



## The Impact of Private and Independent Colleges on the Education System in Zimbabwe: The Case of Gweru Urban High Schools

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### Abstract

Education systems in many countries are run by national governments. When the formal education system provided by the government cannot cope with demand for education by learners then alternative educational avenues are explored. This study explores the impact that private and independent colleges have made in the education system in Zimbabwe. The study proffers a view of private and independent colleges that contradicts the often held view that such colleges are established merely for monetary benefits.

### Introduction

Private education institutions, in their various forms, are an important aspect of education systems the world over. These institutions are not a new phenomenon as they have been in existence for many years in both developed and developing countries (Silova, 2009). According to Bray (2007), private educational institutions or private and independent colleges, have become part of the educational environment to the extent that people accept them. This is because the existence of a private education sector enables learners to opt out of state provided education. James (1991) identifies two key drivers for the growth of private education. Firstly, there is demand for education which exceeds what the state can provide. This implies that the formal education system cannot cater for all the learners in the system or those who would want to join the system. Secondly, there is differentiated demand for alternative types and quality of education to that provided by the state. In other words, learners opt to pursue this route because of the type or quality of service that is offered. In some cases, some learners may be disillusioned with the service offered in the formal education system (Hofmeyer and Lee, 2002).

In the United States, the country's history shows that what began as a small group of mostly church-affiliated colleges has over the years grown in both size and complexity. Today, there are more than 1 000 private colleges in the United States which are independent, not-for-profit institutions (Greene, 2000). These colleges operate with revenues from tuition, private gifts or corporate foundation grants. One interesting feature is that all licensed or registered colleges in the country – whether private or public, for profit or not – receive public funds from the federal government. These funds come in the form of direct grants or loans for eligible students and grants to support research or campus programmes. What emerges from this analysis is that in the United States, private and independent colleges have made a huge impact in the country's education system. Such a viewpoint is supported by Glenn (1997) who states that this is because private institutions focus more on values and educational attainment of the child until the student graduates. He adds that they also focus on academic excellence, religious and spiritual life, basic literacy, work habits and self discipline, personal growth, specific moral values, social skills and occupational skills. Evidently, a parent would choose an institution which seeks to impart such qualities through its curriculum.

In China, the concept of private education represents a new system in the country's education system. Hofmeyer and Lee (2004) observe that the country, previously a bastion of centralised public education, is now encouraging private education. Referred to as 'minban', which means 'people-run' as opposed to 'state-owned' education, Zhao (2006) observed that socio-economic causes accounted for its emergence. These included diversified demands and inadequate state funding for education.

In 1997, the State Council published *Regulations for Running a School by Social Forces*, which defines minban education as "schools or educational institutions that are run by corporations, public enterprises, social organizations, social groups, or individual citizens through non-fiscal educational funds" (Huang and Wiseman, 2011). This means that minban education develops as a result of social demand for education as well as an insufficient supply of public education. As can be seen, these are some of the factors that have given rise to the emergence of private and independent colleges the world over.

The same trend is apparent in South Africa where private education has also made its mark in the education system. However, as Hofmeyer and Lee (2004) note, the South African case is rather different from the experiences of other developing countries. While concurring with the assertion that there has been a marginal growth in private education provision, the authors content that there has been no burgeoning of the non-governmental sector in secondary schooling. It is interesting to note that critics of private education viewed the expansion of these institutions as a threat to the state's role of ensuring equal access for all (Kitaev, 1999). Conversely, advocates of independent schooling such as Muller (1992) argued that private education offered alternative choices to the state's standardised educational package. They also argued that these institutions were necessary in order to realise the right of citizens to access private institutions. In addition, as long as there was inefficient service delivery and under-performance in public education in terms of access and quality, private education institutions could continue to fill the gaps left by state provision (Hofmeyer and Lee, 2004). So, in a nutshell, what this implies is that private education in South Africa has contributed to the growth of the

country's education system. This is because private education institutions have come on board to meet demand created by insufficient public educational provision.

In Zimbabwe, following the attainment of independence in 1980, the Government adopted policies aimed at promoting the provision of education for all its citizens (Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ), 2005). This was out of a realisation that the most important resource of any country is its people and that national development was dependent upon that resource. In the same vein, the level and rate of development is also dependent on the people's levels of education. In this regard, the Government widened access to education for all Zimbabweans regardless of their age, race and sex (GoZ, 2005). Naturally, this called for the expansion of existing schools and the establishment of new ones. According to the Education Statistics Report (2001), the expansion was more evident at the secondary school level.

