
MANAGING QUALITY IN THE NON-FORMAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF INDEPENDENT COLLEGES, MIDLANDS PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

Edward Mudzimba, Fainos Chokera, Tendai Ngwenya

Ministry of Education and Culture, Dorset Secondary School, Gweru, Zimbabwe
Lecturer Department of Marketing, Midlands State University, Gweru Zimbabwe
Lecturer Department of Marketing, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT: *The study is an evaluation of the quality of education offered by small independent colleges in Zimbabwe. Focus was on (1) the level of compliance of independent colleges to the government requirements on quality education (2) perceptions held by students on the quality of education they experience in the independent colleges and (3) challenges faced by independent colleges in providing quality education. Data was collected from the 320 respondents being students, staff of the independent colleges and representatives from the ministry of education and culture and the Zimbabwe Council for Education (ZIMSEC). The main instruments of the study are questionnaires and interviews. The study found out that Independent colleges are failing to meet governments requirements on quality education and their students have negative perceptions towards the quality of education they are receiving. Lack of funding emerged as the main challenge affecting independent colleges in providing quality education. The study recommends the government to strengthen its monitoring and supervisory efforts in the non-formal education sector. Independent colleges are also urged to seek strategic partnerships with other players locally or internationally to reduce their financial burden.*

KEYWORDS: Quality, Non - Formal Education, Independent Colleges

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe is currently ranked the best African nation in terms of literacy rate (UNDP 2010). The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) statistical digest of June 2010 highlighted that the country's literacy rate had risen to 92% up from 85%, this is a plus to a government which upon gaining independence in 1980 declared education a basic human right and devised several strategies to ensure that education is accessible to its citizens. One of the strategies adopted by the government which is credited with this success has been the partnering with the private sector in the provision of education. Since the enactment of the Education Act [Chapter 25:04], Zimbabwe has witnessed a tremendous growth in the number of private educational institutions mainly through the emergence of large as well as small independent colleges.

In most countries there is a general feeling that the rapid expansion if not massification of education will result in the deterioration of quality. Grisay and Mahlck (1991) urged the governments of developing nations to put more emphasis and particular attention to the issues concerning educational quality and improvement strategies. The Zimbabwe Education Act [Chapter 25:04] defines an independent college as any educational institution, other than a Government educational institution, which maintains, manages or conducts any educational

course or provides face-to-face tuition for reward on students who have completed primary education or have attained the age of sixteen years, whichever is the earlier, but does not include a school. In Zimbabwe these institutions derive their mandate to operate from the Zimbabwe education Act [Chapter 25:04] which provides for the establishment of non-formal educational platforms. The Non-formal mode complements the formal mode of learning as a way of affording equal opportunity to education for everyone both old and young.

According to the Ministry of education, arts, sports and culture's annual report of 1998 the non-formal education was created to cater for dropouts from the formal education system and also pupils who fail to get enough ordinary or advanced level subjects to proceed to the next level. It also caters for those students who fail to attend formal education because of their employment commitments. Some independent colleges of late have brushed aside the tag of being second choice institutions from secondary schools and are pursuing aggressive promotional programmes to lure more students from formal educational institutions.

In terms of their operations all Independent colleges in Zimbabwe which offer academic courses fall under the Ministry of education, arts, sports and culture's non-formal education section and are supposed to conduct their business in the same manner of secondary schools in the formal education system. If the curriculum of any particular independent college includes professional courses they are also regulated by the Ministry of higher and tertiary education. Independent Colleges are required by law to engage suitably qualified teaching staff who are competent in their specific subject areas without necessarily having teaching qualifications. In addition the Principals are supposed to have extensive knowledge of the Zimbabwean education system and must have a teaching background and teaching experience. In terms of staff remunerations independent colleges pay their own staff without any assistance from the government and their salary scales are lower than the government rates. Education inspectors are now mandated to move around these colleges as they do to secondary schools in the formal education sector and inspect them on issues like the availability of professional teaching documents such as the scheme books, syllabi and record books. Small independent colleges are also obliged to incorporate activities that promote arts, sports and culture in their curricular.

