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Factors that led to Schools having different pass rates at Grade Seven Public Examinations level in Makoni District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate factors that led to different trends in pass rates in Grade Seven National Examinations in Primary Schools in Makoni District during the period 2015 to 2019. The investigation employed mixed methods research design. The target population of the study comprised all school heads and Grade Seven teachers in Primary Schools in the District. The study was conducted in twenty primary schools randomly-selected from 182 primary schools in the district. A stratified random sampling strategy was used to select participants for the study. Twenty Grade Seven teachers and twenty School Heads were randomly-selected from their respective strata to participate in the study, bringing the total sample size to forty respondents. A structured questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussions were used for data-collection. The study findings revealed that the general Grade Seven Public Examination pass rates in Primary Schools in the District ranged from: low; high, and mixed. The factors that led to schools having different pass rates for the period 2015 to 2019 included the following factors: (1) Availability of text books and reading resources/library facilities; (2) Teacher's level of commitment to duty; (3) Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners; and (4) Teachers' length of experience. The study recommends that: (1) Government increases the non-remuneration component of the National Budget for school development, teaching and learning resources; and (2) School Development Committees establish a textbook levy to be paid by each learner, and approved by the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education.

1 Background to the study

The Grade Seven pass rate is a critical indicator of the quality of learning at primary school level (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education [MoPSE], 2018). When a child completes primary school education, a Grade Seven certificate is awarded by the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC). The Grade Seven results are used by Secondary Schools to screen potential candidates for enrolment into Form one (Moyo and Maseko, 2016).

1.1 Improvement of the Grade 7 Examination pass rates from 2012 to 2018

According to the Zimbabwe MoPSE Draft Education Sector Performance Report 2018, over the preceding six-year period, (2012 to 2018) (see Table 1), there had been a steady and remarkable improvement in the examination pass rates at Grade 7 Examination level for both male and female candidates.

An analysis of the pass rates in Table 1 reveals that the examination pass rates rose from 31.5% in 2012 to 52.87% in 2018, giving an increase of 21.37 percentage points over the seven years. It is possible that the 1:1 pupil to textbook ratio achieved as a result of Education Transition Fund (ETF) Textbook Project bore fruit. The 2017 candidates were the first cohort to have had a 1:1 pupil to textbook ratio from Grade 1.

The data shown in Table 1 shows a steady improvement in the pass rates for both male and female candidates. It also shows that female candidates consistently outperformed their male counterparts in the seven-year period up to 2018.

Every year, ZIMSEC releases the Grade 7 Examination Analyses, and District Education Offices display them by school, at the District Offices. The parents and other education stakeholders use the results to assess the performance of schools, and even rank them. Consequently, some parents end-up withdrawing their children from schools registering low examination pass rates and transferring them to schools registering high student performance.

Parents and other stakeholders invest significant resources towards the education of their children. Such resources include payment of school and examination fees, provision of school uniforms, textbooks, exercise books, as well as individual parents' services, to support the education of their children. Given the immense resources they commit to education, parents have high expectations from schools. They expect schools to provide quality education to their children, so that they achieve high examination pass rates

in Grade Seven Examinations, advance further with their education, and become productive members of society and the world at large when they graduate.

Parents who can afford to fund post-primary education for their children prefer to send their children to reputable secondary schools which provide quality education (Kanyongo, 2005). Such schools have limited places against large volumes of applications they receive from prospective students. So, students ought to excel in their Grade Seven final examinations to enhance their chances of securing places at reputable secondary schools of their choice, so that they do not cause stress to their parents. USAP Zimbabwe (2008) posits that students striving to get a place into secondary schools compete for the limited places in reputable Government and non-Government schools including Mission schools which conduct their enrolments basing on Grade Seven examination results.

1.2 Grade 7 Examination pass rates at National Level, Provincial and District levels for the years 2015 to 2019.

According to the Grade Seven Examination analyses by the Makoni District Education Office, Manicaland Provincial Office and the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) for the years 2015 to 2019, some of the Primary Schools in the District were living up to the expectations of the parents and school communities they served by consistently achieving high examination pass rates in Grade Seven Examinations. However, a significant number of primary schools struggled and could not reach the 50% pass rate mark at Grade Seven Level for the years 2015 to 2019 (see Table 2) resulting in the overall pass rate for the District remaining below 50%.

In fact, they had a trend of low examination pass rates, as they consistently attained low examination pass rates for the years 2015 to 2019. Some of these poorly-performing primary schools registered successive zero percent pass rates for the years, 2015 to 2019.

An examination of the data in Table 2 for the years 2015 to 2019, reveals that the pass rates in the Grade Seven Examinations for Makoni District were all below the national average pass rate, and all below 50%. In year 2018, the Grade Seven Examination pass rate for Makoni District was 41.26%, compared to 52.87% pass rate at national level, and 43.99% pass rate at provincial level.

