

The Effects of Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company (ZISCO) Industrial Retrenchment on Learners' Educational Opportunities in Two Secondary Schools in Torwood Area

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Abstract

This study set out to investigate the effects of ZISCO Steel industrial retrenchment on educational opportunities of learners in two secondary schools in Torwood area of Kwekwe in Zimbabwe. The study was confined to the effects of ZISCO retrenchment on educational opportunities of school children, the strategies employed to cope with the challenges of retrenchment as well as the effects of these strategies on educational opportunities. The researchers were guided by Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. A qualitative research paradigm was employed in which a case study research design was conducted with a purposively selected sample of 16 teachers and 12 parents; and a stratified sample of 50 secondary school students. Questionnaires for pupils and interviews for parents and teachers were data gathering tools employed in this study. The case study brought the results that ZISCO retrenchment and the strategies employed to cope with it had a plethora of effects that militate against pupils' educational opportunities such as hunger, lack of school fees, malnourishment, dropout, broken families, poor health facilities, absenteeism, demotivated learners, and lack of time to study. Basing on the findings, the researchers recommended that the government should implement policies that promote social and economic development to allow for an investors free atmosphere that would help to resuscitate ZISCO, downstream industries, schools and hospitals. Resultantly this would create better learning opportunities for the learners.

Keywords: ZISCO, industrial retrenchment, educational opportunities, learners,

1. Introduction

Since the controversial election victory, the Zimbabwean economy has struggled with massive company closure, job losses, and electricity shortages. It is also failing to woo foreign investors (Daily News 27 November, 2016). One such extremely affected is the city of Kwekwe in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe (Zindoga, 2012). The fall of Kwekwe has been described by Zigara (2015) who reports that:

The city's vibrancy, its fast paced life and the smoke from most of the industries are now all gone. Most industrial infrastructure is slowly turning out to be white elephants and the ripple effects of their collapse are affecting the economy. Thousands of workers lost their jobs and now find themselves on the streets following the closure or downsizing of companies such as ZISCO Steel, Sable Chemicals, Lancashire Steel and ZIMASCO.

Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company (ZISCO) located just outside Kwekwe, in Redcliff in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe, used to be the largest iron steel works in Zimbabwe which employed over 5000 workers at its peak but today the company resembles a museum (Zindoga, 2012; Zigara, 2015). Over the years the company has faced many operational problems and has been dogged with mismanagement and corruption scandals (Daily News 27 November, 2016).

As of early 2008 the company was producing less than 12,500 tones, way below the break – even capacity of 25,000 tones. It was wholly owned by the government of Zimbabwe up until it entered into a deal with ESSAR Africa Holdings Ltd. A new company between the government and ESSAR Africa, New-Zimsteel, collapsed citing legacy debt amounting to \$200m, lack of cooperation from the government and disagreement over control of vast iron deposits (New Zimbabwe 10 January, 2017). In December 2015, all the contracts for ZISCO's 3000 workers were terminated on three months' notice (Daily News 27 November, 2016). They had gone for months without salary and had outstanding salaries as well in some of the months. The collapse of ZISCO sent ripple effects to downstream companies which relied on it on raw materials for example ZimChem Refineries lost 75% of its business because ZISCO used to provide 75% of its raw materials (New Zimbabwe 10 January, 2017). The researchers felt that besides the collapse

of downstream industries, the fall of ZISCO had resounding effects on other institutions like the family and education. With this focus the researchers felt that no detailed research has been done to take stock of how retrenchment and economic hardship as the result of the collapse of ZISCO have affected educational opportunities of secondary students in the Torwood area of Kwekwe.

2. Statement of the problem

ZISCO and downstream industries have collapsed. This has resulted in retrenchment of workers whose effects have cascaded to affect educational opportunities of children.

Research question

- What effects does ZISCO industrial retrenchment has on pupils' educational opportunities?

Sub research questions

- What are the effects of ZISCO industrial retrenchment on pupils' academic performance?
- What strategies were taken to cushion the community from effects of ZISCO industrial retrenchment?
- How do the strategies to cope with ZISCO industrial retrenchment affect pupils' educational opportunities?

Research objectives

- To establish the effects of ZISCO industrial retrenchment on pupils' academic performance.
- To explore the strategies which were taken to cushion community from effects of ZISCO industrial retrenchment?
- To find out how strategies to cope with ZISCO industrial retrenchment affect pupils' educational opportunities

Physical boundaries: The research study was confined to two secondary schools in Torwood area in Kwekwe, Zimbabwe.