Registration of small independent colleges

In Zimbabwe the registration of small independent colleges is done in accordance with the manpower planning and development act (chapter 28:2) and statutory instrument number 333 of 1996 and number 26 of 2001. These acts provide a legal framework for the operation of independent colleges. Some of the issues included in these acts are that independent colleges before they start operations must be in possession of an approval letter from the local authority granting permission to use particular premises for training and the letter must also include the maximum number of pupils expected on the premises. The colleges are also expected to be in possession of latest curricula vitae of their educators and principals, extensive knowledge of the education sector and sufficient teaching experience. Upon registration and also from time to time independent colleges are expected to have current syllabus for all courses on offer.

The Ministry of education arts, sports and culture and the Ministry of higher and tertiary education have standards and compliance inspectorate committees which from time to time conduct surveys to monitor whether the small independent colleges are complying with the above mentioned statutory requirements to guarantee quality of education. The growth of independent colleges in Zimbabwe is largely attributed to the socio- economic challenges that

the country witnessed from the year 2000. During this era, lack of teachers and other infrastructural challenges caused a near collapse of the formal education system. Parents withdrew their children from the formal education system and enrolled them with independent colleges a fact which resulted in tremendous growth of these colleges. Small independent colleges literally sprout in every residential suburb as entrepreneurs sought to fill the gap which was left by the collapse of the formal educational system particularly the secondary schools in the country.

Growth of small independent colleges in Zimbabwe

The growth of independent colleges in Zimbabwe can clearly be measured in terms of student enrolment statistics particularly those provided by Zimstat as the statistics from the Ministry of education, arts, sports and culture's non-formal education section only caters for the students from registered institutions only and the Zimstat statistics have latest data on enrolment without the number of institutions. Statistics reveal that before the economic crises in 1998 the enrolment stood at 15000 and it ballooned to reach a peak of 175 509 in 2009 recording a 1070% increase. Table 1 below presents some of the statistics.

Table 1 Distribution of registered independent colleges by province 1998 and 2002

Province	Number of registered independent colleges	
	1998	2002
Harare	41	50
Manicaland	7	13
Mashonaland Central	1	2
Mashonaland West	1	2
Masvingo	1	3
Matebeleland South	0	0
Matebeleland North	13	21
Midlands	22	17
Mashonaland East	2	2
Total	88	110
Student enrolment	15000	22980

Source: 1998 and 2002 annual report Ministry of education sports and culture non-formal education

Table 2 Small independent colleges' student enrolment figures 2005-2012

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of colleges	127	155	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total student enrolment	146173	34 529	164 970	164 970	175 509	224814	34053	71 039

Source: Zimstat facts and figures 2012.

From the statistics above it is evident that small independent colleges play a critical role in the education sector and considering a student enrolment of above 100000 it's a point beyond dispute that the Zimbabwean citizens are gaining confidence in the education system of independent colleges. In Zimbabwe there has been always a debate pertaining to the

contributions of these institutions to education with some accusing them of short changing their customers and in extreme cases some of them having to be closed. The following represents some of the main news headlines that have been published from the main news media:

- Bogus colleges closed-students left stranded The Standard 5/08/12
- Government should clean up education system Newsday 9/02/13
- Pupils stranded as government cracks down on private colleges Chronicle 22/07/12
- Illegal colleges, private schools shut Sunday news 28/05/12
- Private colleges continue to defy the state Newsday 12/08/12
- Blackmail at private schools: a personal experience Financial Gazette 9/9/04
- Government must support independent colleges Manica post 15 /02/2013

From the above cross section of the Zimbabwe media it is evident that there are some mixed feelings towards the operations of independent colleges in Zimbabwe, however, one theme that cuts across all the articles is that of quality concerns. The Zimbabwean government having witnessed the sudden increase of educational institutions has of late stepped up its efforts of ensuring the provision of quality education and this has witnessed the closure of several illegal colleges in 2010 and 2012 by both the Ministry of education, arts, sports and culture and the Ministry of higher and tertiary education. The blitz which was conducted by the two ministries in 2010 according to the Newsday of 13 November 2012 left 106 colleges closed and the one that followed in 2012 was the most severe, according to a public notice from the Ministry of higher and tertiary education, Harare and Chitungwiza topped the list of unregistered colleges with 36, Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South had a combined figure of (17), Midlands (16), Manicaland (25) and Masvingo (9). The bulk of deregistered colleges were in Harare and Chitungwiza with (42), followed by Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South with (10), Midlands (7), Masvingo and Manicaland (2) respectively.