Table 2 illustrates the trend of poor performance by a significant number of primary schools in Makoni District in

Table 1: Zimbabwe Grade 7 National Examination pass rates from 2012 to 2018

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Candidature	292,375	299,673	306,490	327,191	329,549	326,109	319,395
Pass rate	31.50%	32.20%	38.13%	41.87%	42.90%	44.73%	52.87%
Male	29.70%	30.72%	35.67%	38.88%	40.43%	42.59%	49.79%
Female	33.30%	33.66%	40.30%	44.29%	45.29%	46.78%	55.78%

comparison to Manicaland Province and the National Level during the period 2015 to 2019.

Table 2: Grade Seven Public Examination pass rates at National Level, Manicaland Province and Makoni District for the year 2015 to 2019

YEAR	NATIONAL LEVEL	MANICALAND PROVINCE	MAKONI DISTRICT
2015	41.87%	28.45%	33.61%
2016	42.90%	29.57%	35.18%
2017	44.73%	31.98%	38.36%
2018	52.87%	43.99%	41.26%
2019	46.90%	44.34%	37.42%

The poor performance by schools in Makoni District continued despite interventions by UNICEF and Government. The interventions included UNICEF's donation of Educational Transition Fund (ETF) textbooks to all Primary Schools to ensure that all schools in the district had adequate reading materials in 2010. Government, through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in order to upgrade teachers' competences and improve the learning processes, introduced and/or enhanced programmes such as Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP); Teaching of Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS) and Early Reading Initiative (ERI).

In addition to this, massive countrywide teacher training programmes were undertaken by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to improve Grade Seven Examination results. All these interventions were meant to close any possible learning gaps that could have been created during preceding country-wide hyperinflationary years.

Despite these interventions, the Grade Seven Examination pass rates of most schools in the district remained consistently low, or just average, yet schools in other schools achieved high examination pass rates. It would appear that, as much as these poorly-performing schools might have desired to achieve high examination pass rates, they were being constrained by factors that are caused them to continually get low examination pass rates. Accordingly, the researchers felt it would be important to investigate the factors that led to schools having different trends in exam-

ination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District of Manicaland Province in comparison to schools other provinces both in Manicaland Province and nationally for the period 2015 to 2019.

2 Statement of the problem

When parents and other stakeholders invest large resources towards the education of their children, they expect schools to provide their children with quality education so that they achieve high examination pass rates, advance further with their education, and become useful members of the society. UNICEF made a donation of textbooks and reading materials to all Primary Schools in the country. MoPSE mounted massive countrywide in-service teacher in-service training programmes aimed at upgrading teachers' competences and improve examination pass rates in Primary Schools. They strengthened key programmes such as PLAP and ERI. Despite all these efforts from 2010, a significant number of Primary Schools in Makoni District continued to register low pass rates of less than 50% in the Grade Seven Public examination. Consequently, because of the low passes, many pupils from the District failed to proceed to schools of their choice for Form One, while others struggled to secure Form One places because of high competition. Others completely dropped out of school, failed to proceed with their education and ended up in early marriages.

The few learners who attained good passes succeeded to secure Form One places in reputable high schools such as Kriste Mambo, St. David Bonda and St. Faith Secondary Schools in Manicaland Province or beyond. This shows that there still remained some yawning disparities between schools in terms of trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven national examinations.

The current study sought to investigate the factors that led to schools in Makoni District attaining lower pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations during the period 2015 to 2019.

Based on the foregoing analysis, the study investigated the factors that led to schools having different trends in

examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District of Manicaland Province during the period 2015 to 2019.

3 Purpose of the Study

When Government, parents and other education stakeholders (e.g. UNICEF) invest huge sums of financial resources, and teaching and learning materials (e.g. textbooks and computers) to schools for the education of children, they expect schools to provide quality education, so that learners pass their examinations. Despite the huge investments into education, and in-service training/professional development of teachers by MoPSE, a significant number of primary schools in the District continued to struggle to reach the 50% pass rate mark in the Grade Seven Examinations. They are consistently registering low pass rates, while other schools continue to achieve high pass rates. Accordingly, the purpose of the study was to establish the general trends in pass rates, and investigate factors that have led to schools having different pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District of Manicaland Province for the period 2015–2019.

4 Research questions

The research problem was guided and addressed through the following research questions:

Sub-question 1

What were the general trends in examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Primary Schools in Makoni District of Manicaland Province for the period 2015–2019?

Sub-question 2

What factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District of Manicaland Province for the period 2015–2019?

5 Literature Review

5.1 Examinations as a measure of Academic performance

In educational institutions such as primary schools, success, as supported by [Tan \(2013\)](#), is measured by academic performance, or how well a student meets standards set out by the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) and the institution itself. Examinations and continuous

assessment are used to measure student academic performance. As cited by [Maimela \(2016\)](#), examinations have been found to be the most adequate way to measure students academic performance. One reason why they are viewed as adequate is because when students know that they are going to write an examination they work hard and adequately prepare for it, and try to do better. They invest enough time and do extensive research. So, examinations can be regarded as adequate as a measure of students' academic performance. [Siddiek \(2012, p.136\)](#) further posits that National Examinations (e.g. Grade Seven Examinations) are a means by which learners' academic achievements can be judged, through national standardised examinations. The examination is an effective tool for the assessment of educational objectives as, from the results achieved by students. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education can measure the degree of their performance and identify their points of strength or weaknesses to enable them to review as appropriate.

