

# **The Emergency of Satellite Schools and Access to Education in Zimbabwe: Leveraging the Human Rights Agenda?**

Pfurai Chimbunde  
Seke Teachers College, Zimbabwe  
chimbundep@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

While the Land Reform Programme (LRP) in 2000 and beyond was camouflaged as a distributive justice schema aimed to better the socio-economic status of the Indigenous people in Zimbabwe, it precipitated educational injustices for students arising from the creation of an education landscape marked by inequitable access to education. The study, undertaken after 20 years since the inception of the LRP, sought to check the progress made thus far by the Government of Zimbabwe to enhance access to education by children of the new farmers. Informed and guided by the international normative frameworks of the right to education, of which Education For All (EFA) and the Zimbabwean Education Act (1987) are part, the case study cast in the qualitative approach, presents constructed narratives of three primary school learners and their three teachers at one purposively selected satellite school. The study finds that as much as the advent of the LRP worked to bring equal access and redress in land appropriation between the settlers and natives, a new form of injustice has resurfaced as reflected by challenges of equitable access to education.

## **Introduction**

The Director's Circular Number 5 of 2011 on access to education in Zimbabwe states that learners were not to travel a distance of more than five kilometres to school (Mubika & Bukaliya, 2011). The main thrust of this study was to understand the lived experiences of learners at satellite schools in Zimbabwe in tandem to the Zimbabwean declaration on the provision of education to all within a radius of five kilometres. The Land Reform Programme (LRP) in Zimbabwe was a noble idea meant to economically empower the landless indigenous Zimbabweans but posed social injustice to students in satellite schools in terms of their experiences to the quality and nature of access to education (Jenjekwa, 2013).

Indeed, the advent of Zimbabwe's LRP in 2000, characterised by the massive movement of black Zimbabweans into former white commercial communities, brought with it a litany of challenges in the provision of education. Muzingili, Muchinako and Shava (2017) argue that LRP neglected education in farming areas and therefore the establishment of satellite schools was an afterthought because the polemics of land reform programme were shaped by political and electoral calculations at the expense of social services in these areas. In fact, with the land reform, the then Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe was suddenly presented with an urgent need to provide education to sons and daughters of the new farmers who moved into former white commercial farms where there were no schools. In response to that need, satellite schools also known as resettlement schools were built. In this study, I reviewed the legal binding instruments in Zimbabwe on access to education and unearthed the lived paradox of the LRP and its implications for experiences of learners at satellite schools. I also explored

*Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2021, 16(1), pp. 58-71.

ISSN 1718-4770 (c) Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence  
<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>

how learners' access to educational provisions has been affected and propose ways to enhance their access to education, which is stipulated by human rights instruments in Zimbabwe.

### **The Land Reform Programme: A Social (In)justice?**

The Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe was a result of the need to correct land ownership imbalances created by the land apportionment act of 1930 that gave 51% of land to white farmers who numbered 4000 while only 30% was given to Black Zimbabweans who numbered seven million in 1980 (Besapa & Moyo, 2013). 70 years down the line, the situation had not changed thereby giving birth to the fast track land redistribution programme in July 2000 (Mavhundutse et al., 2012). Besapa and Moyo (2013) observed that before independence, the country had undergone a series of land resettlement programs, many of which were guided by the United Kingdom in favour of white settlers. Yet, successful changes were still to materialize. One lingering issue that haunted the newly independent state was the slow progress of land redistribution (Raftopoulous & Mlambo, 2010). This could have been so because upon attainment of political independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a racially skewed agricultural land ownership where whites despite being the minority, owned large chunks of land not commensurate to their population at the expense of the black majority. The land question became the unfinished social justice agenda as far as the liberation war was concerned since it was one of the central reasons why the blacks took up arms against white rule. The new government had to put on its agenda the land issue as a way of redressing the social injustices entrenched during the colonial period and had to fulfil the promises of the protracted war through the equitable distribution of land among the landless masses.