Conceptual boundaries: This study focused on the effects of ZISCO retrenchment on educational opportunities of secondary school pupils.

Theoretical framework: This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Various development theories place the emphasis on the nature and nurture interaction in the development of children, but Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory looks at a child's environment in terms of its quality and context (Witt, 2012; Donald et al, 2010:34). Bronfenbrenner (2008) contends that a child develops within a complex system of relationships which are affected by multiple levels of the surrounding community. He proposed an ecological systems model of the lifelong progressive accommodations individuals make to the changing environments in which they develop. Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that a person's surroundings, including his/her home, school, work, church, neighbourhood, economy, culture and government, all have an influence on the way one develops (Donald, et al., 2010:34).

This study focused on children's educational opportunities within the context of a system of relationships that forms their environment. In this regard the ecological perspective was found applicable since it focuses on interaction between an individual and the environment ie the fall of ZISCO, and its ripple effects on the learner. The Ecological Systems Theory views the child's development in terms of the reciprocal influences between the child and the multiple levels of the surrounding environment (Berk, 2007:24). Donald, et al. (2010:36) indicate that the ecological theory is based on the interdependence between different organisms and their physical environment. The ecological perspective, as espoused by Bronfenbrenner (2005, 2008), provides a framework from which multiple contextual factors affecting the educational opportunities of children can be viewed. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994:572) suggest that individual development is a culmination of many direct and an indirect influence, which either facilitate or impede the individual's potential.

In the ecological theory the relationships between organisms and their environment are seen holistically; therefore, all parts affect the system as a whole. According to Bray, Gooskens, Khan, Moses and Seekings (2010), the system is greater than the sum of its parts. So, how the children think, feel, behave and develop as persons is inevitably linked to the social grouping, forces and relationships that make up their environment, for example families, peer groups, the school and other social groupings, the socio-economic forces, cultural, political and power

relationships. Thus, things that happen in one part of the system can affect the other parts, and ultimately the ecological system as a whole. Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple throughout the other layers (Bray et al., 2010; Witt, 2012:6).

The model is of paramount importance, since it provides a useful theoretical framework for examining the effects of ZISCO retrenchment and economic hardships on educational opportunities of school children. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model posits that the child's development occurs within an interactive system of nested influences between the child and the environment. While multiple environments and mechanisms exist, this study only examined how the fall of ZISCO affected educational opportunities by focusing on environments, which are, the family/home, the neighbourhood, peers, the school, health centres, and the economy.

3. Research methodology

This study hinged on the qualitative research paradigm. Specifically, the researchers employed a case study research design. The researchers also chose a case study to carry out the study because of its ability to use many different sources of data collection (Yin,2009 :19). The researchers felt the case study method was the most appropriate because it provides a great amount of description and detail. Researchers can learn from each other , it provides an in-depth assessment of a case , data is easy to obtain from various historical events and a case study is holistic in nature when compared to other methods. In addition case studies involves looking at a case or phenomenon in real life context , usually employing many types of data (Robson ,2002 in Cohen , Manion and Morrison , 2011:290).

Punch(2005) however argues that the results of a case study might not generalize to others. In other words , the experiences , background and orientation might not apply to other people. To circumvent this , the researchers tried to reach out a cross section of the society to find common assumptions and experiences on the effects of ZISCO retrenchment on pupils' educational opportunities . The researchers also carefully chose the important stake holders , that is the parents ,the teachers , pupils.

Case studies recognize and accept that they are many variables operating in a single case and hence to catch the implication of the variables usually requires more than one tool

for data collection and many sources of evidence (Cohen , Manion and Morrison , 2011:290).

Sample and sampling techniques

The researchers used convenience and purposive sampling techniques in selecting 12 parents,16 teachers . 50 O' Level learners were selected purposive and stratified sampling techniques. When using purposive sampling technique, the researcher has to pick up only such sample which is relevant to the study and leave out all others so that the purpose of the study is not defeated (Sidhu, 2001:265).In this case the sample categories were selected on the basis that they had direct experiences on the effects of ZISCO retrenchment specifically on pupils' educational opportunities

Data collection methods

This study employed questionnaire for pupils because they were many and vast data could be gathered in a short period of time. Interviews were administered to parents and teachers because they were fewer and they required a lot of time.