5.1.1 Definition and Concept of Pass Rate in a Grade Seven Examination

According to [MoPSE \(2018\)](#), supported by the [Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council \(2014\)](#), a school's pass rate in a Grade Seven Examination is the percentage of the number of candidates who attain a total of 5 to 30 units from the five subjects whose examination they sat, that is, excelling in the five subjects with grade six or better. So, a school is deemed to have registered a satisfactory pass rate if it attains 50% or better. Any school that achieves a pass rate below 50% is deemed to have achieved a low examination pass rate.

5.2 Factors that influence learner performance in Examinations leading to schools having different trends in pass rates

[Maimela \(2016\)](#) posits that there is a whole myriad of factors that contribute to the academic performance of the learner in the National Grade Seven Examinations which mark the end of Primary schooling. The factors include Educational Resources/teaching and learning materials, school libraries, parental involvement, motivation of teachers, medium of instruction, school infrastructure, learner to teacher ratio, qualifications of teachers and learners' discipline. In the same vein, [Duwal and Khonju \(2021\)](#) posit that academic performance of students is influenced by a combination of several factors which include but not limited to: availability of teaching and learning materials,

students' learning skills, parents' level of education, peer influence, teachers' quality, school/learning infrastructure, socio-economic status, learners' interest in a subject discipline, gender, regular studying, punctuality in attending classes and teacher/learner self-motivation.

5.2.1 Educational Resources/Teaching and learning materials and Academic achievement

Research shows that there is a relationship between the availability of adequate and quality educational resources in schools, and academic performance (Maimela, 2016). Providing schools with adequate and quality teaching and learning materials (e.g. textbooks) improves learners' academic performance.

However, there are a lot of challenges when it comes to the procurement and provision schools with adequate and quality educational resources/teaching and learning resources which hinder the teachers from effectively and properly discharging their duty. In some cases, the problem may be that of lack of, or inadequate teaching and learning resources. In other cases, the problem may be linked to mismanagement of resources as the allocation may not be done effectively. For example, school management may keep the resources in the storerooms (for security reasons) without allocating them for classes to utilise. Such instances make teachers struggle as they improvise most of the time while materials are in the storerooms.

5.2.2 Libraries in schools

Libraries, as cited by Maimela (2016), are an important but not well-developed feature of school infrastructure in Primary Schools. For teachers to instil a culture of reading among learners, there has to be a foundation laid from an early age so that learners can get used to visiting the library and be able to research on their own and realise that if they conduct research on a certain topic, they become competent in it and consequently, it becomes easy for them to pass. Libraries are important in assisting teachers generate information for the purpose of effective teaching of learners and research (Ubegu, 2006). In support, Lansdale (2003) points out that researchers have demonstrated that school libraries have a positive impact on students' achievement. For instance, students who score highly in reading tests tend to perform better on their use of language and use of the library media centre (Roser and Forest, 1990).

5.2.3 Parental Involvement and Learner Academic Performance

One of the most powerful but neglected factors that support students' learning and development, is parental or family involvement both in and out of school. Involvement of parents in their children's education accelerates the children's learning (Maimela, 2016). Thus, parental involvement is one of the strongest predictors of learners' school success, and that families play pivotal roles in their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development from birth through adolescence.

Parents are generally fairly supportive of teachers' initiatives to improve learners' academic performance by encouraging their children to come to school prepared. Communication is the hallmark of successful parental involvement. As such, learners are urged to encourage their parents to attend meetings meant for parents including Annual General Meetings (AGMs). As posited by Pajares and Schunk (2001), parents' academic socialisation is the way in which parents influence students' academic performance by shaping students' skills, behaviours, and attitudes towards school. Furthermore, academic socialisation can also be influenced by parents' socio-economic status and highly educated parents tend to provide a more stimulating learning environment (Meece, 1997).

5.2.4 Teacher Motivation and effects of Teacher Commitment on Student Achievement

No single theory can adequately explain motivation of teachers in full. For example, the Incentive Theory of Motivation suggests that teachers are motivated to go to work each working day because of external rewards, such as monetary rewards of being paid a salary at the end of the month. The greater the perceived rewards, the more strongly teachers are motivated to pursue those reinforcements. Maslow's motivation theory of hierarchy of needs would suggest that teachers are motivated to fulfil low order basic needs before moving on to higher order needs. They are first motivated to fulfil basic biological needs for food and shelter, then to progress through higher needs of safety, love, and self-esteem (e.g. recognition, promotion to a higher post) and, finally, striving to achieve the need for self-actualisation. In the Expectancy Theory of motivation, teachers formulate different expectations. On predicting that there would be positive outcomes, teachers are more motivated to pursue those likely outcomes. So, there are many different forces that interact to motivate teacher behaviour.