From the Zimbabwean government's perspective, the inauguration of the LRP was a demonstration of inclusion and empowerment which on social justice principles was crucial for the material, social and political wellbeing of society (Yanicki, Kushner, & Reutter, 2015). Based on that assumption, the limited access to land before attainment of political independence by the majority of the people in Zimbabwe defied the equality initiatives and the principles of social justice. Fairness was to be ratified to uphold Zimbabweans' right to the land. While the Zimbabwean land redistribution was meant to be a form of social justice, it was an unmitigated disaster. This was because it was fraught with several challenges. Farming, which is a business, collapsed due to political interference. The ordinary peasants not aligned to those in power were allocated land not arable enough to grow crops but to rear animals. In addition, due to corruption, only those who were well-connected politically and their children benefitted from the best land (Besapa & Moyo, 2013). Such a move where those best positioned in the society try to maximize their self-interest, defies principles of social justice according to which a society is well-ordered when it is effectively regulated by a public conception of justice in which, "everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles" (Rawls, 1999, p. 4). However, the LRP was a mess because those who took the farms performed poorly in the farming sector. Although there are a few farms that are still productive, much land lies idle and Zimbabwe has become a begging bowl rather than a bread basket (Besapa & Moyo, 2013). Not only was the farming business affected by the LRP but also social services such as education. Satellite schools were established to provide education services to learners located in the farms. Mwiinde and Muzingili (2020) argue that the coming of satellite schools in Zimbabwe is closely

tied to the LRP. To put into context how the LRP is linked to education in the satellite schools, an outline on how the satellite schools were established is imperative.

### **Establishment of Zimbabwean Satellite Schools**

While the LRP of the year 2000 which redistributed land from the white farmers to the indigenous Zimbabweans was glorified by recipients of the land, its ramifications presented the Government of Zimbabwe with a new challenge. Since the LRP was the baby of the Government of Zimbabwe, that same government was obliged to establish schools as a way to accommodate all children that had been suddenly moved into commercial farms thereby fronting a social justice agenda enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Act 2013 (Amendment No. 20) which espoused that every child had a right to education. That gave birth to the establishment of new schools, often referred to as fast track schools (Jenjekwa, 2013; Mavhundutse et al., 2012), satellite schools or resettlement schools. Prior to the launch of the LRP in 2000, most commercial farms did not have schools for the farm workers' children. Mutema (2012) notes the previous white farmers' children were driven to faraway schools or sent to boarding schools so that they could acquire the best education. However, the launch of the LRP witnessed a massive influx of black Zimbabweans into former commercial farms which earlier on had been less populated, which spurred the establishment of satellite schools in those areas (Mutema, 2012). As such, the government of Zimbabwe was obliged to establish these schools partly because of the Education for All agenda first launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand; and then reaffirmed in 2000 in Dakar, Senegal at the World Education Forum (Mapako & Mareva, 2013). For the Ministry, it was a matter of finding a farm with some tobacco barns so that a school could be established (GoZ, 2012b; Mutema, 2012). Farmhouses were consequently turned into schools, regardless of whether they were centrally located as per the dictates of the Director Circular Number 5 of 2011 (GoZ, 2012a). As a result, a total of 1029 satellite schools were established in Zimbabwe of which 175 are located in Masvingo province where this study was conducted (GoZ, 2012b).

A surge of interest in research on the implications of the land reform on social services such as education became evident in scholarship following the LRP. Many studies were carried out ranging from the challenges and opportunities of the LRP (Mutema, 2012); access and quality in resettlement secondary schools (Jenjekwa, 2013); unruly practices in rural secondary schools emanating from the Zimbabwean economic crisis (Kapingidza, 2014) and emerging teacher education needs as a result of the LRP (Mavhundutse et al., 2012). The studies showed that with the advent of the LRP, the dream for access and quality in education was shattered as provision of educational facilities was compromised. Jenjekwa (2013) aptly posits that, "emerging satellite schools bear the brunt of hastened and impromptu establishment, hence were a facade of the schools envisioned by many Zimbabweans at independence. These schools reeled from an abject shortage of; everything except pupils" (p. 15). Literature further confirms that the challenges ranged from inadequate furniture and teaching equipment to high pupil drop out due to lack of political will (Mutema, 2012; Mavhundutse et al., 2012; Jenjekwa, 2013) although the government of Zimbabwe admitted that for over two decades children in farming communities had been deprived of a conducive learning environment. Recent studies show that satellite schools, being an annex of mother schools, are far behind the standards of mother schools (Mwiinde & Muzingili, 2020; Muzingili et al., 2017). Satellite schools in Zimbabwe are

*Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2021, 16(1), pp. 58-71.

ISSN 1718-4770 (c) Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence

<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>

neglected and suffer from a multitude of challenges, which include squalid infrastructure, acute shortage of resources, rampant school dropout and general shortage of classrooms and accommodations. The limitation of these studies was that they concentrated on administrative and teacher reports, leaving the learners' voices inaudible and untapped. This study was motivated by this lacuna and sought to complement the previous work by focussing on student voices.

