AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO AVER HIGH FAILURE RATE IN PUBLIC EXAMINATION IN RURAL BORDER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

A study was steered to propose ways in which an asset-based approach can be used to reduce high failure rate in public examination in rural border secondary schools in Chiredzi South, Zimbabwe. This qualitative study was motivated by the problem of occasioning high failure rate in public examination by rural border schools. The study was constricted to 20 randomly selected participants; 1 headmaster, 4 teachers, 5 parents (inclusive school development committee (SDC) member) and 10 form four learners from one purposively identified secondary school. 6The study was able to apprehend the reality of the participants’ know-how using the participatory action research design through the use of one-on-one interview, focus group discussion and document analysis. Data generated were critically analysed and discussed using the critical discourse analysis. Results obtained indicate that teacher related factors, unavailability of teaching/learning materials and learner related factors have more damaging effects on the public examination pass rate in rural border learning ecologies. Results suggest that if the available assets within school and from the community are utilised to some degree, it is possible for rural border secondary schools to achieve better pass rate regardless of their geographical location. The researchers conclude that the asset-based approach has great potential as a way of lessening high failure rate in public examination.

Keyword: public examinations, high failure rate, learners, rural border school, academic performance, Chiredzi South

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic performance is an outward phenomenon in many developing countries like Zimbabwe since is measured in final examination (form four national examination), whereby success is measured by academic performance or how well learners meet standards set out by the Zimbabwe School Examination Council (ZIMSEC). In Zimbabwe, a pass at ordinary level means passing at least five subjects with grade C or better including Mathematics, English and a Science subject (Ndoro, 2012; Nyoni, Nyoni and Bonga, 2017) however a large number of learners in rural border secondary schools are failing to pass the examination (Mapolisa and Tshabalala, 2014; Mujaji, 2012). In the year 2018, Zimbabwe had 32.83% national pass rate at ordinary level public examination - a slight increase from 28.71% in 2017 (Zimsec online). The issue of low pass rate at ordinary level in Zimbabwean rural areas has become a national concern and ever expanding problem especially in rural border districts secondary schools. Table 1.1 below show the national pass rate for the form four public examinations from 2015 to 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NATION AL % P.R</th>
<th>TRENDS</th>
<th>SCHOOL X % P.R</th>
<th>TRENDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>27.86%</td>
<td>+5.48%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>+27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>29.97%</td>
<td>+2.11%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>+1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>28.71%</td>
<td>-1.25%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>-28.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 Zimbabwe ordinary level national and School X pass rate trend for the past four years

This (pass rate as shown in Table 1.1) was alarming and it indicated that learner performance in schools is poor. Although high
level of literacy rates have been achieved on average in Zimbabwe, pass rates at ordinary level remain very low (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). An average percentage pass rate amongst rural secondary schools is below standard with many achieving even zero percent (Nyoni, Nyoni and Bonga, 2017). Mostly, secondary schools in the rural border districts are usually the ones that perform that dismally.

The factors that affect learners’ quality of academic performance are inside and outside school (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq and Berhanu, 2011). Although many factors contribute to high failure rate, in this research we dwelt much on the administration issues, teacher related issues, availability of learning resources and learner related issues as factors causing high failure rate and how an asset-based approach can be applied to curb the above problem in rural border learning ecologies.

Lezotte’s (2010) elucidates that effective schools model and instructional leadership is generally recognised as the most important characteristic of school administrators. For an asset-based approach, school administrators are important assets to improve school performance (Chikoko and Khanare, 2012; Myende, 2014). Reche, Bundi, Riungu and Mbugua (2012) assert that the major duties and responsibilities of school administrators include; holding staff meetings to facilitate coordination of various activities in the school, checking teachers’ schemes of work and lesson plans and internal supervision of curriculum implementation through physical observation of teachers while lessons are in progress. Leadership in this context pursues effective performance in schools because it does not only examine tasks to be accomplished and who executes them, but also seeks to include greater reinforcement characteristics like recognition, conditions of service and building of morale, coercion and remuneration (Balunywa, 2000; Kapur, 2018). Therefore instructional leadership at school has a bearing on the outcome of the school’s pass rate, depending on the type of a leader the school has.