In 1987, the Government of Zimbabwe enacted the Education Act which, among other things, gave the then Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture the responsibility for running Adult Non-Formal Continuing Education (ANFE) programmes. In 1988, following the promulgation of the 1987 Education Act, the Division of ANFE was created and tasked to promote and oversee educational provision outside the formal school system (Gatawa, 1998). According to the author, the promotion of this type of provision was justified because there was need to cater for drop-outs from the formal system and other youths. In fact, the non-formal route was seen as an integral part of the government's strategy to democratise and expand access to education. That route was flexible and easily accessible. Among the programmes that were undertaken was the formation of study groups and private/independent colleges as well as the monitoring of the teaching and learning at those institutions (GoZ, 2005).

Operating under the ambit of ANFE, private and independent colleges have proved popular especially with providers. According to Gatawa (1998), these colleges complement formal secondary school system and provide face-to-face tuition to students. The colleges have provided an alternative route for many who fail to secure places in conventional schools. This perception is consistent with an assertion by Silova (2009) that private education provided by the colleges creates new educational opportunities for many individuals. Indeed, most of the colleges enrol students from Form One and they conduct classes during the day just like conventional schools. Also, the colleges cater for youths and adults who attend afternoon or evening classes, thereby increasing access to education. The majority of the colleges employ qualified teachers on both full-time and part-time basis (Nziramasanga, 1999). The authors observe that in addition to the formal school curriculum, the colleges also offer commercial courses..

### **Statement of the Problem**

The policy of free education introduced by the Government of Zimbabwe in 1980 was aimed at making education accessible to the majority of the children side-lined through colonial discrimination. The new government expanded educational facilities to ensure access to education by all and many children from all backgrounds got a chance to learn. However, the country's formal education system now faces immense challenges as standards are declining due to factors such as: teacher exodus, inadequate budgets, low teacher and administrative morale, poor hygienic conditions in most schools and severe shortages of essential supplies. Thus, failure by the formal education system to provide quality education has left parents and guardians with no choice but to turn to private colleges, which have been commended for providing an alternative route to accessing education. It is therefore against this background that this study sought to investigate and establish the impact which private and independent colleges have made on the education system in Gweru urban, with particular emphasis on secondary education during the period 2009 to 2012.

### **Research Questions**

The research study was structured around the following research questions:

1. To what extent did private and independent colleges contribute to access to education in Gweru urban from 2009 to 2012?
2. To what extent did private and independent colleges contribute to quality education delivery in Gweru urban from 2009 to 2012?
3. What were the challenges faced by private and independent colleges in providing effective education service delivery in Gweru urban from 2009 to 2012?

### **Research Design**

In this study, the researcher employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the impact of private and independent colleges on the education system in Gweru urban. According to Best and Khan (1997), the descriptive survey design is concerned with the conditions and relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on and the effects that are evident. It therefore describes, clarifies and interprets issues as they currently exist. Thus, its primary concerns are the nature and degree of existing conditions. The researcher therefore adopted this design because it is effective in dealing with large populations since it is most concerned with generalization of statistical results. It also allows data to be collected through the questionnaire which has considerable advantages in data collection (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). The descriptive survey affords the illumination and clarifications of the meanings of actions and situations..

In this study, the researcher used simple random sampling to select 25 respondents who were drawn from the five private and independent colleges and this number was seen to be representative of the entire population. According to O'Leary (2004:107), simple random sampling is 'the simplest form type of random sampling because within a designated population, all elements have an equal chance of inclusion.' This viewpoint is supported by Macmillan and Schumacher (2001) who state that simple random sampling is a form of probability sampling in which every individual member in the sampling frame has an equal and independent chance of being chosen for the study. Furthermore, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) point out that in a random sample, the characteristics of each individual in a sample reflect the characteristics of

the total population. This implies that the results are less likely to be biased and can be generalised to the larger population.