### **The Right to Education**

The right to education was first enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (UN General Assembly, 1948). Several binding international instruments followed the UDHR that are dedicated to the right to education, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) *Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960), which inspired the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) in 1966. Article 13 of the ICESCR (1966) is considered the most authoritative expression of the right to education. While UDHR and the ICESCR guaranteed the right to education regardless of one's race, social background and identity, the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 resolved to improve access, quality and equity throughout the educational life course (Heymann, Raub, & Cassola, 2014). In the Zimbabwean context, access to education is also premised on the EFA policy which Zimbabwe is committed to, and which is also enshrined in the country's constitution. The government of Zimbabwe declared education a basic human right for all its nationals in line with the United Nations Bill of Human Rights, a value that is established in clause 4 of the Zimbabwe Education Act of 1987 (Mavhunga, Madondo & Phiri, 2009). Embedded in the constitution of Zimbabwe is the Education Act (1987) and its subsequent ratifications which provides that every Zimbabwean child has the right to education and is obliged to attend any school of choice. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 enshrines the right to education in Article 75, which provides that every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has a right to a basic State-funded education, including adult basic education; and further education, which the State, through reasonable legislative and other measures, must make progressively available and accessible. Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's Director Circular Number 5 of 2011, the school is there mainly to increase access to education to any children of primary school going age in the following categories: 1. Children who live more than five kilometres from the nearest registered primary school; 2. Children who live in scattered and isolated communities such as farms, estates, mines, research and training stations and national parks; 3. Those in rehabilitation, transit and other temporary centres; children, who for geographical reasons do not have access to a school, etc. The Director's Circular Number 5 of 2011 on access to education holds that learners were not to travel a distance of more than five kilometres to school (GoZ, 2012a). As explicitly explained by Mubika and Bukaliya (2011), the standing orders for the location of a school in Zimbabwe stipulates that a school should be established within a radius of five kilometres from the residence of the school-going age to successfully achieve Education For All. So naturally, when Zimbabwe established satellite schools it was expected to take that educational instrument into consideration.

Ideally, according to Mavhunga et al. (2009), education is essential for any nation to develop. "All things being equal, education equals development. This is so because education, particularly

*Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2021, 16(1), pp. 58-71.  
ISSN 1718-4770 (c) Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence  
<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>

basic education, lays the basis for skills development” (p. 25). If education is a tool that decreases abject poverty and raises the standard of living, then educational provisions should be founded on an equitable platform to empower learners to compete fairly among themselves. Restrictions to access to equitable educational opportunities defy both the Education for All initiatives and the values of social justice. To embrace the Education for All agenda, Zimbabwe then enacted legal instruments that promoted the access to education by all citizens. This study argues that it is high time to ensure the realisation of the right to education in all contexts. By renewing the attention paid to the rights and obligations laid down in the legal instruments and treaties, all countries and the corporate world need to join hands and take measures to effectively put an end to all kinds of discrimination and ensure equality of opportunity in the education sector.

The preceding literature describes disadvantages relating to the provision of education in Zimbabwean satellite schools soon after the launch of the LRP which sought to address the land imbalances inherited from the colonial injustices. The research revealed that children attending satellite schools encountered a plethora of challenges related to access and quality of education entrenching social stratification and injustice in education and life chances. Satellite schools were hastily put up with no proper planning hence have several anomalies that needed attention. However, little had been researched on the learners’ experiences of access to education in satellite schools. Indeed, as far as I could ascertain, there was a scholarly silence on the learners’ views and concerns on how they experienced attending these satellite schools. It was against this scholarship lacuna that this study sought to shed light on the lived experiences of learners at satellite schools which were located in former commercial farms in the context of access to education.

## **Methodology**

The study was undertaken in 2020, about 20 years after the first LRP was initiated to check the progress the Government of Zimbabwe had so far made in the provision of access to education to learners of the new farmers. This study adopted the narrative inquiry to interrogate the lived experiences of three learners who were selected using convenience sampling. The choice of the participants was based on their accessibility to me and their familiarity with the phenomenon under study. The learners’ narratives were complemented by the three teachers’ views. I employed the narrative inquiry because the study wanted to unearth the learners’ current experiences within institutional and social contexts, what Kushner (2000, p. 63) calls “locating the individual in the recent sociology of their lives”. As the aim was to understand the prevailing conditions in and around the school of these learners which affected their access to education, narrative inquiry was therefore most appropriate because it offered in-depth descriptions of participants’ everyday realities which were not apparent to policymakers as they lacked detailed understanding of the local context (Cropley, 2015). I share Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) thinking that qualitative inquiry prioritises the experience of the individual, the realm of the personal. This is because personal experience is understood most effectively through narrative, for “experience is the stories people live” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). This confirms Kushner’s opinions that narrative inquiry uses people’s lives as “contexts in which to read the significance and the meaning of the program” (p. 33). Also, the narrative inquiry ensured that the impact of the LRP on access to education provided an opportunity for the learners and I to go

through the reflective and generative process of co-constructing narrative experience as “told, learned and written” (p. 85).