In the same vein, regarding student achievement, teacher commitment, as cited by [Altun \(2017\)](#), is an internal force that derives teachers to invest more time and energy in keeping up involvement in the school. This willingness of promoting the school creates emotional link between teachers and the school which ultimately inspires teachers to seek ways to enhance the teaching profession and establish an effective learning environment to allow students to reach their targets. Accordingly, teacher commitment to teaching has a key role, and is a crucial factor that contributes to student achievement.

5.2.5 The Impact of Teacher's length of experience on Effectiveness

Many professions recognise employees' years of experience as a relevant factor in human resource policies. The rationale being that experience, gained over time, enhances the knowledge, skills, and productivity of a teacher. In education, teacher experience is probably the key factor in personnel policies that affect current employees. It is a cornerstone of traditional single-salary schedules. The underlying assumption is that experience promotes effectiveness ([Rice, 2010](#)). Research evidence from Calder studies, have important policy implications. The impact of experience is strongest during the first few years of teaching; after that, marginal returns diminish. On average, new teachers are less effective than those with some experience. Teachers show the greatest productivity gains during their first few years on the job, after which their performance tends to level off. In fact, evidence suggests that the most experienced (greater than 25 years) high school mathematics teachers may be less effective than their less experienced counterparts ([Ladd, 2008](#)) and even their inexperienced colleagues ([Harris and Sass, 2007](#)).

5.3 Causes of Low Student Academic Performance

Several factors have been identified as causes of poor student academic performance. The following factors contribute to poor academic performance of learners at primary school level:

- lack of parental involvement;
- non-availability of teaching and learning materials;
- lack of infrastructure facilities;
- high learner-teacher ratio;
- lack of libraries in schools;
- lack of motivation among teachers; and
- learner indiscipline ([Maimela and Monyatsi, 2016](#)).

Non-availability and failure to use teaching and learning materials negatively affects the effectiveness of a teacher's lessons ([Asamoah, 2018](#)). Research studies ([Arshad, Zaidi and Mahmoud, 2018](#); [Ayaz et al., 2017](#)), identified lack of school libraries as one of the most important causes, and significant factors that influence the poor performance of students. A highly motivated teacher puts in maximum effort in his or her work. Several factors result in motivation and job satisfaction. Lack of motivation and professional commitment result in poor school attendance by the teacher and student, and teacher's unprofessional attitudes towards learners which in turn adversely-affects learner academic performance. A teacher who is academically and professionally qualified, but works under unfavourable conditions of service would be less dedicated to her/his work and, thus, be less productive than a teacher who is unqualified but works under favourable conditions of service ([Etsey, 2005](#)). Other negative factors include poor teaching methods ([Gegbe and Koroma, 2014](#)), and inadequate coverage of the syllabus ([Ojukwu, 2015](#)). If the problems persist for long periods, they may lead to the school having a trend of low examination pass rates.

Availability of adequate and quality teaching and learning materials, and libraries in schools provide a conducive learning environment for students in reading, understanding subject content and, consequently, performing highly in examinations ([Etsey, 2005](#)). It is, thus, important that all the necessary teaching and learning resources, and infrastructural facilities for effective teaching and learning are made available ([Otegunrin, Otegunrin and Oni, 2019](#)) because they enhance better teaching and learning ([Mahmood and Gondal, 2017](#)).

6 Research Design and Methodology

The investigation employed a mixed-methods research design. The target population of the study comprised all school heads and all Grade Seven teachers in Primary Schools in Makoni District. The researchers requested and got from the District Schools Inspector for Makoni District, the list of names of all the 182 Primary Schools in the District. The researcher used a stratified random sampling strategy to select participants of the study. The target population was stratified according to the position of the would-be respondents, either as a school head or Grade Seven teacher. The required samples of school heads and Grade Seven teachers were randomly-selected from each stratum. A list of names of all the primary schools in the District was arranged in alphabetical order and numbered from one (1) to one hundred and eighty-two (182).

The study was conducted in 20 primary schools randomly-selected from the 182 primary schools in the District. Lists of Grade Seven teachers were requested from the school heads. Using a random sampling procedure, 20 Grade Seven teachers and 20 school heads were randomly selected to participate in the study, bringing the total sample size to 40 respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in which respondents provided the general trends in examination pass rates, and factors that led to primary schools having different trends in examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District. From the sample of teachers, and for relevant, informed interaction in a group, the researchers purposively-selected eight teachers, based on their qualifications, positions, and teaching experience, to participate in the FGDs.

The researchers had challenges in trying to bring school heads to meet at the same time (for the Focus Group Discussion), due to their busy schedules. Out of the 40 respondents, 35 of them made up of 20 teachers and 15 school heads, completed the questionnaires; and eight teachers participated in the Focus Group Discussions. The questionnaire was designed to include both open-ended and closed-ended questions, thereby covering both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire and the Focus Group Discussion guide had open-ended questions. The open-ended questions provided respondents the opportunity to freely express and give their views on the general trends in examination pass rates, and factors that led to primary schools having different trends in examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District.

