as working with the community. Most schools are working on how they can best improve infrastructure, provide resources and improve teachers' morale and teaching so that students can learn better. English continues to be emphasised as a key subject throughout schooling.

In a climate like this, the author argues that there is scope for school improvement *within* schools and *by* schools and perhaps by considering teachers' and pupils' perspectives on how to deal with constraints in teaching and learning of secondary English. The next section presents schooling in Zambia and explains the age groups and levels in primary and secondary schools.

Schooling in Zambia

Zambian children begin primary school between five and ten years of age because of lack of school places, but most begin at age seven according to Zambian education policy. In accordance with education policy (MOE, 2002), the Zambian education system has adopted the following structure: basic schools offer grades 1–9 (age 7–15); high schools offer from grades 10–12 (age 15–18/20); and tertiary education is provided for learners who have completed grade 12, which includes teacher training and universities. The basic education sector is oriented towards the final goal of universal basic education (UBE) and has three levels: lower basic for grades 1–4; middle basic for grades 5–7; and upper basic for grades 8–9. Although the transition from the previous system of primary (grades 1–7) and secondary schools (grades 8–12) has begun, it was not yet completed at the time of writing. At present, both systems continue to run in parallel.

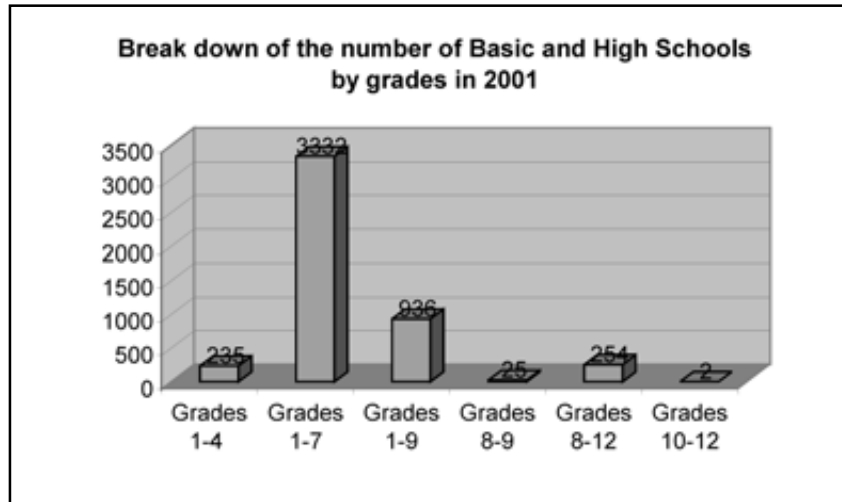


Figure 1.1: Number of schools in Zambia

Source: Ministry of Education, Planning Unit, 2001

As the above figure indicates, there are more pupils in primary and basic schools than there are in secondary schools. Since 2001, the Ministry of Education has aimed to increase the number of senior schools and basic schools. Apparently, after some meetings and discussions with ministry officials in the provinces (regional centres) and headquarters, it seemed easy for government primary schools to become basic schools and for secondary schools to become high schools. However, the change resulted in more pupils entering basic and high schools, which caused overcrowding, overuse of available resources and lack of preparation in terms of there being enough teachers and facilities such as laboratories. It was assumed that such facilities would be provided in years to come, but the government can only afford to provide limited resources¹.

The next section is a description of education provision during the colonial and federation eras. It gives the context in which Zambia has developed its education system.

Historical perspective of education in Zambia

The period of BSAC 1890–1923

The colonial era in Zambia began when the paramount chief of the Lozi signed an agreement with the BSAC (British South Africa Company) to gradually extend its sphere of influence to other parts of the country (Snelson, 1974). At first, the region was administered as North-Western and North-Eastern Rhodesia, but following the amalgamation of the two sections in 1911, the BSAC administered the whole territory as the protectorate of Northern Rhodesia. Company rule continued until 1924, when the colonial office in London assumed responsibility for the territory.