The use of the qualitative approach promoted the generation of in-depth data through the participants’ thick description of their experiences in accessing education. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data to comprehend and obtain an in-depth appreciation of the phenomenon presented by the LRP within its real natural setting (Ledford & Gast, 2018) and were, therefore, an appropriate research approach that produced a detailed description and a critical analysis of the impact of the LRP on access to education. In light of the above conviction, the study captured data from stories and interviews with the learners and teachers to construct narratives of the three learners. Crolley (2015) contends that narrative researchers are concerned with life as it is experienced on a continuum – experiences that are contextualised over a reasonably period of time. As such, the study reflected the participants’ everyday experiences, joys, and frustrations.

The data from the semi-structured interviews with the three learners and teachers were audio-taped, and then transcribed into narratives by the researcher and later transformed into textual data which were then sent to the learners for member checking to “verify if the data lived to their experiences” (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802). Thereafter, I analysed the data using thematic analysis. Data validity was enhanced through member checking, where “themes were sent back to the participating learners and teachers who made verifications whether the data matched or not to their lived experiences” in accessing education (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1802). Ethical issues were attended to by seeking permission from the Ministry of Education to carry out the study in the purposively selected satellite school. Parents of the three learners signed consent forms on behalf of their children and I assured the participants that the information was to remain confidential. I used pseudo names to hide the learners and teachers’ identities in reporting the findings.

#### *Data collection site*

Data were gathered from a conveniently sampled Zimbabwean satellite school offering primary education situated in one of the former commercial farms in a district located in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. The choice of the satellite school was based on its accessibility to me and its location in the former commercial farm. The primary school was established in 2000 during the LRP to cater for the children who had been abruptly moved from the rural schools which were near their homes. 20 years after its creation, the satellite school lagged behind in terms of infrastructure and educational provisions as compared to either rural or urban schools found in Zimbabwe. This school received a School Improvement Grant from UNICEF under the supervision of the government. The grant was introduced in 2015 and lasted until 2018. Its purpose was initially to pay levies to the orphans and vulnerable children, buy teaching and learning materials as well as to make minor repairs. The school did not receive any grant other than the book donations from the international community. The school had 210 pupils at the time of the interviews.

#### *Participants*

The study presents narratives of three students whose pseudonyms are Farai, Tendai and Tsitsi. The three students were thirteen, fifteen and sixteen years old though they were still attending primary school. The pseudonyms of the three interviewed teachers’ names are Mr. Ncube, Miss

*Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education, 2021, 16(1), pp. 58-71.*

*ISSN 1718-4770 (c) Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence*

*<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>*

Zuze and Mrs Moyo were also used. The parents of these learners were beneficiaries of the LRP and eked a living from subsistence farming of food crops yet the areas in which they lived now were and are suitable for cattle ranching. As such, the learners had to attend these schools since the schools were in their localities.

## Findings

### *Farai's story*

Farai was sixteen years old and attended grade 6. He had to get up early daily to get to school. The interview revealed that the latest time he could wake up was at 05:00 hours to get to school by 08:00 hours after walking a distance of eight kilometres:

“I attend school three days per week on average because 100% attendance is impossible owing to the long distance. Mental fatigue gets the better of me during the learning process because of the long distance. After completing grade six this year I intend to join my older siblings who left for South Africa to get employed on farms picking oranges and herding cattle. I am not the only one in the community contemplating to quit school because of distance. At least I can read and write though not effectively.”

His teacher, Mrs Moyo, in agreement echoed that Farai had the potential to do well but the distance he had to travel was limiting his potential as he arrived late almost every day and his fatigue hindered his concentration. Unfortunately for Farai, he got to school tired and in most cases missed the first lesson. After another tedious journey he arrived home late in the day and did not have the energy to do homework after school.

From the semi-structured interview, it emerged that the distance was prohibitive for him to attend the Early Childhood Development Programme of which he says:

“My parents used to tell me that I was unfortunate to begin school late unlike my relatives in rural areas who had the privilege to attend schools located within two kilometres radius from their homes. Had I been fortunate enough to reside near the school, I could be finishing secondary education now.”