Statement of the problem

Although small independent colleges play a pivotal role in complementing the government's efforts of educating the nation, their massive increase in recent years brings the need to monitor quality of education. The study therefore focused on evaluating the quality of education offered by small independent colleges. Furthermore, the study aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the measures being taken by both the government and small independent colleges in guaranteeing quality of education in the Non-formal secondary education sector.

Research objectives:

This study aims were to:

- Examine whether private colleges are meeting government requirements on quality education.
- Discover students' perception concerning the quality of education provided by small independent colleges.
- Explore the challenges that private colleges are encountering in providing quality education to their customers.

Research questions

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were asked:

- Are private colleges meeting government requirements in terms of quality education?
- How do small independent college students perceive the quality of services they are receiving from private colleges?

- What are the challenges faced by small independent colleges in providing quality education to their customers?

Justification of the study

- Education plays a fundamental role in the social and economic development of nations hence the need to evaluate quality of education in the private independent colleges so that their contribution can be relevant
- While there are many research papers and articles in the area of quality there is little evidence of a similar research especially in the private independent colleges in Zimbabwe hence knowledge to be gathered may assist policy makers in the provision of quality education

Study Delimitations

- Study was carried out in the Midlands province targeting private independent colleges offering secondary education in Gweru, Kwekwe, and Zvishavane districts
- Students of private colleges, staff of the private colleges, provincial education inspectors and officials from the Zimbabwe Council for Education (ZIMSEC) participated in the research study
- Statistics of enrolment figures from the independent colleges, pass rates, qualifications of teachers and government regulations on secondary education were considered from the year 2010 to date

Quality education defined.

The word quality is derived from a latin word *qualitas* which means the degree of excellence of something thus with regard to quality education it can be taken to mean the degree of excellence of education and indeed for education to achieve its goal of economic development it must be of high quality. The concept of quality education is viewed differently by different authors. Grisay and Mahlck (1991) view quality of education as the extent to which the products or the results of the education provided (the knowledge, skills and values acquired by the students) meets the standard stipulated by the educational objectives. Chapman and Adams (2002) argue that quality education is simply the attainment of specified targets and objectives. One striking feature of the above definitions is the issue of standards where the authors seem to agree that for there to be quality education there must be existence of standards which academic institutions are supposed to conform to and therefore in this study if independent colleges are found to be complying with government requirements on quality education it means there is quality education in the non-formal education sector of Zimbabwe.

Hoy et al (2000) proposed that quality of education is an evaluation of the process of educating which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of the customers of the process, at the same time meets accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process or outputs from the process of educating. Key issues brought about by the Hoy et al definition are that quality education involves an evaluation of outputs and as well as the processes of education a view supported by Tshabangu and Msafiri (2013) who managed to come up with three probable definitions of quality education and according to the two authors quality education may refer to inputs, that is number of teachers, teacher training, curricula and learning materials. Secondly it may refer to process which is the amount of direct teaching time and extent of teaching time. Thirdly, it may mean an output, that is tests scores, examination, graduation rates, and lastly it may refer to outcomes, that is performance in subsequent employment. Hoy et al (2000) proposed again another simple definition of quality education which is simply what is good for the school and the students. Although these authors brought

in the aspect of students' views in the assessment of quality education, education has several customers who all look for different characteristics of quality (UNICERF 2000) and thus this definition seem to be an understatement of quality education.

Some authors having discovered the challenges which are faced in defining quality education ended up providing some form of guiding principles which must be considered when defining quality education. Verwimp (1999) highlighted that a good definition of quality education is one which is not static but rather one which is open to changes. Motala (2000) further highlighted that the definition should also take in to account the global and international influences on education as well as factoring in national and local educational contexts. This view is also shared by Cossa (2011) who highlighted that quality education should be sought for in varied and flexible ways that are akin to local cultures and responses to global challenges. These authors seem to suggest that quality education has no universal definition as it varies with the context.