Data analysis technique

The data gathered was subjected to qualitative analysis. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statement about relationship and underlying themes (Marshall and Rossman, 2006:154). Cohen, Manion and Morisson (2011:463) report that qualitative data analysis is a rigorous and logical process through which data are given meaning. Raw data have no meaning; the interpretive act brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader through the written report. Qualitative data analysis therefore transforms data into findings (Patton 2002 cited in Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The researcher gathered overwhelming data in the study. The data was coded and the effects of ZISCO retrenchment on pupils' educational opportunities were extracted from the actual words that were taken verbatim from the respondents.

4. Discussion of findings

The findings of this study appear in categories in which answers to the research questions are provided. These categories comprise the effects of ZISCO industrial retrenchment on pupils' academic performance, the strategies employed to cope with the challenges faced and the effects of these strategies on pupils' educational opportunities.

The effects of ZISCO retrenchment on pupil's academic performance.

The participants were asked to state the specific effects of industrial retrenchment and economic hardships on pupil's educational opportunities. All the participants lamented that the fall of ZISCO spelt doom in the whole town of Kwekwe. The following are sample of common responses from the interviewed parents:

Parent respondent 1: *We were retrenched after spending many months without salary and we were not given a full salary in some of the months we were paid. As a result we found it difficult to pay school fees for our children.*

Parent respondent 2: *Besides paying school fees we find it hard to raise other requirements like books and uniforms as a result children perform poorly.*

Parent respondent 3: *I am in trouble, my children are being chased from school because they are in fees arrears. I am trying to fight to get food for my children first. They have not been attending school for weeks.*

Parent respondent 4: *I am failing to raise food let alone fees. When children have chance to attend school they won't concentrate because they will be hungry and fatigued.*

Parent respondent 4: *Most children are hungry, malnourished and sick. The hospital has closed due to lack of funding because it was also funded by ZISCO which collapsed. Children find it hard to get medical services, obviously this affects their attendance and overall learning at school.*

The teachers also concurred with the common responses from the parents. The following are some of their sample responses:

Teacher respondent 1: *Most pupils dropped out of school due to failure to raise fees and have resorted to menial jobs to make a living.*

Teacher respondent 2: *The pupils we have at our school lack concentration they are hungry, weak, tired and stressed. Their families have broken.*

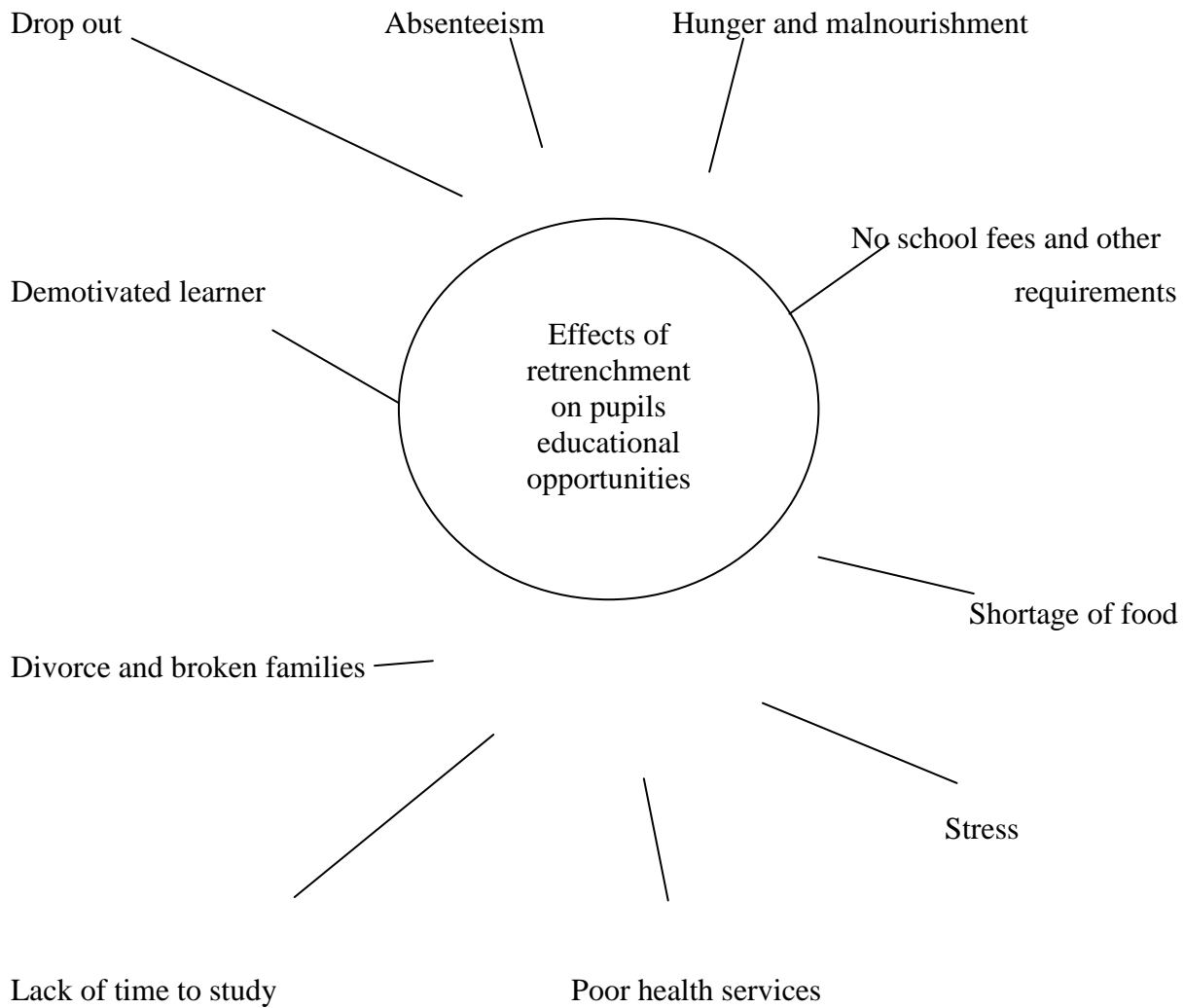
Teacher respondent 3: *We have high cases of absenteeism here, pupils will be doing other things to survive. As a result of erratic attendance, and most pupils underperform.*