During the BSAC's administration, the provision of education remained the responsibility of the missionary agencies (with the exception of the Barotse National School). According to Snelson, (*ibid.* p. 269) 'all other educational developments up to April 1924 depended almost entirely on the initiative, energy, perseverance and financial resources of the missionary societies'. By the time BSAC rule ended, about 1,500 schools were scattered throughout the territory, all poorly equipped. The enrolment was approximately 50,000, with the schools being financed by whatever the impoverished missionary societies could afford. Snelson (*ibid.* p. 121) also comments that, 'the failure of the BSAC to invest in education during the 34 'somnolent years' of its rule meant that a generation and more of Northern Rhodesians lost their chance of receiving an education.' This loss had its repercussions 40 years later, when Zambia entered independence with a largely illiterate adult population and a pitifully small supply of educated human resources (Kelly 1991, p. 8).

The colonial era 1924–1952

The responsibility for the administration of Northern Rhodesia was transferred from the BSAC to the British colonial office in 1924. The Phelps-Stokes Commission visited Northern Rhodesia in June 1924 and held extensive meetings with the missionary bodies and with government officials. The commission's tasks were to investigate the population's educational needs, to ascertain the extent to which these were being met and to assist in the formulation of plans to meet those needs. The commission urged that the education provided should meet the peoples' real needs and should prepare students for life in the village community. This point is reflected in the colonial office's Advisory Committee Report, *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa*, which states that:

'Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life such as advancing agriculture, developing industries, improving health, training people in the management of their own affairs and inculcating ideals of citizenship and service.'

Source: Quoted in Snelson, 1974, p. 142.

The 'occupational and traditional aspects' were assumed to fit into the education system. The education policy came to favour spreading the available resources over as many children as possible and providing education for at least five years of primary education (Coombe, 1967). Secondary education was delayed because of finance, the economy's absorptive capacity and the hostility of a large section of the settler and miner population to the advancement of the local people. It appeared there was a strong link between the country's progress and the market for copper (Kelly, 1991; Coombe, 1967); however, even when government revenues and reserves increased enormously in the early 1940s because of the high wartime demand for copper, it was reluctant to invest in development projects like education. The Northern Rhodesia Government feared it might produce an unemployed educated class. This fear even dictated some misgivings about the provision of higher levels of primary education, as stated in a government document:

'With a regular supply of Standard IV candidates available for vocational training, the problem will be to make sure, as far as is possible, that no more pupils are trained in each line than can be readily absorbed in the country.'

Source: Northern Rhodesia Government (NRG), 1931, p. 17.

A later report of spoke about the danger of the emergence of a discontented unemployed class (Northern Rhodesia Government, 1937). Even as late as 1946, the Education Department responded defensively to a mission request to open a new secondary school by speaking of the danger of creating 'an intellectual unemployed proletariat' (Mwanakatwe, 1968). Kelly (1991) observes another factor that delayed the introduction of secondary education. He claims that:

'Their bitter opposition to any provisions for the African population was that it might reduce employment prospects for white settlers and immigrants. They had increasingly successful disproportionately large amounts of public funds devoted to developing a parallel, but independent and racially exclusive system of European education. Recurrent expenditure

on providing education for about 1,000 European children in 1937 considerably exceeded expenditure on over 30,000 African children the same year, without counting a further 74,000 African children in 'unaided' schools'.

Source: Kelly, 1991, p. 9.

Informed commentators perceived colonial education to be a major source of economic inequalities and social stratification, an instrument of intellectual and cultural servitude. The curriculum provided 'was largely irrelevant to needs of local people' (Kelly, 1991, p. 39) and examinations dominated teaching and learning to such an extent that, 'for an ambitious child, education was a rat race and often drudgery' (Snelson, 1974, p. 275). The emphasis on teaching to pass examinations, rather than to develop the child's ability to think logically and develop natural curiosity, still applies to what goes on in Zambian classrooms today.