In the questionnaire, each of the respondents was to list three general trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Primary Schools. The questionnaire also included closed-ended questions, in which respondents were given factors that could have led to Primary Schools in Makoni District having different trends in examination pass rates during the period 2015–2019. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the given 'factor' statements by ticking in the space provided, the statements that best expressed their degree of agreement with the statements. They were guided by the following key:

- SA Strongly Agree
A Agree
NS Not Sure
D Disagree
SD Strongly Disagree

The responses were scored using the following key:

- SA 5
A 4
NS 3
D 2
SD 1

Of the 40 questionnaires administered, 35 were returned, giving an 87.5% return rate. The questionnaires were generally well completed.

7 Data Presentation and Analysis

The collected data were presented and summarised in tables shown below:

7.1 General trends in pass rates in Grade Seven Public Examinations in Primary Schools of Makoni District for the period 2015–2019

Respondents were asked to provide general trends in examination pass rates in Grade Seven Public Examinations in Primary Schools of Makoni District for the period 2015–2019. Table 3 shows the responses that the investigators got.

Table 3: General trends in Pass rates in Grade 7 Examinations in Primary Schools of Makoni District for the period 2015–2019 (n=35)

General trends in examination pass rates	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Trends of low pass rates	35	100
Trends of high pass rates	35	100
Trends of mixed of pass rates	21	60
Trends of average pass rates	14	40

Table 3 gives the numbers and percentages of participants who gave each response. A study of data in Table 3 shows that, for the period 2015–2019, the following are the general trends in examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in primary schools of Makoni District:

- trends of low pass rates (100%);
- trends of high pass rates (100%);
- trends of mixed pass rates (60%); and
- trends of average pass rates (40%).

Accordingly, for the period 2015–2019, the general trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Primary Schools of Makoni District were:

- (i) trends of low pass rates, where a primary school registered pass rates far below 50%. Some schools with trends of low pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations registered low pass rates which were in the 20–47% pass range. Others registered pass rates as low as 0–15% (mostly rural) for all the years 2015 to 2019;
- (ii) trends of high pass rates where a primary school registered pass rates that were well above 50% over these years. Schools with trends of high pass rates are known to register high pass rates every year in the Grade Seven Public Examinations. Some of these schools, mainly urban, register examination pass rates which may be in the 75–100% pass range; and
- (iii) trends of mixed pass rates, whereby a primary school registers a high pass rate in one year; a low or an average pass rate in the other year, during the years 2015 to 2019.

7.2 Factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District for the period 2015 to 2019

In the questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), respondents were asked to identify factors that led to Primary Schools in Makoni District having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations for the period 2015–2019. The presentation and analysis of the collected data of the identified factors are summarised below under the following sub-headings based on their source:

- Open-ended questions; and
- Focus Group discussions; and
- Closed-ended questions.

7.2.1 Factors derived from Open-ended questions

In the questionnaire with open-ended questions, respondents identified factors summarised in Table 4. Table 4 which shows:

- the identified factors;
- the number and percentage of respondents giving each response; and
- the ranking.

Table 4 illustrates the identified factors that led to primary schools in Makoni District having different trends in pass rates in Grade Seven Public Examinations, ranked according to percentages. The figures in brackets are the corresponding percentages of participants for each response:

1. Availability of reading resources/Library facilities (100);
2. Availability of text books and subject syllabuses (100);
3. Teacher commitment to duty (94.3);
4. Teacher's length of experience (91.4);
5. Regular administering of revision tests (85.7);
6. Availability of learning materials at home (85.7);
7. Teacher giving daily homework (82.6);
8. The head's leadership style (74.3).

7.2.2 Factors derived from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

During the Focus Group discussions (FGDs), respondents were asked to identify factors that led to Primary Schools in Makoni District having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations for the period 2015–2019. The participants came up with varied responses to the question. During the Focus Group discussions, the respondents were agreed on the following factors:

- (i) Availability of reading resources/Library facilities (100%);
- (ii) Availability of text books and subject syllabuses (100%);
- (iii) Teacher commitment to duty (100%);
- (iv) Availability of learning materials at home (94.3%);
- (v) Economic situation of the country (85.7%); and
- (vi) Giving daily homework.

The figures in brackets reflect percentages of whether the level of agreement was unanimous or was the measure or proportion of the level of agreement with the identified factor within the FGD. Responses from the FGDs revealed that, for learners to do well in their examinations, and the school to have a trend of high examination pass rates, there was need for adequate availability of reading resources/Library facilities, and relevant, appropriate text books for the various subject disciplines they were studying. Respondents commented that the availability of reading resources/Library facilities facilitates research and generation of knowledge by individual students, more especially if these resources were available at both the school and at home. Respondents observed that parents in urban areas had higher ability level to pay school fees for their children

Table 4: Factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in pass rates in Grade 7 Public Examinations for the period 2015–2019 (Open-ended questions) (n=35)