Dimensions of quality education

As has been highlighted above that the concept of education is broad and a multifaceted one, this section seeks to review what different authors say in regard to the dimensions of quality education. Frick (2012) highlighted that the following dimensions need to be assessed in respect to quality education namely context, content, process and outcome. This view is also supported by UNICEF (2000) which proposed Environment, Processes, Content, Learners and outcomes as important dimensions of quality education Environment covers issues such as the physical as well as the psychological learning environment where learning takes place. In understanding quality education there is need also to evaluate educational processes which according to UNICEF (2000) represents how teachers and administrators use inputs to frame meaningful experience for students. The content dimension deals with how the curricula and standards as well as educational materials create value to the learners. Learners is the other critical component of quality education and in this case the rationale is that for there to be quality education there is need to provide the system with quality learners-those who are physically and psychosocially healthy. Ndoye (2008) also acknowledged the criticality of quality learners and emphasised the criticality of students' aptitude and entry test in ensuring that pupils possess the necessary skills required by each level of education. The final dimension of quality education is outcomes and this in turn tells intentional, expected effects of the educational systems, Adams (1993).

Indicators of quality education.

There are several indicators of quality education that have been put forward by different authors. Cossa (2011) proposed the following as the indicators of quality education, literacy rate, dropout rate, retention rate, enrolment of children in various age groups, contribution to the world knowledge, emergence of eminent personalities, social relevance of the education, system of examination as well as the morale of the teaching profession. Moyo and Mubengegwi (1995) also proposed the following indicators of quality education namely growth rates, transition rates, access to schooling, promotion rates, enrolment ratios, internal efficiency, teacher supply (qualification and utilisation ratio of teachers), school buildings and utilisation rates of classroom, conditions of learning (supply of furniture and textbooks and pass rates). Although above authors agree on the need for educational stakeholders to monitor quality of education through the use of educational quality indicators, they seem to differ on the list of the indicators. Cossa (2011) provided qualitative indicators and their greatest weakness is that

they are very difficult to measure. Moyo and Mubengegwi (1995) provided quantitative indicators and given the qualitative nature of educational services these indicators may lack comprehensiveness. From the different authors reviewed it is clear that different indicators of quality education exist and they can either be qualitative or quantitative, the authors however failed to clarify whether the indicators they proposed are universally applicable to all educational contexts. From this line of thinking it seems wise to suggest that the indicators of quality education must be used in line with the quality objective of academic institutions

Understanding quality from the customer's perspective

Various authors in service marketing such as Parasuraman et al., (1988); Gronroos, (1994) although they have acknowledged the existence of differing views on defining service quality among different authors, they agree that in understanding quality of a service, there is a need to capture the view of the customer. Education is a service that academic institutions offer to students as primary consumers thus an evaluation of quality of education will be incomplete without exploring how the primary consumers view the service they are receiving. Gronroos (1982) coined the word perceived service quality which was best explained by Parasuraman (1988) as a type of attitude related to satisfaction, resulting from comparison between expectations and perceived performance. Perceived service quality is therefore a function of perception and expectations. This view is also supported by Nguyen and Hein (2006) who have noted that when customers evaluate perceived performance they always consider expectations unconsciously, this therefore means that the perceived quality includes expectations as well. Zeithaml et al (1993) argued that customers' expectations are beliefs about a service that serve as standards against which service performance is judged which customers think the service provider should offer rather than what might be on offer. In the context of this study it may thus be taken to mean what the students think independent colleges should offer. Zeithaml et al (1990) also noted that customer expectations are determined by a multiple dimensions like personal needs, past experience, goodwill and image, word of mouth and service provider's communication; the service provider must therefore ensure that their communication efforts do not result in customers having unrealistic expectations since expectations at the end have a bearing on overall satisfaction (Parasuraman et al 1988).

Barriers to quality education

The route to quality education is not a walk in the park, it calls for institutions to be proactive and navigate through the murky waters. UNICEF (2002) have identified five categories of barriers to quality education namely policy barriers, household barriers, infrastructure barriers, community beliefs and practices and educational barriers. Household barriers consist of the socio-economic variations that exist among different families such as income status, level of parent education etc. while educational barriers include teacher performance, teacher qualification, poor management style as well as an un conducive climate and Harris (2008) highlighted that most of these barriers are in the control of educational. Infrastructural barriers include issues such as laboratories and classrooms and they greatly hinder quality improvements efforts of academic institutions. Policies both at national as well as institutional level may also act as a barrier to quality education. There are also other community beliefs which hinder quality education such as those of failure to accord disabled and the girl child equal educational rights as others. Having outlined the barriers to quality education it is important to note that no barriers are insurmountable hence academic institutions need to think outside the box and devise strategies to circumvent these barriers.

METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted in the study. A sample size of 320 was considered out of the target population consisting of 18 registered and non - registered private colleges, the Zimbabwe Council for Education (ZIMSEC) and the provincial and the provincial ministry of education and culture. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) framework was used in drawing the sample size. Questionnaires were used in collecting quantitative data mainly from students and teachers of the independent colleges while interviews were employed in collecting qualitative data from the provincial education director, ZIMSEC regional manager and the provincial education inspectors.

Sampling procedure

Both probability and non - probability sampling methods were employed in the study. In the three cities that were studied namely Gweru, Zvishavane and Kwekwe, the town of Zvishavane has 2 colleges and this town was given one slot and the college with the highest student enrolment was included in the sample. Kwekwe has 3 colleges and the city was allocated 2 slots and again the first two colleges with the highest enrolment were included in the sample. Gweru has the largest concentration of independent colleges as compared to the other cities with 13 institutions this city thus was allocated 6 slots and again the first 6 colleges in terms of enrolment were included in the sample. The selection of the three inspectors in the ministry of education sports arts and culture was done using convenience sampling because of the busy schedule of inspectors and the fact that data from all the inspectors does not vary significantly as they operate being guided by the same act.

Sampling procedure for the for 27 small independent college staff was done using stratified random sampling. The staff members were initially placed into 2 strata namely the supervisors (deputy principals and principals) stratum and the general teachers' stratum. The reason for this was that supervisors control operations of small independent colleges and are representative of the owners and possess more knowledge of quality of education as the ministry expects them to be in possession of extensive experience from the educational field. Simple random sampling was then done at college level to ensure that each college provides one supervisor into the strata of supervisors and two teachers who do not occupy either the position of principal or deputy principal into the teachers' principal. In terms of 287 students, all the 9 colleges were ranked in terms of student enrolment; the first 8 colleges in terms of enrolment were given 32 student slots per college with the last colleges in terms of enrolment having 31 students included in the sample. Simple random sampling was then used picking the names from respective colleges enrolment register and all the students from the colleges under study had an equal chance of being selected.

FINDINGS

Data was obtained from independent colleges' staff, students as well as officials from Zimsec and Ministry of primary and secondary education through questionnaires and interviews. Out of 287 questionnaires distributed, 280 were returned representing 97% response rate.

Table 3 Demographic profile of respondents (students)

		ZJC Form 1&2	O-level Form 3&4	A-level Form 5&6	Total
Gender	Male	50	80	50	180
	Female	30	40	30	100
Age categories	15 and below	20	Nil	nil	15
	15-18	52	30	nil	82
	18 and above	8	90	80	178

Generally, age distribution is normal from all the levels (forms 1 to 6) except at ordinary level where there are a number of over - aged pupils with 75% (90/120) of students being above 18 years and this represents 32.1% (90/280) of the total enrolment. These results are consistent with the annual report (1998) from the ministry of education which stated that the non-formal education platform was created to cater for dropouts from the formal education system as well as repeaters. Results also show that there are more boys and girls in the independent colleges as shown by 180 boys and 100 students being girls included in the sample. This scenario might be a result of high expulsion rates of boys from formal school system as well as parental reluctance to send the girl child to independent colleges due to fear of potential abuse believed to be associated with these colleges.

Compliance to government requirements on quality education

In order to evaluate and analyse the quality of education offered by independent colleges the first objective of the study was to find out whether private colleges meet government requirements on quality education. In this area data was gathered from representatives of the Ministry of education, ZIMSEC, and College staff. Table 4 below summarises the findings.

Table 4 Showing compliance to government requirements on quality education

Dimension of quality requirement		Number of colleges meeting (Yes) or not meeting (No) quality requirements.			
		Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
College registration	Zimsec registration	2	22	7	78
	Subscription payment	2	22	7	78
Staff qualifications	Teachers	25	100	0	0%
	Principals	9	100	0	0%
Staff supervision programmes		2	22	7	77.7
Pupils assessment and evaluation		7	77.7	2	22
Learning environment		0	0	9	100
Curricula		0	0	9	100
Pupils evaluation Documents	Schemes of work	0	0	25	100
	Record of marks	0	0	8	89
	Attendance registers	25	100	0	0

College registration

Before detailed analysis of independent colleges was done the researchers saw it fit to initially evaluate the registration status of independent colleges. Data gathered from the Ministry of primary and secondary education officials indicated that an independent college which does not pay subscription fee to the Ministry is deemed to be unregistered and therefore illegally operating. The study revealed that 22% of the colleges were registered implying that 78% of these colleges were operating illegally. It also emerged that 22% of the colleges were accredited by ZIMSEC to be centres of national examinations. Students from unregistered colleges write their final examination from nearby formal schools, a fact which demonstrates incredibility on the part of independent colleges.