From each of the five colleges involved in this study, the principal was purposively selected. In order to get the other four respondents who, in this case were teachers, the researcher then used simple random sampling. Babbie (2008) observes that one of the advantages of simple random sampling is that it ensures a degree of representativeness. To ensure that every element of the population had an equal chance of being selected in this study, the researcher wrote all teachers' surnames on slips of paper, put them in a hat and mixed them up thoroughly, and then drew out the number of slips required. This was consistent with Macmillan and Schumacher's (2001) advice that to collect a simple random sample, a researcher must assign each unit of the target population a number. A set of random numbers is then generated and the units having those numbers are included in the sample. The researcher was cognizant of this advice in choosing the 25 respondents. Questionnaires and an interview guide were used as data collection instruments in this study. All the five college principals were interviewed while all the twenty teachers responded to questionnaires.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1: Highest Academic Qualifications of the Respondents (N = 25)**

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
'O' Level	2	8%
'A' Level	6	24%
Degree	17	68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 above shows that all the respondents had attained educational levels ranging from 'O' Level to degree level. The lowest academic qualification was 'O' Level and this was due to the fact that 'O' Level was the minimum level of education required for a teacher in Zimbabwe. Two (8%) respondents had 'O' Level, while six (24%) had 'A' Level. In addition, 17 (68%) respondents were educated up to degree level and it was interesting to note that these respondents constituted the majority in the study. This implies that all the respondents had high levels of literacy and this had an important bearing on how the questions were handled.

In a similar vein, Table 2 below depicts the professional qualifications of the respondents. The teachers were asked to indicate their highest level of professional qualifications as these were deemed important in this study. According to Tooley (2001) there is a relationship between academic qualification and the teacher's performance in the classroom.

**Table 2: Respondents' Professional Qualifications (N = 25)**

Professional Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
C.E.	2	8%
Dip. Ed	9	36%
Bed	7	28%
Grad C.E	1	4%
None	6	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

As depicted in Table 2 above, two (8%) respondents were Certificate in Education holders while nine (36%) respondents had Diplomas in Education. A further seven (28%) respondents possessed Bachelor of Education degrees. One (4%) respondent held a Graduate Certificate in Education and six (24%) respondents had no professional qualifications.

What can be discerned from the above is that the majority of the teachers in private colleges in Gweru urban are qualified teachers. This implies that on average therefore these institutions employed qualified teachers and this was an indication that the quality of teachers was good and therefore good students' academic performance was to be expected. The respondents were also asked to indicate their years of teaching experience. This was to enable the researcher to describe the respondents' experience as a variable that had a bearing on teacher performance. Accordingly, data on the experience of respondents is shown in Table 3 below. There were two (8%) respondents with less than one year's experience while those with experience ranging between two and five years were five, constituting 20% of the respondents. It was interesting to note that the majority of respondents were those with experience ranging from 6 – 10 years and these were nine (36%). In addition, five (20%) respondents were in the 11 – 15 years category while three (12%) had experience ranging from 16 – 20 years. Only one (4%) respondent had over 20 years experience.

**Table 3 Respondents' Teaching Experience (N = 25)**

Experience	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one year	2	8%
2 – 5 years	5	20%
6 – 10 years	9	36%
11 – 15 years	5	20%
16 – 20 years	3	12%
Over 20 years	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

A discernible trend that emerged from the above findings is that generally private and independent colleges in Gweru urban were staffed by teachers who are experienced. Again, this was an indication that quality education was achievable. Evidently, such a finding lends credence to the notion that the unfavourable working condition in the public education sector forced some qualified and experienced teachers to join private colleges. According to Cletus Mushanawani (*Manica Post*, 11/01/2013), private colleges were able to pay these teachers in foreign currency because the Zimbabwean dollar had been severely eroded by inflation.

**Table 4 Information on the Statuses of the Private Colleges**

College	Status	Year started operating	Authorised to operate (Yes/No)
A	Registered	2009	N/A
B	Unregistered	2009	Yes
C	Unregistered	2004	Yes
D	Unregistered	2010	Yes
E	Unregistered	2008	Yes

The private and independent colleges from which data were collected were coded as A, B, C, D and E following the order in which the researcher visited them from the first day. Coding was necessitated by the need to maintain anonymity of the respondents. Five respondents were targeted at each college.

Table 4 depicts the state of affairs at the private colleges which were used in this study. It was interesting to note that only one private college (A) was registered while the other four (B, C, D and E) were not registered. It was also interesting to note that most private colleges started operating during the period 2009 – 2010. According to Tichagwa (2012), this was the period that educational standards had started declining. As shown in Table 4 private colleges that were not registered had been authorised to start operations pending registration by the Ministry of Education head office. Annual Reports for Gweru independent colleges reveal that these colleges had submitted all the required documents to the Provincial Office in 2011. Evidently, this scenario fits in well with Tooley's (2001) claim that one of the common regulatory barriers to private education provision that many countries face has to do with cumbersome and complex registration processes that are less explicit than they should be. He says this leaves institutions in a position of not knowing what documentation is required and how it should be obtained.