Teacher related factors are those within the teachers as an asset that could hinder or promote academic performance of learners in their schools such as teachers’ commitment, teachers’ frequency of absenteeism, teachers’ motivation and teachers’ work load (Lezotte, 2010; Myende, 2014; Keiti, 2017). Maganga (2016) laments that absenteeism by teachers as assets reduce the amount of instructional time and this result in the syllabus not being completed. Professionalism and approachable attitude on the part of the teachers significantly influence the academic performance of the learners in a positive manner (Jacobs, 2012) and is portrayed primarily in the teaching-learning processes, instructional strategies and communication (Kudari, 2016; Kapur, 2018). Accordingly, teachers are the most important human resource and remain the backbone of any educational system in determining the extent to which quality education can be achieved.

The provision of resources that include library laboratory facilities, technology, books, reading materials, stationary items, uniforms, bags and even private tuitions at home, in case they find some subject areas difficult and need assistance promote learning (Maganga, 2016; Keiti, 2017), hence learners achieve their academic goals (Kapur, 2018). The lack of these resources and civic amenities as assets may impede the concentration of the learners upon their studies; as a result they may not achieve the desired outcomes leading to poor pass rates. Maina (2010) and Maganga (2016) proved that when learners are provided with the necessary tools and equipment, they are able to acquire a better understanding regarding academic concepts and perform better academically. In some cases, learners belonging to deprived, marginalised and socio-economically backward sections of the society, are mainly affected by lack of resources, be it human or material resources, resulting in low pass rate (Chinyoka, 2013; Maina, 2010; Amoo, Adeyinka and Aderibigbe, 2018; Adamu and Dikko 2017). We were pushed to explore assets within the school and the community that maybe be utilised to provide the necessary material/information/advice for learners to perform better regardless of their schools’ geographical location and rurality.

Furthermore, attitude of learners is amongst the most important abilities in learning and it can act as a psychological hindrance to effective learning (Langat, 2015). Maina (2010) revealed that in Kenya goal-oriented learners usually possess positive feelings regarding their school experiences, they possess the traits of discipline, diligence, and resourcefulness, are avid readers
and tend to devote less time towards recreation and leisure activities. Ndebele (2008) found that most Zimbabwean secondary learners thought that it was better to cross either the Botswana or South African borders to come back in a few months driving good cars than concentrating on their education. This kind of negative attitude minimises concentration and commitment to academic work (Mapolisa and Tshabalala, 2014). Therefore, learner attitude may be a determinant in learner performance. In addition Kapur (2018), Chinyoka (2013) lists a number of factors that lead to low academic performance as a result of poverty as unavailability of learning materials, poor diet and nutrition, poor health, transportation problems and performance of household chores. Additionally, Ogunsola, Osuolale, and Ojo, (2014) found that some may even get involved into violent and criminal acts, drug abuse, HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancies, induced abortions and finally drop out of school. These factors have a direct impact upon not only their academic performance, but also their lives. These may hamper their psychological approach and they may even experience problems of depression, trauma or stress to a major extent (David, 2014; Maganga, 2016; Kapur, 2018). One of the psychological factors related to academic performance of learners is exam phobia as it was found to affect the attention, concentration, thinking and memory (Kapur, 2018; Srinivas and Venkatkrisnan, 2016). When an individual is not confident and is fearful, then even if he/she is well-prepared, he is unable to render an effective performance (Al-Zoubi, and Younes, 2015; Kapur, 2018). For learners to do well in exams, it is vital for them to be confident and overcome fear and anxiety.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to utilise an asset-based approach to reduce high failure rate in public examination in Zimbabwean rural schools.

3. EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS MODEL AND THE ASSET-BASED APPROACH AS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This study was informed by the effective schools model by Lezotte (2010) and the asset-based approach concept by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). The order was that we first identify the problem and find solutions to the identified problem. At the heart of effective model is the view that there are seven correlates of effective schools. The seven common correlates include: clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, opportunity to learn and time on task, safe and orderly environment, positive home-school relations, and frequent monitoring of student progress (Lezotte, 2010; Kosgei, 2015; Scheerens, 2013). In this study, we concentrated on the correlates summarised as administration issues, teacher related issues, availability of learning resources and learner related issues. These problems have been identified because the researchers hoped that by analysing these, the deep insides on the factors causing high failure rate on public examination can be revealed, thus guide towards improvement of rural border secondary school performance through an asset-based approach. Literature has it that when school improvement processes based upon the effective schools research are implemented, the proportions of learners that achieve academic excellence either improves, or at the very least, remains the same (Association of Effective Schools, 1996). These are summarised below on Fig 1:

![Conceptual framework showing relationship among factors.](image)

Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing relationship among factors.

On other hand, the asset-based approach (ABA) is a conceptual model that challenged the conventional way of addressing rural problems (which is to rely on expert service providers and funding from agencies) and observed that assets within the community can be utilised as building blocks to solve problem being faced (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). The aim is to ensure that individuals and communities are no longer clients,
but they become independent and gain control over their lives (Hernandez, 1998). ABA has potential to enable communities to recognise their strengths and focus on what they have rather than what they are missing and thereby contributing to identifying and harnessing new skills in addition to new relationships (Myende, 2014; Myende and Hlalele, 2017). ABA assists community members in developing “new eyes about themselves and their surroundings” and for professionals “it shifts the conversation from thinking of citizens as objects to fix, to assets to tap” (Foot, 2012). Their interest lies in creating strong and healthy neighbourhoods, therefore using the assets from within the community to create well-being, rather than relying on expertise from service providers outside the community (Goetze, 2006; Myende, 2015). We view the ABA a fit conceptual framework to avert high failure rate because it uses available assets within school and community to solve the named problem. There are lots of different types of assets in the community which need to be identified and recognised then provide the opportunity to use them (Green and Haines, 2012; Foot and Hopkins, 2010; Myende 2017). Myende (2014, p.14) argues capacities, skills, talents and gifts of people, if considered, would contribute positively to low rates of public examination pass rate by the members themselves. It was our assumption that within the rural schools, there are skills, talents and gifted people who may assist to avert the prevailing high failure rate in public examination. We felt this was only achievable by creating community awareness of the available assets they have.

Chikoko and Khanare (2012) further highlight that we can classify assets into three tiers which include the primary, the secondary and the ‘outside’ layer. In this research we will also call the ‘outside’ layer the tertiary assets. Primary assets are the most immediate, easily accessible and mostly located within the schools such as learners, teachers, and management and school infrastructures; the secondary assets as those within schools’ neighborhood but not controlled by the school. Faith based organisations, charity organisations, local businesses, parents and families and the outside layer (tertiary layer) as the outside asset both in location and in ownership which include private businesses, non-governmental organisations, national corporations, universities and research institutions (Myende and Chikoko, 2014). Thus, we were of the opinion that schools are important in bringing together all other assets in order to avert high failure rate in public examination in rural schools.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research site was identified using purposive sampling technique. We also randomly selected participants to gather data. The secondary school was found in Masvingo Province, under Chiredzi Rural District of Zimbabwe. The research participants consisted of 20 participants; 1 headmaster, 4 teachers, 5 parents (inclusive school development committee (SDC) member) and 10 form four learners. For gender balance, of the four (4) school teachers two (2) were females; 5 parents, two (2) were females; ten (10) learners, five (5) were females. To generate data needed in this study, the researchers made use of focus group discussion, one-on-one interview and document analysis to find out how best can we utilise an asset-based approach to reduce high failure rate in public examination in Zimbabwean rural schools. These data generating methods linked very well to the research paradigm (critical emancipatory research), research design (participatory action research), and the conceptual frameworks (effective schools model and asset-based approach) in trying to answer the research question of the study. Issues of trustworthiness of the data generated were ensured through triangulation of data generating sources above, generating methods above and data analysis methods (critical discourse analysis).