Learning environment

In terms of the physical learning environment all the colleges were failing to meet government requirements on quality education. The study revealed that 55.6% of the colleges studied operate in ancient buildings which lack adequate ventilation and such premises were not approved by local authorities as centres of learning. Of the few colleges which had approval letters from their local authorities it also emerged that their student enrolment far exceeds the required capacity of such structures. Moreover, 66% of the colleges had only 2 toilets one for boys and the other for girls and given an average enrolment of 137 pupils per college, it implies that the average toilet - pupil ratio is 1:68.5 thus violating the Ministry of education's expected ratio of 1:8. Furthermore, 11% of the colleges do not have running water and pupils rely on nearby buildings for water. The looming health and safety crisis emanating from these independent colleges needs urgent attention from responsible authorities.

Staff qualifications

In any quality endeavour there is critical need to ensure that the staff possess sufficient skills to perform their duties efficiently. From the interviews conducted with representatives of the Ministry of education, the government is not very particular about teachers' qualifications but it expects the teachers to have a deep mastery of their respective subject areas. As for the Heads or Principals of independent colleges, the ministry expects them to be in possession of a teaching qualification and extensive experience in the education sector. As shown on table 4, 100% of the college principals are in possession of a teaching qualification which means that in terms of principal qualifications, independent colleges are meeting government requirements on quality education. As for the teachers all of them do not have professional teaching qualifications and were mostly recent university graduates who just stay for a short while and leave as soon as they get a better job in their area of specialisation. Failure to attract trained teachers could be a result of the lower salary structures offered by the colleges as compared to the government.

Staff monitoring and supervision

To guarantee quality education there is need for monitoring and supervision of lessons by Heads of department and Principals to ensure that the process of learning is up to standard. The study revealed that Heads of private colleges are not performing their duties as expected in order to guarantee quality education. Given the fact that most of their teachers do not have professional teaching qualifications there is need for close supervision to guarantee quality education and also for the professional growth of the members of staff. Only 22% of independent colleges had some form of supervision mechanisms in place. Given this *laissez faire* kind of attitude exposed by the Heads of colleges it comes not as a surprise that most of

the teachers do not have teaching documents such as scheme books, record books and attendance registers which are very critical in education. From interviews with heads of colleges it emerged that some teachers disappear when they hear of an imminent lesson supervision.

Student assessment and evaluation

Quality education requires close monitoring and evaluation of pupils' performance to ensure that it will result in the achievement of intended goals. Results also showed that 77.7% of the colleges were giving tests and exercises to pupils however the work given to pupils was not comprehensive and frequent. This might be caused by high staff turnover at independent colleges where the staff might be under pressure to cover the syllabus as pupils are always behind the syllabus thus leaving less time for tests. Lack of practice tests might be the contributing factor to lower pass rates and this agrees very well with views by Scheerens et al (2011) who observed that pupils who are given adequate preparation work usually perform better than those who are not given.

Curricular of Independent colleges

In terms of their curricula the study revealed that all the colleges are failing to meet government requirements on quality education. All the colleges explored do not offer special needs education which implies that pupils with disabilities are not catered for thus the system is discriminatory, which is in violation with the basic characteristics of quality education . Moreover, majority of the colleges do not offer practical subjects, a fact which may be attributed to lack of funding. Furthermore, there is no guidance and counselling department, suggestion boxes and this is in violation of the Ministry's requirements. The study also revealed that 77 % of the colleges offer sporting activities and 44% offer computer lessons, however researchers observed that the sporting activities are not conducted as frequent and are not a permanent feature of the independent colleges' academic calendar. It was also observed that the colleges have old model computers a case which could be a result of lack of funding.