Mrs Moyo confirmed that:

“One visit to Farai's home shows that there are many potential learners who are not yet in schools because of their age. Access to Early Childhood Education programme in Zimbabwe begins when one is four years old and thus it is inhumane to expect such young children to travel 10 kilometres to and from school.”

It also emerged from the interviews that Farai sometimes had no teachers to attend to him and thus spent the time playing games at school. The school was boring for him and every now and then, he spent most of his time doing nothing because his teacher was often absent. In the teacher

interviews, the three teachers admitted that they sometimes had to be absent to look for provisions for their upkeep as the school was quite a distance from social services such as banks and supermarkets where they could access money and food respectively. Farai described the infrastructure and facilities at the school as follows:

“When we are in what we call classroom which is a depilated room that had been used to accommodate the commercial farmer’s workers, we sit on the floor with no chairs and tables to sit and write on correspondingly. I wish my parents were rich enough to send me to any boarding school within the district. I could even do better than what I am doing here.”

This indicates that infrastructure and facilities at the school were inadequate and hence benefits associated with them were far from being realised.

#### *Tsitsi’s story*

Tsitsi was 13 years old and attended grade six. Access to schools in her area was not constrained by the long distance since she stayed within the vicinity of the school. She was one such lucky child who did not endure the long distances as she covered less than two kilometres per day. In the interview, she happily recounted that:

*“While we have a limited number of schools in this former commercial farm because the population density contained in here does not warrant the establishment of many schools, I am lucky because my new home is less than two kilometres from the school. So I get early to school, do whatever I am supposed to do. At the end of the day, I get home before sunset and do all my homework before I go to bed.”*

On being asked about the challenges she was encountering at the school, she said:

“We seem to be in a dilemma because one way or the other we need to go to school but the school we attend is poorly resourced in terms of human and material resources. We don’t have textbooks, tables, and benches. Teachers sometimes are absent from school. My parents are so poor that they can’t afford to send me to an adequately resourced schools, let alone boarding schools.”

This shows that the learners had limited access to what was expected at educational institutions because their new homes were located in the former commercial farm. Additionally, poverty did not permit her to be enrolled at a boarding school with better facilities. Mr Ncube, one of the teachers at the school, confirmed that most of the parents were knee deep in poverty to an extent of not affording to send their children to mission schools found in the province.



### *Tendai's story*

For Tendai, a fifteen-years-old grade five student, getting to school was a mammoth task as he had to travel more than 20 kilometres per day. "When I get to school, I would be pretty tired that concentration on school work is hardly possible and that affects my liking school as well as my academic performance." His teacher revealed that his parents depended on subsistence farming and the situation was aggravated by the fact that their area was not meant for crop farming but rather for animal rearing. Resultantly it was a poor family that could not afford to send its children to boarding schools. The teacher, Miss Zuze and Tendai confirmed the experiences of Tsitsi and Farai in their narratives that the school infrastructure was not user friendly; it was troubled by the non-availability of resources; and that the teachers did not often avail themselves at school for varied reasons.

## **Discussion of Findings**

While the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 and the Education Act (1987) set the stage for desegregation and equality in accessing education by all, limited effort was done to level the playing ground in terms of establishing schools within the five kilometres radius in the former commercial farms as envisioned in the Director Circular Policy Number 5 of 2011 (GoZ, 2012a). This suggests that, while the new indigenous farmers benefitted from acquiring land, the land reform disadvantaged their children in terms of access to education. This suggests that the principle of justice which accords priority to liberty cannot be compromised for any other benefit. The study revealed that the situation in the new resettlement areas in Zimbabwe represented two sides of the same coin wherein the adult population enjoyed the right to ownership of land; whereas the children were excluded from accessing educational opportunities that other students enjoyed in rural areas, not to speak of urban centres. In that way, the children who represent the least-advantaged members had been denied their human rights and thus justice from this discernment had been compromised. As a result, the limited access to education by learners in the studied satellite school reflects justice denied because the result is an education marked by enduring and inequitable access which in the future will choke some of the learners' life chances because of their credentials obtained from such satellite schools. Admittedly, Harare argued that the Ministry did not have many options at its disposal but for expediency, had to convert old farm houses and tobacco barns into learning infrastructures for the children who had moved with their parents into these areas (GoZ, 2012b). In the process, the Ministry satisfied partially the child's right to education but overlooked the Director's Circular Number 5 of 2011 on distance between schools thereby unintentionally worked against its beliefs and interests, demonstrating a paradox because what mattered was the availability of a farmhouse or tobacco barn to stand in for school infrastructures yet learners had to travel a prohibitive distance of approximately 20 kilometres to access schools. I agree with Mubika and Bukaliya (2011) who note that in Zimbabwe the policy for the location of a school, stipulates that a school should be established within a radius of five kilometres from the residence of the school-going age. This stipulation was disregarded when the satellite schools were established.