Factors that led to schools having different trends in examination pass rates in Grade 7 Public Examinations during the period 2015–2019	Number	Percentage (%)	Ranking
1. Administering of regular and frequent revision tests to learners	30	85.7	5
2. Teacher commitment to duty	33	94.3	3
3. Availability of reading resources / Library facilities	35	100	1
4. Availability of text books and subject syllabuses	35	100	1
5. Economic situation of the country	26	74.3	8
6. Availability of learning materials at home	30	85.7	5
7. Teacher's length of teaching experience	32	91.4	4
8. Quality of pupils' written work	18	51.4	10
9. Teacher giving daily homework	29	82.6	7
10. Provision of study time	10	28.6	14
11. Holiday lessons	13	37.1	12
12. The head's leadership style	26	74.3	8
13. Effects of drought	9	25.7	15
14. Poor parental background	14	40	11
15. Teacher punctuality	11	31.4	13
16. Use of modern teaching aids	9	25.7	15

as compared to those in rural schools. High rate of fees payment enables urban schools to purchase reading resources and even construct school libraries. They pointed out that this explained why a significant number of urban schools had trends of high pass rates and most primary schools in the rural areas had trends of low pass rates.

The respondents further added that if, in addition to the sustained availability of the reading and learning resources, the level of teacher commitment to duty was also high, the school would have a trend of high examination pass rates. Respondents stated that a high level of teacher commitment to duty enhances student performance, as the teacher would be motivated to employ effective instructional strategies and teaching methodologies. This results in improved learner motivation and performance, and consequently, results in high learner performance in examinations. They pointed out that the converse situation results in schools having trends of low or averaged pass rates, more so if it was exacerbated by the harsh economic situation as was the case in Zimbabwe.

7.2.3 Factors derived from closed-ended questions

In the questionnaire section with closed-ended questions, respondents were given factors that could have led to Primary Schools in Makoni District having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations during

the period 2015–2019. They were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the given 'factor' statements by ticking in the spaces provided, the statements that best expressed their degree of agreement with the statement. They were guided by the following key:

- SA** Strongly Agree
- A** Agree
- NS** Not Sure
- D** Disagree
- SD** Strongly Disagree

The responses were scored using the following key:

- SA** 5
- A** 4
- NS** 3
- D** 2
- SD** 1

Table 5 shows the responses, total scores, mean scores and ranking of each response.

An examination of the data in Table 5 shows that, from the closed-ended questions, 33 respondents agreed with all the given 'factor' statements. Thus, 94.3% of the respondents agreed with all the given 'factor' statements as factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District for the period 2015–2019.

The level of agreement was determined on the basis of a score of at least 3 out of 5. The overall mean score of the responses by all respondents was 4.7. A percentage of 94.3 of the respondents who agreed with all the given 'factor' statements as factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations, and a high overall mean score of 4.7 (out of 5), reflects a very high level of agreement by the respondents. Table 5 shows that the factors were rated and ranked in the following order using mean scores (*the figures in brackets are the corresponding mean scores*):

1. Availability of adequate reading resources/library facilities (5);
2. Adequate text books as per enrolment (5);
3. Teacher commitment to work (5);
4. Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners (5);
5. Teacher's length of experience (4.89);
6. Quality of pupils' written work (4.86);
7. Teacher giving learners homework daily (4.86);
8. Country's economic situation (4.8);
9. Providing study time to learners (4.8);
10. Availability of learning materials at home (4.7);
11. Poor parental socio-economic background (4.6);
12. Use of modern teaching aids (4.57);
13. Use of modern technology (including computers) (4.5);
14. The school head's leadership style (4.1); and
15. Effects of drought (4.0).

Accordingly, the most highly-rated factors were:

1. Availability of adequate reading resources/library facilities (5);
2. Adequate text books as per learner enrolment (5);
3. Teacher commitment to work (5);
4. Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners (5); and
5. Teacher's length of experience (4.89);
6. Quality of learners' written work (4.86); and
7. Teacher giving learners homework daily (4.86).

8 Findings from analysed data

From the foregoing analysis of the open-ended questions, Focus Group Discussions and closed-ended questions, it emerges that the following are the factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in pass rates in Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District during the period 2015–2019:

1. Availability of adequate text books and subject syllabuses (5.0);
2. Availability of adequate reading resources/library facilities (5.0);
3. Teacher commitment to duty (4.9);
4. Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners (4.7);
5. Teacher's length of experience (4.6);
6. The head's leadership style (4.5);
7. Availability of learning materials at home (4.3);
8. Teacher giving learners daily homework (4.3);
9. Providing learners study time (4.3);
10. Quality of pupils' written work (4.2);
11. Country's economic situation (4.1);
12. Poor parental socio-economic background (4.1);
13. Use of modern teaching aids (4.0);
14. Use of modern technology (including computers) (4.0); and
15. Effects of drought (3.8).

Accordingly, the most highly rated factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District of Manicaland Province for the period 2015–2019 were:

1. Availability of adequate text books and subject syllabuses (5.0);
2. Availability of adequate reading resources/library facilities (5.0);
3. Teacher commitment to duty (4.9);
4. Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners (4.7);
5. Teacher's length of experience (4.6);
6. The head's leadership style (4.5); and
7. Availability of learning materials at home (4.3).