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gatekeepers’ permissions were secured from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe Masvingo Province, Chiredzi District Education Office as well as the school where the research was conducted. Consent was granted by all participants in this study.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the empirical data yielded the following themes as causes of high failure rate in rural border learning ecologies:

6.1. Theme 1: Administration issues and the pass rate

Findings from the headmaster’s one on one interview revealed that administrators from the
school selected do supervise the teachers, involve them in strategic planning, hold staff development and check on teachers and learners absenteeism on daily basis. All the teachers and the SDC member concurred that instructional leaders generally supervise teachers and learners in the teaching and learning process. However, the remaining four (4) parents/guardians were neutral that administrators check on teacher and pupil absenteeism and punctuality in classrooms. They argued that most learners and teachers were seen loitering around especially on Thursdays, a sign that shows they are not monitored. Eight percent (80%) learners also supported that the administrators too, do supervise both teachers and learners. The documents analysed proved that administrators do their job because the schemes of work were stamped on weekly basis. In the FGD, all the participants agreed that supervision was being done and they were all being involved in strategic planning and decision making. Those four (4) parents/guardians who disagreed that teachers and learners were enlightened by the administrators that they would have seek permission to visit the local market where they were seen. “Usually we give them permission in form of a pass to visit the market to buy their wants to use at school and or home. We realised that if we don’t give them that opportunity, they will dodge lessons, so we usually allow them after lunch (1400hrs)”, explained the headmaster. This was in line with Lezotte (2010) sentiments that in the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and continually communicates the mission of the school to staff, parents, and learners. Johnson (1997) adds that the effective school should have effective administrative leadership; positive expectations; strong, integrated curriculum; shared decision making; and campus wide responsibility for teaching and success in order to achieve significant changes in the performance of learners. Having common core values and a shared sense of purpose as findings indicates helps guide all members of the instructional team and avoids individuals straying from the intended goals. Administrators were found to be basic assets to improve academic performance of learners in school by supervising teachers and leaners effectively. They do not pursue effective performance only, rather seek to improve condition of service and building of morale for both teachers and learners (Balunywa, 2000; Kapur, 2018; Wamulla; Myende, 2012).

6.2. Theme 2: Teacher related issues and the pass rate

Through one on one interviews, this study found out that the headmasters, all the teachers, all the parents/guardians and seventy percent (70%) of the learners were in accordance that teachers are not motivated to carry out their duties and they are not satisfied by their current salaries, teacher/pupil ratio is too high in in rural areas and that there is heavy loads for teachers working in rural areas. One of the teachers from the one on one interview by the name Mr. Q (not his real name) said, “Handishandiri nzungu ini, tongoitawo zviripo kuti ndirarame nekuchengetedza basa chete, kufoira kwake kana kana kupasa yangu inoyya yakakwana mari iyyo shoma”……meaning I cannot work for peanuts, I just dance to the current tune to keep my job, whether the learner passes or not, my little pay will still come. The sentiments by the teacher did not go in line with Jacobs (2012), Maganga (2016) and Kapur (2018) findings that in order to achieve significant changes in classroom practice, teachers must be motivated to participate in doing their work. We then argue that teachers should work hard to ensure that expectations for learner achievement are understood and guaranteed across classrooms and across grade levels. Lack of motivation results in poor performance by teachers, thus their performance may affect the learner they teach to achieve best results (Keiti, 2017; Maganga, 2016 and Kapur, 2018). In addition to teacher motivation, Lezotte (2010) asserts that creating an atmosphere in which teachers are considered professionals and have opportunities to continue their professional development, both within and without the school they teach in, leads teachers towards excellence. Thus the study found out that teacher related factors were positively related to learner academic performance. This was in line with Mufanechiya, Mandiudza, Mufanechiya and Nyaradzo (2012) and Keiti (2017) findings that teacher satisfaction levels, qualification and work load were critical in determining the performance of the learner. We do not dispute that highly satisfied teachers with higher qualification and a reasonable work load play a critical role in improvement of school performance.