From the accounts of the three learners enrolled at a purposively sampled Zimbabwean satellite school complimented by the teacher's narratives, it emerged that equitable access to education was inhibited by factors associated with distance and population density. That could have been

so because initially, the population of residents in the farms could not make a reasonable number that warranted the establishment of a school. As for the old breed of farmers, they sent their children to boarding schools or drove them to faraway schools since they could afford to do so (GoZ, 2012b). This means that learners from the new breed of farmers had to travel long distances on foot to access schools because of their poverty. If they were rich, they could still send their children to better resourced schools far away from their farms. As confirmed by Mandina (2012), satellite schools were not centrally located and some children were travelling distances of up to 20 km to and from school. Travelling to distant schools for long does not correspond to the government of Zimbabwe's Director's Circular Number 5 of 2011. Learners in this study experienced hardship associated with distance in terms of accessing education. The long distances the learners had to travel affected the age at which they were able to begin school. Beginners were prevented from attending schools early and the satellite schools had to enrol those above the expected age. A student like Farai was sixteen years old and was still at primary level, yet his age group under normal circumstances was supposed to be in form three, about to complete secondary education. The three learners' ages indicated that they were far above their grade level; hence they had been delayed in accessing education.

The study revealed that there were many children in the farms who could be in school but their ages did not permit them to travel 10 kilometres to school. This reflects poor implementation of the Director's Circular Number 5 of 2011, ICESCR and EFA which are important tools whose locus is to advance the right to education for all, regardless of the socio-economic and geographical contexts of the learners because education is a right captured in the Bill of Human Rights. Rawls (1999) also argues that social and economic inequalities are to be mitigated to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society, consistent with the just savings principle. This suggests learners aged four or five are regarded as the most vulnerable in any society and thus must benefit most by accessing education. As if that was not enough to the learners' challenges, the distance from their homes to school affected the time they arrived at school causing them to miss every first lesson of the day. School attendance was also poor as revealed from the narratives of learners. Absenteeism leading to dropouts and subsequently to low completion rates was an indicator of poor access to education. Revelations by the Thematic Committee on Millennium Goals in Zimbabwe show that absenteeism is a cause of concern and retards progress towards the achievement of universal education as has been envisioned (GoZ, 2012b). Consequently, access to the satellite schools was fraught with challenges. Distance to and from school was unbearable to young children of five years (on the assumption that a child goes to school from four years when starting Early Childhood Development). Additionally, enrolment in satellite schools were low as evidenced from the First Report of the Thematic Committee on Millennium Development Goals on the provision of Education in resettled area, which reveals that the 1:40 teacher-pupil ratio established by the government of Zimbabwe was not ideal and realistic in these schools because of too low enrolments that may mean a teacher may end up teaching two grades combined (GoZ, 2012b). Mavhundutse et al. (2012) argue that the fast track schools placed new skills demands on the teacher, for example, handling composite classes that were prevalent in satellite schools.

It emerged from the study that the students were not spared the ordeal of facing fatigue after long-distance travelling. That impeded their chance of doing homework as they arrived home tired. This finding is inconsistent to Rawls' theory of justice which argues that the "subject of

*Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education, 2021, 16(1), pp. 58-71.*  
*ISSN 1718-4770 (c) Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence*  
*<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>*

justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation” (1999, p. 6). Teachers were also to blame as they sometimes absent themselves from schools citing unjustifiable reasons for their absence.