8.1 Availability of adequate text books and reading resources/library facilities and high-level teacher commitment to duty

During Focus Group Discussions, and in the open-ended questions, all the respondents, both school heads and teachers, stressed the importance of the availability of adequate text books and subject syllabuses; reading resources/library facilities, and high level of teachers' commitment to duty as critical factors to the success of candidates in Grade Seven Examinations.

Respondents were of the view that learners should be able to read and comprehend so that they benefit from using the textbooks. Learners who have access to various teaching and learning materials such as computers, text books and well-resourced libraries were likely to perform better

Table 5: Factors that led to Primary Schools having different trends in Grade 7 Examination Pass rates (Closed-ended questions) (n=35)

Factors that may lead to identified differences in trends in Grade Seven Examination pass rates	SA 5		A 4		NS 3		D 2		SD 1		Score	Mean	Rank
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1. Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners	35	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	175	5	1
2. Teacher's length of experience	31	88.6	4	11.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	171	4.89	5
3. Effects of drought	21	60	6	17.2	0	0	4	11.4	4	11.4	141	4	15
4. Availability of adequate reading resources / library facilities	35	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	175	5	1
5. Availability of learning materials at home	26	74.2	8	23	0	0	1	2.8	0	0	162	4.7	10
6. Use of modern teaching aids	25	71.4	8	23	0	0	1	2.8	1	2.8	160	4.57	12
7. Availability of adequate text books as per learner enrolment	35	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	175	5	1
8. Use of modern technology (computers)	24	68.6	9	25.7	0	0	0	0	2	5.7	158	4.5	13
9. Quality of pupils' written work	30	85.7	5	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	170	4.85	6
10. Providing study time to learners	27	77	8	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	167	4.8	8
11. Giving daily homework to learners	30	85.7	5	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	170	4.85	6
12. Economic situation of the country	32	91.6	1	2.8	0	0	1	2.8	1	2.8	167	4.8	8
13. Poor parental socio-economic background	28	80.1	5	14.3	0	0	1	2.8	1	2.8	163	4.6	11
14. The school head's leadership style	22	62.8	5	14.3	0	0	5	14.3	3	8.6	143	4.1	14
15. Teacher commitment to work	35	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	175	5	1
Total Score	2180		256		0						Overall mean score 4.7		
Number and percentage of respondents who agreed with all the given 'factor' statements.	33 = 94.3% Respondents												

than their counterparts without such resources. The study findings are in support of the literature viewpoints by Kafui (2015), Maimela (2016), Duwal and Khonju (2021), and Lansdale (2003). Kafui (2015) underscores the importance of the use of textbooks in schools, citing that personal copies of textbooks can be taken home by the learners with tasks for homework. Such an arrangement also enables parents to be active participants in the teaching and learning of their children. Furthermore, it affords parents an opportunity to timely check and monitor the performance of their children. Such learners are more likely to perform highly in their Grade 7 examinations. Lansdale (2003) posits that school libraries have a positive impact on students' achievement. In terms of student achievement, in every Grade, students who score highly in reading tests tend to perform better on their use of language.

Respondents stressed that the afore-cited factors were among the most critical factors that led to Primary Schools having high examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations during the period 2015 to 2019. Virtually all school heads agreed that a high textbook-learner ratio is a 'catalyst' for high examination pass rates in schools, more especially with the Competence-Based Curriculum

(CBC) Examinations. One of the respondents said, "A 1:1 textbook to pupil ratio aids significantly on high performance in Grade Seven Examinations, and no wonder why our school was in the best ten schools in the District rankings in 2016 and 2017". Some school heads pointed out that the non-availability of adequate text books was adversely affecting their schools' pass rates in all the subject disciplines in the Grade Seven Examinations. One of the school heads pointed out that their school's trend of poor examination pass rates was likely to continue if they continue to fail to resolve the problem of inadequate textbooks. Thus, the participants were in agreement that lack of, or inadequate textbooks and reading resources, coupled with teachers who are not committed to their teaching duty, results in schools having low examination pass rates.

Muranda (2012) observes that some schools do not have a policy where learners are allowed to take textbooks and reading books home. This, consequently results in: w primary schools having differences in trends in examination pass rates in Grade Seven Public Examinations. Some of the Grade Seven teachers who answered the questionnaire were of the view that the availability of text books alone without Subject Syllabuses was not very helpful. In fact,

more than fifty percent of the respondents indicated that, in their schools, they did not have subject syllabuses in nearly all the Learning Areas of the Competence-Based Curriculum. This is a factor which one of the school heads described as a 'recipe' for disaster in their quest to attain high examination pass rates in the Grade Seven General Paper examination.

Comparing the differences in trends in pass rates between the 2010 national pass rates before the distribution of textbooks and the 2015 pass rate five years after the distribution of the text books to all schools by UNICEF, one also concludes that availability of adequate reading materials has the potential to improve the national pass rate. This means that adequate reading, teaching and learning resources if properly utilised lead to improved student achievement in national Grade Seven Examinations.