6.3. Theme 3: Learning resources and the pass rate

It was observed in this study the headmaster, all the teachers, all the learners and all parents
acknowledged that the school has no libraries, no laboratory and no enough teaching and learning resources to use. One of the learners interviewed had this to say... “Hambi hi lava kuhlaya, ku hava tibhuku, se hinga pasa njani loko vadyondzisi vahine bhuku lin’we hi cicanaka”... meaning even if we want to read, there are no textbooks because we share only one that belongs to the teacher. The headmaster and the SDC member also acknowledged through the one on one interview that parents do not pay their learner levies on time; hence the schools cannot afford to buy the teaching and learning resources adequate for all learners to use. In their research, Reche et al (2012) witnessed that text books enable the pupils to follow the teacher’s sequence of presentation of syllabus and aids in understanding of lessons. Lack of teaching and learning resources may impede the concentration of the students upon their studies; as a result they may not achieve the desired outcomes (Kapur, 2018). If the determination of the students is not strong, then they may even require understanding of concepts, while studying on their own, and this can be hindered if there are no resources. We argue that unavailability of other critical facilities such as laboratories may affect delivery of science oriented subjects. Therefore, libraries need to be equipped with sufficient books while laboratories need to be installed and equipped with required apparatus and chemicals. It therefore means the learning resources play a vital role in influencing academic performance of learners. This was in line with Keiti (2017), Maganga (2016) and Maina (2010) research findings that unavailability of learning resources affects performance negatively while their adequacy and availability will positively affect learners’ academic performance to a great extent.

6.4. Theme 4: Learner related issues and the pass rate

From one on one interview, the study established that the headmaster, the teachers, the learners and three out of five parents/guardians agreed that parents and learner attitude affects pass rate in rural areas. The teachers interviewed reported that the learners often come to school with no learning materials needed in the teaching and learning and it may be difficult to teach such learners. Teachers have no idea whether these learners have understood the concepts. Seventy percent (70%) of learners interviewed stated that their parents do not pay their levies on time and some are not even supportive of their education and are usually send back home to collect and they are disadvantaged because they tend to miss valuable contact time as they move from school to their home places. The teachers also established that school attendance is often irregular amongst learners whose parents are very mobile/or are working outside the country because they do not have anybody to control them. We do not dispute that the conditions surrounding the learner from the family setting are very critical in influencing the performance of the learner. Around ninety percent (90%) of participants from the FGD acknowledged that most learners become sexually active especially girls and perform dismally or drop out of school after participating in initiative ceremonies (kudzanirwa/kucineliwa/hoko) and eventually get married. “With regard to both the academic and social aspects of school, learners develop an ‘I do not care attitude”, said another teacher. “It is also challenging to help these learners to learn at least something of value after participating in these initiative ceremonies”, he added. Consequently, Amoo (2017) and Keiti (2017) found out that there was a strong positive relationship between socioeconomic background of the learner and academic performance in Nigeria and Matungulu sub-county, Machakos County respectively. Findings from this research are the same as by Maina (2010) who concluded that learners with negative attitude, learners cannot settle down and get serious about learning, and thus they cannot achieve positive results. It was therefore concluded that socio-economic background of the learners affects their attitude and academic performance. The environment and the personal characteristics of learners play an important role in their academic success (Kapur, 2018). The school personnel, members of the families and communities provide help and support to learners for the quality of their academic performance. We therefore argue that the environment where a learner storms from plays a central role in performance improvement, and that good performance can be predicated on the social and economic background of the learners.

7. AVAILABLE ASSETS TO AVERT HIGH FAILURE RATE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The aspects identified above were identified as assets of priority if the school wanted to avert high
failure rate. These were particularly from the school boundaries (mainly the people) and outside the school boundaries (local community members, institutions and built capital) and those beyond the school and its community (Myende, 2014; 2015). These were technically identified as primary tier, secondary tier and the tertiary tier by participants.

Within the primary tier, the teachers, the headmasters/principals, the School Development Committee (SDC) members, and the learners and other peer learners were identified were identified as key assets in the school. All the participants identified the built capital like unused storerooms as other assets that could be used to avert high failure rate in rural border learning ecologies. The assets acknowledged above confirm those found by Chikoko and Khanare (2012:30), Myende (2012:46) and Myende (2015:113) in their studies to be assets within the school limits.