It was evident from the learners’ narrative that infrastructure of the satellite schools befitted a description not anything close to school buildings. The satellite schools were poorly equipped in terms of manpower and educational resources. The land reform was catastrophically ill-planned when viewed from the economics of education provisions. Before moving to the new resettlement areas, learners were better off in their former schools located in the rural areas than they were today. The emergency of the land reform which led to the establishment of satellite schools deprived them of their social rights. While the adult population celebrated land ownership, little did they infer and understand the injustices to be meted to their children. In that same line of argument, the satellite schools did happen to have critical shortages of resources as aptly confirmed by Mavhundutse et al. (2012) that, “schools that were rapidly set up to cater for the children of the settlers in the farms were not properly planned for and therefore do not have the basic infrastructure, facilities, and resources expected in normal schools” (p. 298). As also noted in the report of the Thematic Committee on Millennium Goals on the Provision of Education in Resettled areas satellite schools suffered from a scarcity of resources such as furniture and learning and teaching material. Children were seated on timber bricks on the floor (GoZ, 2012a). The state of the infrastructure, teachers’ accommodation, and ablution facilities in satellite schools range from non-existence; huts made of the pole, dagga, and thatch; dilapidated old farmhouses or tobacco barns to two classroom blocks and two houses and ablution facilities (GoZ, 2012b). This suggests that the *Convention against Discrimination in Education* is inhibited because the treaty expresses that there must be equivalent standards of education in all public educational institutions of the same level and conditions in relation to quality. This is far from being achievable considering the nature of problems encountered by the learners in the studied Zimbabwean satellite school.

The study revealed that despite the acquisition of land by the Indigenous Zimbabweans through the Land Reform Programme, the new farmers were not rich enough to send their children to boarding schools or drive them to already established schools, hence their children were left with no option but to access education very late and to travel long distances. This defeats the claims of Rawls’ theory of justice which argues that “the basic structure establish certain equal basic liberties for all and make sure that social and economic inequalities work for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged against a background of fair opportunity” (Rawls, 1999, p. 261). Closely related to the distance were early dropouts of learners hence the completion rate was affected and skills, attitudes and knowledge expected at completion of school not fully accomplished, leading to the establishment and entrenchment of the poverty circle. As stated by Lumadi (2019), education should be regarded as every child’s necessity and not a luxury of the affluent alone because “poverty is a condition that erodes the learner’s future prospects” (p. 1). As such, most legal frameworks and treaties on education seek to address this condition.

## Recommendations

From the study, distance problems had impacted negatively on access to education and had brought other education-related problems. Given the expansion of the motor industry in Zimbabwe, it might be considered to involve the corporate sector in the commitment to education by both the parents and the government. access to education by learners in former commercial farms could be averted if hands were joined where the learners could be transported on daily basis from their homes to schools by commuter omnibus. While this is a viable alternative, it needs proper planning and cooperation among stakeholders. That could alleviate problems of late coming; the late beginning of schools; school dropouts; and lack of concentration at school work that could have been affected by fatigue.

While home-schooling was and is popular in the developed world, its implementation in the former commercial farms could present challenges to parents when preparing and delivering appropriate lessons considering their literacy level. However, when implemented, learners could access education in the comfort of their homes under familiar territories and their local environment. In this way, learners could be home-schooled in the early years of education until they can walk those long distances to the satellite schools. In the event that home schooling is not a plausible policy within these areas, then Early Childhood Centres located in the communities could be established to allow learners to access education at an early age.

If the government is serious in establishing schools in the farms, then it should provide basic minimum resources in form of infrastructure, textbooks and instructional materials necessary for meaningful learning to take place. This is only possible if the economy is stable. What the country needs then, are major socio-political and economic reforms which will assist abate inflation which in 2019 was at 500% and in February 2020 reached 540%. There is no sign of things getting better. Otherwise, emergency of satellite schools in poorly run farms represents a gross travesty of social injustice to the learners who attend such ‘schools’.

## Conclusion

The main thrust of this study was to understand the lived experiences of learners at satellite schools in Zimbabwe against the background of the educational guarantees contained in international rights instruments and Zimbabwe’s constitution, the Education Act (1987) and the Director Circular Number 5 of 2011 on the provision of education to all. What is enshrined in the UDHR, ICESCR, and EFA with regards to the children’s right to education is also depicted in the Zimbabwean Constitution (2013) and the Education Act (1987) which underscores the importance of ensuring that every member in the society has a right to education. These reference documents were useful in discerning that the satellite schools represent a challenge to the right to education.

Despite the fact that the Land Reform Programme leveraged the right to land and created a pathway for the socio-economic development to the formerly marginalised Zimbabwean populace in the country’s mainstream economy, it presented to the children of this group the injustices associated with the lack of access to education, thereby hindering the child’s right to education. The paper argues that the challenges these innocent learners faced affected them

*Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 2021, 16(1), pp. 58-71.