The participants commented that teachers who are committed to their work are always punctual, and they are resourceful and hardworking. Such teachers produce high examination pass rates in Grade Seven Public examinations, resulting in the school achieving a trend of high examination pass rates. The converse was true of primary schools with Grade Seven teachers who are disengaged from their work. These findings are in support of the viewpoints by [Cherry \(2016\)](#) and [Kayuni and Tambulasi \(2017\)](#). They stress that teachers' commitment to duty is a result of teacher motivation. Teachers need to be motivated. [Cherry \(2016\)](#) posits that motivation is the force that initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behaviours in teachers. Thus, teachers need to be motivated as they discharge all their duties, including teaching. [Kayuni and Tambulasi \(2017\)](#) stress that lack of motivation and commitment has negative impacts on student academic achievement, most importantly it places the future of learners at stake.

8.2 Regular and frequent administering of revision tests

The majority of the respondents were agreed that regular and frequent administration of revision tests to learners lead to schools having differences in examination pass rates at Grade Seven Public examinations level. They pointed out that learners who are given regular and frequent revision tests perform highly in Public examinations, resulting in the school having a trend of high examination pass rates. Some teachers are keen at giving revision tests regularly to learners while others are reluctant to do so leading to differences in examination pass rates.

8.3 Teacher's length of experience

The participants were of the view that many schools recognise teachers' years of experience as very important in promoting learners' high performance at Grade Seven Public examinations. This explains why, in most cases, the duty of teaching Grade Seven classes is usually assigned to experienced teachers. This is out of a realisation that experience gained over time, enriches the knowledge, enhances acquisition of skills, and improves productivity and efficiency of teachers. The findings confirm the literature viewpoint by [Rice \(2010\)](#) in her study of the impact of teacher experience on instruction. She made the conclusion that learners reach higher levels of achievement when they are taught by experienced teachers and that there is close link between a teacher's experience and his or her level of productivity, but up to a point.

Respondents observed that '*Experience is the best teacher*'. As such, teachers should be allocated classes to teach according to their teaching experience and area(s) of specialisation in order to improve Examination pass rates in the Grade Seven Public examinations level in Primary Schools. It should, however, be noted, as cited by [Ladd \(2008\)](#), that the impact of teacher's experience is strongest during the first few years of teaching, after that, marginal returns diminish.

8.4 The head's leadership style and availability of learning materials at home

Participants also highly rated the School Head's leadership style, more especially if it was not just democratic, but was contingent upon the situation. Respondents stressed that availability of learning materials at home affords learners opportunities for research. They, thus, complement the work by the teachers at school, and consolidate children's learning.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, for the years 2015 to 2019, the general trends in pass rates in Grade Seven Public Examinations in Primary Schools of Makoni District were:

- (i) low pass rates;
- (ii) high pass rates; and
- (iii) mixed pass rates.

The most highly-rated factors that led to primary schools having different trends in pass rates in the Grade Seven Public Examinations in Makoni District of Manicaland Province during the years 2015 to 2019, were:

- (i) Availability of adequate text books and subject syllabuses;
- (ii) Availability of adequate reading resources/library facilities in schools;
- (iii) Teacher's level of commitment to duty;
- (iv) Regular and frequent administering of revision tests to learners; and
- (v) Teacher's length of experience.

9.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings of this research, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration by the relevant authorities, for policy action and further research:

Recommendation 1

In order to guarantee availability of adequate text books and reading resources/library facilities and enable poorly performing primary schools to achieve high examination pass rates, and thus, minimise differences in examination pass rates among Primary Schools:

- (i) Government and School Responsible Authorities should significantly increase the non-remuneration component of the Budget for teaching and learning resources, and the School Development Committee (SDC) must establish a textbook levy approved by the Permanent Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education, to be paid by each learner.
- (ii) All Schools, through the School Development Committees (SDCs)/Boards of Governors, should be encouraged to construct School Libraries.

Recommendation 2

In order to address the problem of teachers' lack of commitment to duty, resulting in teachers being disengaged from their work, and also noting that commitment to duty is enhanced by teacher motivation; Government and School Responsible Authorities should motivate teachers by improving remuneration and other rewards/salaries (preferably to a level above the poverty datum line) as well as their general welfare.

Recommendation 3

Noting that learners who are given regular and frequent revision tests perform highly in Grade Seven Public examinations resulting in the school having high examination pass rates, so in order to minimise differences in trends

in examination pass rates and enable poorly performing schools to also achieve high pass rates in examinations:

- (i) School heads, District Schools Inspectors and School Inspectors should conduct in-service training workshops and staff-develop teachers on the value and importance of giving learners regular and frequent revision tests.
- (ii) MoPSE should put in place policy on the administration of standardised revision tests in primary schools, demand compliance by all teachers. Ministry should also address the problem of some teachers ignoring or not valuing the importance of revision tests in the learning process.

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