Within the secondary tier, the parents and relatives, community based programs such as Communal Area Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), Chilojo club; cultural groups such as GAZA trust, neighbouring schools and former school learners were viewed as critical assets towards averting high failure rate in public examinations in rural border learning ecologies. The above assets too validated those identified by Myende (2014) in his studies in South Africa that these assets are found within the local community.

Lastly in the tertiary tier, notably, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSEC), The District Schools Inspector (DSI) and the Zimbabwe School Examination Council (ZIMSEC) were identified assets from the outside tier. It was beneficial because it confirms the participants understanding that they have to build their schools from inside-out, meaning they have to draw from the primary tier and move to the secondary tier before they consider the outside tier as proposed by the asset-based approach proponents (Myende, 2015). Although many assets were identified, we discuss below to provide an in-depth analysis of why the participants regarded them as important to avert high failure rate in public examinations in rural border learning ecologies.

8. APPLYING THE CRITICAL IDENTIFIED ASSETS TO AVERT THE HIGH FAILURE RATE IN RURAL BORDER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In as much as the participants identified key assets in the form of built capital, organisations and people, we therefore discuss the participants reflections on what they said were critical assets to avert high failure rate in order for learner in rural border ecologies to realise their potential to achieving quality education as their fellow peers do.

The asset headmaster/principals from the primary tier assets were seen to be crucial in making sure that all learners receive all the learner care in order to realise their potential in life regardless of their poor background. For both the teachers and the learners, improved academic performance depended on whether the principal was able to perform some responsibilities, such as ensuring that the school had sufficient teachers and that they taught in the way they should. Secondly, the headmasters/principals were seen especially by learners to be a very significant asset in ensuring teacher and learner motivation and ensuring effective teaching and learning by lowly motivated teachers and learners. They were also seen as important in creating a parent-school-learner relationship. They are most highly qualified in the community and could use their expertise to try to attract resources in order to help learners and parents alike. During reflection in FGD, the teachers and the headmasters had opportunities to communicate fervently to learners that they were willing to help learners by guiding and counselling them, helping the disadvantaged learners to reach their heights although learners grunted that teachers sometimes use their power and position to abuse them. The creation of a relationship by learners with teachers and or headmasters was seen to be critical to build confidence building and feel secure by Myende (2014) in his study in South Africa. He also found out that good relationship created by leaders inside and outside school helps everyone to feel valuable, willing to dedicate his/her skill and capacities to avert high failure rate. This was also in hand with Lezotte (2010) argument that clear school mission, instructional leadership and high expectation for success by the head/principal leads to success in academic performance by learners (Kosgei, 2015; Scheerens, 2013; Myende, 2014).
In additions to the above, teachers were seen by all participants as crucial assets in creating relationships between head-teacher-learner, teacher-neighbouring school-learner, parent-teacher-learner and teacher-donor-learner. Another learner said, “Ha va khesa ngopfu naku hi pfuna, hi vona vatsvari vahina xikolweli” (we want to thank our loco-parents because they help us at school a lot). “They link us with other learners and schools in order to benefit from accessing resources and gain knowledge”, another has this to say. However, one teacher had this to say, “We are here to serve, but we are blocked by resources to use, learner attitude and our remunerations are very very low”, she laughed. Kudari’s (2010) findings showed that low remunerations results in lowly motivated teachers. Lowly motivated teachers cannot perform to their best (Maganga, 2016; Mana, 2010), therefore, we argue that a teacher is a critical asset we can utilise to avert high failure rate, if highly remunerated.