Compliance to professional teaching documents

One of the senior members in the Ministry of education highlighted that the only way the ministry can be satisfied that teaching is taking place at any given situation is the existence of professional teaching documents. To provide quality education there is need for teachers to plan their work, record their pupils' performance and monitor their attendance levels. Data was gathered to find out whether private colleges maintain these critical documents. It emerged that 100% of the respondents did not have scheme books and also 89% of teachers did not have record books. The interesting findings are that 100% of the respondents kept updated pupils attendance registers for their respective subjects. Data gathered from interviews revealed that the main reason for the existence of attendance registers was largely because attendance registers are used for the calculation of remuneration packages and their availability versus absence of scheme books might be a reflection that the teachers are merely concerned about their salaries more than their core business. Unavailability of professional teaching documents and low morale might be attributing factors to low pass rate. These results seem to agree with Harris (2008) who argued that there is a very close relationship between student performance and educator efforts particularly their ability to effectively monitor pupil performance and planning their work.

Perceptions of students towards the quality of education offered by independent colleges

Researchers sought to understand perceptions of students towards the quality of education in by independent colleges and Table 5 below summarises the findings.

NB: The minimum score and the maximum score represents the lowest and highest rating respectively which was noted from the students' responses from each question; the two variables were not used to calculate the mean score. Mean score represents the overall students' response divided by the total number of respondents.

Table 5: Perceptions of students towards quality education in independent colleges

	Minimum score	- Maximum score	- Mean -score
Learning environment	1	3	2.4
Skills of teachers/lesson delivery	3	5	4.4
Teachers' subject knowledge	4	5	5

Student perception of the learning environment

The minimum score on the aspect of the learning environment was 1 (strongly –disagree) and the maximum 3 (neutral). The mean score was 2.4 which is close to 2 (disagree) this suggests that students have negative perceptions about their learning environment; they see it as not safe and health implying that it is of poor quality. It's not only students who are not happy with the learning environment of independent colleges, even examination authorities revealed that they lack trust in the learning environment of independent colleges and as a precautionary measure they do not allow any examination paper which is not yet written to be kept at independent colleges. College administrators have to collect examination papers every morning unlike formal secondary schools which are allowed to collect all papers weeks in advance. This is also supported by the earlier noted fact that the learning environment of independent colleges does not meet the government requirements on quality education. This could be a result of the college's lack of funding

Perceptions of students on independent colleges' staff

The researchers were kin to explore the perceptions of independent colleges on their teachers particularly their skills in lesson delivery and subject knowledge. On lesson delivery the minimum score was 3 (neutral) and the maximum score 5 (strongly agree) and the mean score is 4.4 which is close to 4 (agree). The results seem to suggest that students from private colleges are satisfied that their teachers are good when it comes to their core business. The same can also be said concerning the possession of subject knowledge by teachers, the minimum score was 4 (agree) and the maximum score 5 (strongly agree) and the mean score was 5.1 which is close to 5 (strongly agree). These findings suggest that students are confident and have positive perceptions about the subject knowledge possessed by their teachers. A question which emerges from these findings is why there are low pass rates associated with private colleges, if students agree that their teachers conduct the core business well and have extensive knowledge of their respective subject areas? The blame for this could squarely be on college administrators who are failing to coordinate the resources at their disposal in ensuring quality education. The other blame could be on high labour turn - over which emerged among the challenges facing independent colleges.

Challenges faced by independent colleges in providing quality education

The final objective of the study was to explore the challenges faced by independent colleges in providing quality education. Data was gathered from independent colleges' staff members and table 6 presents the findings.

Table 6 showing impediments to quality improvements efforts

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of funding	25	100
Shortage of learning space	24	96
High staff turn over	23	92
Lack of learning materials	20	80
Low level of parental involvement	18	72
Unskilled manpower	18	72
Poor remuneration of staff	16	64
Late payment of fees	14	56
High rental charges for premises	8	32
Student indiscipline	7	27
Improper association	4	16

Lack of funding emerged as the greatest challenge which is faced by independent colleges in their quest to provide quality education and respondent [18] had this to say '*if only the government could assist us because all the challenges we are facing are all emanating from lack of financial resources*'. Lack of funding is also supported by the fact that the colleges have limited funding as they solely rely on student fees. This results in fees increases beyond the levels afforded by pupils resulting in drop-out cases and late payment of fees which may lead to poor performance by students as well as weakening the colleges' revenue generation capacity.