The slow and uneasy introduction of secondary education was followed by an equally slow and short-sighted approach to its expansion. By 1952, the country had only four junior secondary schools (offering the first two secondary classes) and one full senior school, with an entire enrolment of 384 boys and 21 girls. Zambia's critical human resources problems at the time of independence, and many of its current difficulties in obtaining good-quality, experienced, mid-level management may be attributed to some extent to this tardy development.

The federal era, 1953–1963

In 1953, against the wishes of the majority of African people in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Malawi), the British government brought the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland into being. During the decade of the federation, the responsibility for education in Northern Rhodesia was divided. The territorial government retained responsibility for African education, while the federal government assumed responsibility for the education of other races. It is observed (in, for example, Snelson, 1974; Mwanakatwe, 1974; Kelly, 1991) that the government established high-quality educational facilities in the major towns, but access was restricted to European children. Increasing provision of primary education in cities led to an increase in migration to urban centres as people travelled in search for education. The underdevelopment of rural schools and loss of many people to cities may have contributed to the state of underdevelopment of education in rural areas, both prior to independence and since.

However, it is important to acknowledge that there was some expansion in education provision during the federation years. During the first years, from 1953 to 1960, the aim for African education was to consolidate and improve the primary school system, to develop secondary education and vocational training schemes and to increase the supply of trained teachers. By 1963, about 342,000 children were enrolled in primary school and 7,050 in secondary. At the secondary level, 80 per cent of the total enrolment were boys.

A significant development took place toward the end of the federal era. The Northern Rhodesia (territorial) government invited the United Nations and the British government to help plan the future development of its education system, to advise on the establishment of a university and to develop a framework for an integrated economic and social development plan. The report of the education mission, undertaken by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), contained the following recommendations:

- Despite the obvious difficulties, both administrative and pedagogic, English should be adopted as the sole medium of instruction from the commencement of primary school (UNESCO, 1964, p. 25);
- The number of well-qualified and well-trained teachers should be increased so that double-session teaching could be eliminated at all primary school levels (*ibid.* p. 19); and
- Education for farming is important, 'but we are not sure that as we saw it being done, it has any educational or social value or would lead to any better farming at home' (*ibid.* p. 91). Any worthy attempt to improve agricultural practice would depend on the quality of farming done by parents in their own community. Improvement would be reflected in increased income and children would see that an agricultural way of life was a viable option.

By the end of the colonial era in 1964, expansion of primary and secondary schools had begun and the Zambian government implemented the establishment of a university immediately after independence. At the point of independence, educational provision was still poor, but the country was quite rich. For the next ten years, between 1964 and 1974, the Zambian government successfully pursued a policy of giving priority to expenditure on education and massively expanding educational provision at all levels. Later, this educational expansion was affected by the fall in copper prices.

The educational crisis Zambia experienced in the early 1980s is discussed in chapter 2.

It is important to point out that the starting point in planning the study that this book focuses on was the author's strong impression that classroom teaching and learning, the problems faced at this level and considerations of what could be done at school level to resolve these problems have tended to be ignored by scholars in the past. Rather, previous research has, understandably enough, concentrated on the effect of reduced input into the system and on its output. Nonetheless, teaching and learning is at the centre of the education system and understanding what teachers and learners do and experience is critical. Schools need not simply be victims, but can be active agents in their own salvation. The author's primary concern in undertaking this study with the unresearched state of classroom teaching and learning.

The following sub-sections focus on English teaching and secondary schooling, as well as the perspectives of teachers and students themselves.

English teaching

The English referred to in this study will be largely 'secondary school English' unless otherwise stated. This is the language and subject taught in Zambia broadly as handed over from British teachers and educationists, but with a number of changes that it has since undergone. English in this context will mean the English language as a subject taught from grades 8–12, that is ages 12 to 18.