For participants, former learners could play a pivotal role to other learners to realise their social background, lack of teaching and learning materials cannot adversely affect their academic performance if they were to be engaged. All participants (headmaster, teachers, learners, and parents/guardians) during the FGD identified several employed and unemployed former learners as knowledgeable people to contribute towards averting high failure rate. One teacher had this to say during the one on one interview, “We can mobilise these former learners to provide us with teaching and learning materials lacking here for learners to acquire quality education.” One learner reiterated that, “These former learners as assets may provide us with many computers, money to build laboratories and libraries we do not have here.” One parent from the FGD said, “Mara hi swona qhlovo, vana lava vananga hi pfuna lembe leriya, vashavile ti printer letiya ti tirhisiwaka primary lahaya”,  (It is true these former learners once bought printers being used by the primary school). One essential role acknowledged by most participants and was also found by Khanare (2009) and Myende (2015) was that former learners, both employed and unemployed could motivate current learners of the school by giving some examination tips and/or on how to deal with failing to good results and to change their attitude towards their school work.

Local community associations and organisations were identified by participants as central to averting high failure rate in rural border learning ecologies. These may be formal or informal and could include cultural groups and faith-based organisations. The participants argued that these organisations may create a partnership between school and community, by ensuring positive attitude towards schoolwork by learners and community. Culturally groups such as GAZA Trust were identified by all participants as critical assets to avert high failure rate in rural schools. They argued that these cultural groups can bring in teaching and learning materials like the former learners can do. More importantly identified by the learners as an important asset were the faith-based representatives (local religious leaders and elders). The learners and the parents agreed that local religious leaders could be critical assets if effectively used to source scholarships, food, and provide spiritual support for disturbed learners. One learner openly said, “Kumwe kufoira kwedu ndekwemadzinda sama kunoda kupota kuchinamatigwa kuti zvifambe, vafundisi kana vamorofita vanoita kuti mweya yakaipa itsiye tione zvakakanaka zviri mberi” (Some of us have ancestral demons that needs to be prayed for by prophets for them to leave us). We argue that findings above show that assets contribute towards learners’ ability to excel well in their academics. This is because Emery and Flora (2006) say that if utilised well, all human capital is crucial in any community. Cultural groups, for example, may create more funds required by the school to ensure that there are sufficient resources in the school as Lezotte (2010) advocates (Kosgei, 2015).

Further displayed by the school-community assets map model were police were identified as crucial assets within the secondary assets. All the participants were of the view that police officers could play a role giving awareness about drug abuses, promiscuous behaviours and in ensuring discipline of learners in the community, which was seen to be crucial for discipline in the school as the issue of lack of discipline was identified among learners in rural schools. In the effective school, the principal and others (police) act as instructional leaders and effectively and persistently communicate and model the mission of the school to staff, parents and learners (Kosgei, 2015; Keiti, 2017). If not provided, Ogunsola, Osuolale, and Ojo, (2014) found that some may
even get involved into violent and criminal acts, drug abuse, HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancies, induced abortions and finally drop out of school. I argue that police as an asset may play a critical role in averting high failure rate by having some campaign in schools against abuses and getting involved in criminal activities.

9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presented proof to answer the question on how best we utilise an asset-based approach to reduce high failure rate in public examination in Zimbabwean rural schools. In accordance with the Lezotte’s (2010) effective schools model, this paper acknowledged that teacher related factors (teacher satisfaction and motivation to carry out the duty, high teacher/pupil ratio, and heavy workloads), availability of teaching/learning materials (unavailability of library and laboratories, and unavailability of teaching and learning materials-textbooks) and learner related issues (learners and parents towards school work and involving themselves in early sexual activities and disruptive behaviours) has more damaging effects on academic performance affecting the national pass rate in rural border secondary schools. By understanding Lezotte’s seven correlates of effective schools at work, we did not only look at the causes but also looked at possible solutions to those issues causing high failure rate in rural border secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The government of Zimbabwe has been and is playing a pivotal role to reducing this high failure rate in public examination, although it is being affected economic challenges at stake. Based on the research findings and conclusions presented above, the researchers recommend need to educate and motivate the rural communities about the assets they can utilise to avert high failure rate in rural ecologies. From the findings of this study, it is further recommended that there has to be collaborative work among all stakeholders (government, rural schools, the community, and the learners) on how to avert high failure rate in public examinations though an asset-based approach.

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