**Table 5: Teaching Staff**

College	Trained			Untrained			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
A	4	3	7	2	1	3	6	4	10
B	4	2	6	1	1	2	5	3	8
C	4	1	5	1	2	3	5	3	8
D	3	4	7	1	1	2	4	5	9
E	5	3	8	2	1	3	7	4	11
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>46</b>

Table 5 above shows the number of teachers at each of the private colleges that participated in this study. There was a total of 20 male qualified teachers and a total of 13 female qualified teachers from all the five private colleges. The numbers of untrained male and female teachers were seven and six respectively. What can be deduced from such a finding is that there were more qualified teachers than untrained ones and this is the trend in all private colleges in Gweru urban and this is in sharp contrast to the generally held belief that private colleges employ untrained teachers. Indeed, this points to the fact that these institutions can deliver quality education.

**Table 6: Current Student Enrolment**

College	ZJC			'O' Level			'A' Level		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
A	12	11	23	32	26	58	6	5	11
B	13	10	23	21	20	41	4	3	7
C	0	0	0	12	27	39	3	2	5
D	36	80	116	126	85	211	17	19	36
E	31	26	57	88	104	192	18	13	31
<b>Totals</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>90</b>

Table 6 above shows the student enrolments for the private colleges that were used in this study. There were a total of 219 Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) students from all the five colleges and this translated to an average of 43 students per college and this compares well with conventional schools. For 'O' Level, there were a total of 541 students from the five colleges and this translated to an average of 108 students per college. Again, this is the trend in most formal schools. 'A' Level students were 90 and this gave an average of 18 students per college.

What emerges from these findings is that private and independent colleges in Gweru urban were promoting access to education as they were able to cater for students who had left formal schools for various reasons as well as those who could not be absorbed by conventional schools. The five school principals who were interviewed supported this view and they added that the 'half baked' students who were churned out by formal schools did not attain the required five 'O' Level passes. So, the only alternative was for them to take the NFE route, that is, private and independent colleges.

According to GoZ (2005), these colleges complement the formal secondary school system and provide face-to-face tuition to students and they have provided an alternative route for many who fail to secure places in conventional schools.

**Table 7: Total Student Enrolments for the period 2009 – 2012**

College	2009	2010	2011	2012
A	73	160	222	240
B	23	47	63	77
C	21	20	29	36
D	N/A	140	262	302
E	88	147	193	221
<b>Totals</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>876</b>

Table 7 above shows the total enrolment figure for each of the five colleges that participated in this study. What can be seen from these statistics is that the number of students who enrolled in private colleges rose significantly from 205 students to 876 in 2012 and then to 850 at the time the study was undertaken. Except for College A and B, most colleges recorded increases in their enrolment figures and this seems to be the trend in Gweru urban. This finding also indicates that private colleges have enhanced access to education in the area. The five school principals confirmed this point when they said that private colleges had contributed to the education sector and had provided a second chance to those who had lost the opportunity to learn.

**Table 8: Overall Percentage pass rates for ‘O’ Level**

College	2009	2010	2011	2012
A	Not available	0 – 20%	0 – 20%	20 – 40%
B	Not available	0 – 20%	0 – 20%	0 – 20%
C	0 – 20%	0 – 20%	0 – 20%	20 – 40%
D	Not available	Not available	40 – 60%	40 – 60%
E	40 – 60%	60 – 80%	60 – 80%	40 – 60%

Table 8 above shows the overall percentage pass rates for ‘O’ Level from 2009 - 2012 for each of the colleges that were used in this study. The statistics depicted above indicate that contrary to the commonly held view that private colleges have contributed to the decline in the education system, some of these institutions have in fact performed well in national examinations. Colleges C and E had statistics for 2009 while the other three did not have any. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that as new players in the system, these institutions were unaware of the need to compile the statistics. In 2010, College D did not have any statistics while Colleges A, B and C had pass rates ranging between 0 – 20 percent. College E had a pass rate ranging between 60 – 80% IN 2010. In 2011, it was the same trend except for Colleges D and E who attained pass rates ranging from 40 – 60 percent and 60 – 80 percent respectively. In the year 2012, College A had a pass rate in the 20 – 40 percent range, College B attained a pass rate that was between 0 – 20 percentage, while Colleges C and E had a pass rates ranging between 20 – 40 percent and 60 – 80 percent respectively. College D attained a pass rate ranging from 40 – 60 percent. This finding also implies that private colleges have contributed considerably to quality education delivery in Gweru urban.