English is the medium of instruction in Zambia. 'English medium' is used to refer to an education system in which English is the sole or main medium of instruction. It is the language in which all or most of the subjects are taught right from the moment the child enters primary school in grade 1. However, this was adjusted throughout Zambia in 1965 and later in 1996 to begin with teaching in a local language in the first two grades.

In Zambia, some languages have been designated 'official' and are used in specified situations such as education, broadcasting, parliamentary debates, law courts and administration. The most important official language is English. Cibemba, Cinyanja and Silozi were at first the three other 'official' languages; Citonga was added to these in 1936. English, as the most important official language, is used in education as the medium of instruction throughout primary school, and in secondary and post-secondary education. It is also used in the law courts, parliament, administration and

commerce and trade (Kashoki, 1978; Mwanakatwe, 1974) and serves as a lingua franca for intra-national communication purposes.

English being the key subject and language of instruction seems to be at the centre of teaching and learning in the country. It was of pragmatic importance to concentrate on one subject in the secondary school curriculum to make the study at the centre of this text more manageable and focused. In addition, the centrality of secondary English in any English-speaking country and the distinctiveness of the Zambian situation are significant reasons for concentrating the study on English.

Secondary schooling

There are three types of secondary schools or high schools in Zambia: government, grant-aided and private. The total number of secondary schools in 2001 was 256, of which 208 were government, 33 grant-aided and 15 were private schools. A majority of schools were still structured grades 8–12 (age 12–18), while a few had the grades 10–12 (age 16–18) structure. ‘Secondary schooling’ in Zambia refers to grades 8–12 (age 11–19). The age range is different because children start school at different ages (the official starting age is seven), because of lack of school places for all school-going children.

The challenges facing secondary schooling in Zambia are many, as reported in a Ministry of Education document (MOE, 2002). The document reports that funding from the government is unreliable, irregular and inadequate and most schools rely on community support through fees and other fund-raising methods. Thus resources to maintain the quality of high school education are extremely limited. Infrastructure and equipment in many schools are in a poor state; supplies of educational materials such as textbooks are also insufficient and out of date. The scenario is worse in day and boarding schools located in rural areas. A major challenge is to ensure that all secondary schools are adequately resourced to provide good quality education, and that funds are released to them on time.

Primary education and concern for improvement at the basic or primary level is important. However, this book and the study it refers to focus on secondary schools. There are various problems that make teaching and learning difficult for teachers and pupils, both in primary and secondary schools. It can be argued that secondary schooling cannot wait until the problems of basic education have been resolved before it receives critical research attention.

It is crucial to understand precisely how inadequate resourcing is preventing high-quality teaching and learning in schools. Those concerned with secondary schooling need to seek ways in which their current problems might at least partially be resolved, especially through establishing teaching strategies to improve teaching and learning in classrooms. In seeking such improvements, it is also important to focus on the opinions of those at the centre of teaching and learning in classrooms, the teachers and students.

Perspectives of teachers and pupils

School development to improve pupils' classroom learning can usefully be thought of in terms of two complementary kinds of strategy: first, helping teachers to develop their classroom teaching expertise; and second, minimising the constraints upon teachers' opportunities to foster effective learning in their classrooms. While some of these constraints may arise from national policies and resource limitations, potentially many may lie within the control of individual schools. Chapter 3 presents an argument that both complementary strategies need to be informed by teachers' perceptions about teaching. Teachers need to be listened to (Oplatka, 2002; Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; Protherough and Atkinson, 1991). Teachers are the implementers and major actors in the teaching and learning process, and it is important that their perspectives about classroom teaching and learning be considered. Insightful teachers can provide insightful knowledge about what goes on in classrooms.

Pupils' perspectives about teaching and learning are also important. Part of the concern and purpose of this book is to discover these opinions. Listening directly to teachers and students as they share their thoughts on classroom processes, constraints and what they perceive to be helpful could be a powerful stimulus to reflect those same teaching and learning processes or repertoires.

Note

1. This is according to conversations with an inspector at MOE headquarters.