High labour turnover was acknowledged by 92% of the respondents as being another impediment to quality improvement efforts by independent colleges. This could be a result of low salaries as well as the employment of non-teaching graduates who quickly leave these colleges for greener pastures. Most independent colleges interviewed use rented premises and have cited high rental charges as another impediment to their quality efforts. The other challenge cited include shortage of learning space which was acknowledged by 96% of the respondents. Respondent [11] had this to say '*the challenge of learning space will continue because we are operating on rented premises thus we can't extend something which is not ours*'.

The other challenge which was highlighted by independent colleges as an impediment to quality improvement efforts was the issue to do with lack of parental involvement and this challenge was acknowledged by 72% of the respondents. From interviews with college principal it emerged that parents of independent colleges are not willing to be incorporated in the structures of independent colleges as done by formal schools. Colleges also cited lack of learning materials an issue more related to funding problems already cited above. Colleges do not have a comprehensive libraries, while those which seem to have them, the libraries merely consist of few books which are managed at the reception by the college clerk / receptionist. Teachers relied solely on their own materials for teaching a case which might be the contributing factor to the low pass rate in the independent colleges.

Student indiscipline was acknowledged by 72% of the respondents as another impediment to quality improvements efforts. Principals highlighted that some of the pupils were over - aged making it hard for teachers to control them and most of them were expelled from the formal education system due to indiscipline. Indiscipline cases include refusal to wear proper college uniform, improper association with teachers, bullying and absenteeism. Others have also highlighted the aspect of rampant improper association as another factor which results in student indiscipline as teachers fail to control pupils they are dating.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on study findings the researchers made the following conclusions:

Independent colleges' compliance to government requirements on quality education

From the data gathered in regard to whether colleges meet government requirements in terms of quality education, the researcher concludes that independent colleges are failing to meet government requirements on quality education and therefore providing poor quality education to their customers. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that the study revealed that most of these colleges are operating illegally, their learning environment pose health and safety risks, they lack a comprehensive curricula, there is lack of staff supervision and student monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Student perceptions on quality education

The researchers also conclude that students are not satisfied with the quality of education they are getting from independent colleges and are not at these colleges by choice, this conclusion is drawn from the fact that the study has revealed that students have negative perceptions towards the quality of education offered by independent colleges. Major issues of concern being centred around the aspect of learning environment, curricula content as well as the daily subjection to excessive lack of proper educational infrastructure.

Challenges to quality improvement efforts

Independent colleges are facing enormous challenges in their quest to improve quality of education and lack of funding was found to be the main impediment to quality improvement efforts. Lack of funding is causing shortage of learning materials, learning space, staff demotivation, poor educational infrastructure and educational materials. Rampant student indiscipline and improper association were also found to be affecting quality improvement efforts of the independent colleges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers are keen to make the following recommendations:-

Multi – stakeholder approach

In order to improve quality education in independent colleges there should be stakeholder co-operation involving government, independent colleges, parents and the community. In this regard the government should seriously consider funding private colleges as they do to the formal education sector through creating a revolving fund to cater for the specific needs of the non-formal independent colleges. Adequate funding will result in colleges ensuring that their learning environment meets government requirements on quality education. Independent

colleges should seriously engage parents such that they sit on school boards so that they help in shaping and moulding acceptable student behaviour.

Income generating projects - Independent colleges should come up with income generating projects rather than relying on student fees to finance college operations. Such income generating projects may include Eco-cash agency, tuck-shops or even creating stationery shops to boost their revenue generation capacity. Income generating projects would assist the colleges to build their accommodation and to improve on school infrastructure.

Performance management systems - Independent colleges should establish credible performance evaluation systems for staff and students. Establishing monitoring and control systems will help staff to maintain record books, scheme books, registers and other mechanics which will ensure quality education. Additionally, establishing control systems on students will help on student conduct thus reducing rampant student indiscipline currently associated with independent colleges. There is need for constant review and evaluation of student and staff performance to ensure that it is in line with the desired outcomes.

Remuneration system and improving work environment - Independent colleges should provide competitive salaries to staff in order to retain and motivate them. Moreover, teacher accommodation, classrooms and staff offices should also be improved to match modern standards so that staff will enjoy their job and be committed to provide quality lessons.

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