**Table 9: Overall Percentage pass rates for ‘A’ Level**

College	2009	2010	2011	2012
A	20 – 40%	20 – 40%	40 – 60%	Not available
B	Not available	40 – 60%	40 – 60%	40 – 60%
C	20 – 40%	20 – 40%	60 – 80%	40 – 60%
D	Not available	Not available	40 – 60%	40 – 60%
E	Not available	60 – 80%	80 – 100%	80 – 100%

As Table 9 above shows, in 2009, Colleges A and C had pass rates in the 20 – 40 percent range while statistics for the other colleges were not available. In 2010, Colleges A and C repeated the same trend while College E had a pass rate ranging from 60 – 80 percent, and College B attained a pass rate ranging between 40 – 60 percent. Again, in 2011, Colleges A, B and D attained pass rates in the 40 – 60 percent range, while Colleges C and E had impressive pass rates at 60 – 80 and 80 – 100 percent respectively. In 2012, three colleges, B, C and D, were in the 40 – 60 percent pass rate and College E again attained an impressive 80 – 100 percent pass rate, while there were no statistics from College A. This could be attributed to the problems that bedevilled the college towards the end of 2012. The teachers are said to have downed their tools in protest over unpaid salaries (Gweru District Annual Report for 2012).

### **Responses on Access, Quality Education and Challenges faced by Private Colleges**

Table 10 below gives a summary of responses on access to education and quality education as well as the challenges that were faced by private and independent colleges in their quest to provide efficient education service delivery in Gweru urban.

**Table 10: Summary of Responses regarding Access, Quality Education and Challenges faced by Private Colleges**

Key: SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

NS = Not Sure

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

Response Variables			Frequency	Percentage
14.	Private colleges provide an alternative way to accessing education.	SA	15	60%
		A	5	20%
		NS	2	8%
		D	2	8%
		SD	1	4%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
15.	Private colleges cater for the educational needs of school drop-outs, repeaters and other youths.	SA	14	56%
		A	8	32%
		NS	2	8%
		D	1	4%
		SD	0	0%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
16.	Inadequate resources hinder quality education delivery by private colleges.	SA	16	64%
		A	7	28%
		NS	2	8%
		D	0	0%
		SD	0	0%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
17.	Regulations in the education system are not favourable to private and independent colleges in Zimbabwe.	SA	15	60%
		A	7	28%
		NS	0	0%
		D	2	8%
		SD	1	4%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
18.	The emergence of private colleges has affected quality education delivery in Gweru urban.	SA	2	8%
		A	2	8%
		NS	6	24%
		D	5	20%
		SD	10	40%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>
19.	Private colleges are not meeting the expectations of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture.	SA	0	0%
		A	5	20%
		NS	4	16%
		D	9	36%
		SD	7	28%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

With reference to Table 10 above, the responses 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' were collapsed to refer to a positive response while 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' were taken to mean a negative response. 'Not Sure' was taken as a neutral response.

In Question 14, which sought to establish whether or not private colleges provided an alternative way to accessing education by those intending to go to school, 20 respondents (80%) agreed that private colleges were indeed providing an alternative way for accessing education by especially those who, for one reason or the other, could not enrol into formal schools. This finding is consistent with an assertion by Fielden and LaRocque (2008) that private education has seen tremendous growth in recent years because governments are increasingly faced with the challenge of meeting the demand for public education and have realised they are unable to respond adequately. By contrast, three (12%) respondents disagreed with this perception, while two (8%) respondents were not sure.

In the same vein, the above finding also established that private colleges catered for the educational needs of diverse groups of learners such as school drop-outs, repeaters and other youths. A total of 22 (88%) respondents were in agreement with this view, while 1 (4%) respondent disagreed and two (8%) were uncertain. This finding is consistent with Provincial Education Circular Number 4/2010 which states that private colleges are non-formal institutions which offer tuition to failed ZJC, 'O' and 'A' Level students and other secondary school drop-outs who may want to improve themselves academically for a variety of reasons.

In Question 16, the researcher wanted to find out if inadequate resources hindered quality education delivery by private and independent colleges. There was overwhelming evidence to support this view as a total of 23 (92%) subjects responded affirmatively to the question. This finding resonates well with a view by Tooley (2001) that inadequate resources such as finance, material or human resources severely affect the smooth running of any institution. The school principals alluded to this fact when they pointed out that operations of private colleges were characterised by shortage of teaching and learning materials as well as failure to retain qualified staff because most positions are on contract basis which do not attract benefits such as pensions.