ISSN 1718-4770 (c) Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence

<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>

negatively in accessing education and as such, proposes that Zimbabwe has to consider seriously how to improve learners' access to education in satellite schools. In this study, the limited access to education by learners in satellite schools reflected justice denied because the result is an education marked by inequitable access which in the future will choke some of the learners' life chances because of their credentials obtained from such satellite schools. So the provision of educational opportunities in new resettlement areas is the unfinished business on the child's right to education; and as such stringent measures must be taken to address the trenchant challenges in accessing a decent education. I conclude that when there is an unequal access to education based on socio-economic status and geographical location, this reinforces social inequalities and future unequal opportunities in accessing societal resources in the learners' lives. If this continues unabated, it privileges those who can afford to send their children to better schools, instead of developing a scheme of justice that treats all citizens fairly. Thus, the LRP did support the social justice agenda when contextualised in terms of land ownership but left glaring glitches on the children's right to education. So, restricted access to education in the studied satellite schools in Zimbabwe constrained the leveraging of the human rights agenda.

## References

- Besapa, H., & Moyo, N. (2013). *Zimbabwe in crisis: Mugabe's policies and failures*. Ontario, Canada: Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI).
- Birt, L. Scott, S. Cavers, D. Campbell, C. & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(12), 1802-1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cropley, A. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: A practice-oriented introduction for students of psychology and education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Riga, Latvia: Zinātne. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285471178>
- Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ). (1987). Education Act. Harare, Zimbabwe: Printflow.
- Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ). (2012a). Director's Circular Number 5. Harare, Zimbabwe: Prinflow.
- Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ). (2012b). *First report of the thematic committee on Millennium Development Goals on the provision of education in resettled areas*. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.
- Heymann, J., Raub, A., Cassola, A. (2014). Constitutional rights to education and their relationship to national policy and school enrolment. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 39, 131–141.
- Jenjekwa, V. (2013). Access and quality in education in satellite schools: The case study of Zivingwi Secondary School in Gutu District, Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 5(2), 15-21.
- Kapingidza, S. (2014). *The Social impact of the Zimbabwean crisis on access and quality of education: Examining teachers' unruly practices in rural secondary schools*. Netherlands, The Hague: International Institute of Social Studies.
- Kushner, S. (2000). *Personalizing evaluation*. London: Sage

- Ledford, J. R., & Gast, D. L. (2018). *Single case research methodology*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Lumadi, M. W. (2019). Curriculum reform in disadvantaged communities: A critical pedagogy. *Africa Education Review*, 16(6), 1-3.
- Mandina, S. (2012). Quality rural secondary school education in Zimbabwe: Challenges and remedies. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3(5), 768-774.
- Mapako, F., & Mareva, R. (2013). The concept of free primary school education in Zimbabwe: Myth or reality, *Educational Research International*, 1(1), 135-145.
- Mavhundutse, O., Munetsi, C., Mavhuto, A., Mavhunga, P. J., Kangai, P., & Gatsi, R. (2012). Emerging teacher education needs as a result of land reform in Zimbabwe: A focus on new resettlement areas. *Academic Research International*, 3(2), 298-305.
- Mavhunga, P. J., Madondo, M., & Phiri, M. (2009). Education for all: A mirage? *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, 21(1), 26-47.
- Mubikwa, A. K., & Bukaliya, R. (2011). Education for all: Issues and challenges: The case for Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, 1(4), 313-325.
- Mutema, E. P. (2012). The fast track land reform programme: Reflecting on the challenges and opportunities for resettled former farm workers at Fairfield Farm in Gweru District, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 14(5), 96-106.
- Muzingili, T., Muchinako, G. A., & Shava, N.L. (2017). A disturbing story: Unravelling the educational conundrums of children learning in Zimbabwe's resettlement areas. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, 29(3), 29-43.
- Mwiinde, L., & Muzingili, T. (2020). Education on the edges: Reflections on satellite schools in Binga, Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Work*, 10(2), 101-108.
- Raftopoulous, B., & Mlambo, A. (2010). *Becoming Zimbabwe*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- UN General Assembly. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) , pp. 71. Available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/043/88/IMG/NR004388.pdf?OpenElement>
- UN General Assembly. (1966). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations Treaty Series 993, pp. 3. Available at: <http://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/UNTS/Volume%20993/v993.pdf>.
- UNESCO.(1960). Convention Against Discrimination in Education. Available at: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL\\_ID=12949&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) (12.07.13).
- Yanicki, S. M., Kushner, K. E., & Reutter, L. (2015). Social inclusion/exclusion as matters of social (in)justice: A call for nursing action. *Nursing Inquiry*, 22(2), 121-133.