Teacher respondent 4: *Most of our learners are not motivated to learn. Their aspirations have been thwarted by the collapse of ZISCO. They no longer have role models because the artisans who have been retrenched are now littering the streets and are doing menial tasks to earn a living.*

From the responses of pupils, thirty three (66%) indicated that they have been struggling to get school fees and books because their parents are out of employment. Twenty nine (58%) confessed that they are facing food shortages hence they find it hard to learn.

From the responses above, the participants agreed that the collapse of ZISCO has militating effects on educational opportunities as shown on fig 1 below:

Fig 1: Summary of findings on the effects of ZISCO retrenchment on pupils, educational opportunities



The strategies employed to cope with the challenges industrial retrenchment and their effects on learners' educational opportunities.

The interviewed parents raised some of strategies by the community to survive in economic hardships. Below are some of the sample responses:

Parent respondent 6: *We have to resort to wood and vegetable vending but the challenge is that people have no money to buy hence we are failing to raise money for education through vending.*

Parent respondent 7: *Most workers have opted for artisanal mining to make a living.*

Parent respondent 8: *Some workers have left for neighbouring countries like Botswana and South Africa to look for employment leaving their families behind.*

Parent respondent 9: *At least we are happy that we have the feeding program running in schools. The burden of looking for food has been lessened during school days.*

Most pupils and teachers concurred with the parents that the following strategies to cope were employed:

- Wood and vegetable vending.
- Dropout and looking for employment.
- Artisanal mining activities by school pupils.
- Feeding programs in schools.

Generally the coping strategies had their challenges on educational opportunities of learners as shown below:

Vending; this has short term benefits however such an activity would imply absenteeism and lack of time to study if learners are involved.

Looking for employment elsewhere; this means that there are a lot of child headed families and even broken families which are full of stress. The effects of such families militate against the educational opportunities of pupils.

Artisanal mining; if this is done by school pupils it would imply absenteeism, dropout and even crime. The open pits that are left by this activity are hazardous .They create dangerous pools in which pupils would drown or may be breeding sites for various diseases to which pupils are vulnerable.

Feeding programs; this has been effective during school days. However pupils still face the problem of shortage of food when they are out of school i.e during weekends and school holidays.

Recommendations

- An investor free environment should be created to resuscitate ZISCO and downstream Industries, schools and hospitals.
- The ministry of education should keep on monitoring the resource base and other needs of these affected schools and try to render aid where possible.
- Parents and teachers should be on alert since the crisis situation due to the fall of ZISCO may render children vulnerable and prone to various forms of abuse
- The feeding program introduced in schools should also be extended to the families to cater for children when they are out of school i.e weekends and holidays .
- There is need for environmentalists to check the activities of artisanal mining because it has been risky and death traps for school pupils who fall in the holes and pools

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