As could be expected, none of the respondents disagreed with the view, while two (8%) respondents were unsure. Again, this served to underline the importance which the respondents attached to the question of resources in an institution.

Also related to the question of inadequate resources was the regulatory environment which the respondents viewed as unfavourable to private education providers. A total of 22 (88%) respondents agreed with this perception. Three (12%) respondents disagreed with this notion while there were no respondents who were not sure. What this finding implies is that, as Tooley (2001) points out, the biggest inhibiting factors for private education in many countries has to do with inadequate resources and the regulatory environment. A report by Felix Share in *The Herald* (13/11/2012) confirms this when it states that a total of 113 private colleges in Zimbabwe were closed in November 2012 for failure to meet registration requirements. Echoing the same sentiments, Kitaev (1999), while acknowledging that regulations were intended to protect consumers, says regulations often have the effect of stifling the much needed educational opportunities. The five principals also highlighted this when they pointed out that regulations for registration needed to be simplified.

Question 18 was intended to elicit views on the claim that the emergence of private colleges had affected quality education delivery in Gweru urban. Fifteen respondents (60%) disagreed with this view, while four (16%) respondents agreed that it was true that the emergence of private colleges had affected quality education delivery in Gweru urban, perhaps taking a cue from critics such as Tichagwa (2012) who has condemned these institutions as contributing to the rot in the education sector. In addition, six (24%) respondents were not sure.

The five principals also underlined the fact that not all private colleges had poor standards. One of principal cited the impressive results which one private college had produced - two students had scooped 15 points each at 'A' Level, a further three students scored 14 points each again at 'A' Level and several others who had good points. What emerges from this finding is that the emergence of private colleges in Gweru urban has in fact contributed significantly to quality education in the area. Thus, according to the college principals, the performance of these institutions was good. What this finding implies is that while some people think that these colleges are not meeting the expectations of the Ministry of Education, they may simply be doing so from an uninformed point of view.

## Conclusions

On the basis of the above findings, it can be concluded that private and independent colleges have made an impact on the education system in Gweru urban. This was because the findings revealed that the number of students enrolling in these institutions had been on the increase since 2009. This indicated that private colleges had significantly expanded access to education as well as providing an alternative route to education, especially by those dissatisfied with education in the public sector. Such a viewpoint is consistent with Tooley's (2001) assertion that if governments fail to provide and fund the education that parents expect their children to get, then they will turn to other ways of meeting this need.

It can also be concluded that private colleges have contributed to quality education delivery in Gweru urban. An analysis of the pass rates of all the private colleges that participated in the study showed that these colleges recorded outstanding performances in public examinations, with the highest pass rate recorded being in the 80 – 100% range for both 'O' and 'A' Levels. This showed that the quality of delivery was good, because student achievement was a result of quality education delivery. As Bowora (2002) states, outcome indicators such good examination pass rates are an indication of quality education.

It can further be concluded that regulations governing the operations of private and independent colleges were stringent and were therefore seen as an inhibiting factor to the development of private education provision. From the findings in the study, it was seen that the process of registering a private college was a long, tedious and complex process. The result was that most private colleges had not been registered or had failed to comply with the requirements, thereby disadvantaging the learners. Such a finding is consistent with an assertion by Tooley (2001) that the biggest inhibiting factor for private education provision in many countries had to do with the regulatory environment.

It can also be concluded that another constraint that undermined effective service delivery by private colleges in Gweru urban was that of inadequate resources. From the findings of the study, it emerged that in the absence of this impediment, these institutions could have performed much better than what they did.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations are made:

- The Ministry of Education should advocate for the establishment of a comprehensive policy on the operations of private and independent colleges which is supported by an Act of Parliament. This is because private colleges can bring many benefits to a country such as increased access, more innovation, greater equity and increased efficiency in education delivery.
- There is need to simplify the registration process for private colleges and make it more responsive to the needs of the clients. Currently, operations of some unregistered private colleges are shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty. Thus the registration process could even be decentralised to districts to ensure timeous processing of applications for registration.
- Private colleges could introduce co-curricular activities such as sporting and cultural activities in order to foster an all-round curriculum that caters for diverse groups of learners.
- International donor organisations such as UNESCO could assist governments by helping them to clarify their policies about private colleges and the importance of these institutions in realising national educational goals.
- Finally, while the issues that emerged from this study about private and independent colleges in Gweru urban could not be generalised to the whole country, however, the findings remain salient indicators for the need to explore further the impact of private and independent colleges across the whole country.

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