

The Efficacy of the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) in the Provision of Life Skills to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *The Basic Education Assistant Module (BEAM) is one of the various forms of social protection that the Government of Zimbabwe is providing to vulnerable children. This research study evaluated the effectiveness of BEAM (Basic Education Assistance Module) as an intervention programme on education for orphans and vulnerable children. The study used a mixed methods approach. The survey design underpinned the study. The population included secondary school children who were beneficiaries of BEAM as well as teachers in three Harare schools. Purposive sampling was used to come up with a representative sample of thirty teachers and thirty learners (BEAM beneficiaries). The questionnaire was the sole data collection tool used. The results showed that BEAM limited the number of subjects to studied by beneficiaries. In addition it was established that most BEAM beneficiaries lacked a financial support in their curriculum especially sporting activities, life skills, food and uniforms. It was concluded that while BEAM managed to help orphans and vulnerable children additional funding is needed to enhance their quality of life. The major recommendations made include the need for BEAM to give independence in the number of subjects to be done and written at Ordinary Level, informed by the pupil capability. It was also recommended that BEAM should go beyond the payment of fees and include the purchasing of uniforms, books and supplementary food. The responsible authorities were also encouraged to reduce bias in the selection of BEAM beneficiaries. Lastly it was recommended that support systems be put in place for orphans and vulnerable children in transition to employment and adulthood.*

Keywords: BEAM, Orphans, Vulnerable children, Social safety net, Assets, Life Skills training

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe is the country with the highest literacy rate in Africa. One of the secret behind this success was the introduction of the Basic Education Assistant Module (BEAM) more than a decade ago. BEAM is one of the various forms of social protection that the Government of Zimbabwe is providing to vulnerable children. It is a school fees assistance programme whose beneficiaries are chosen from across the country. BEAM is administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Services in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. The primary objective of BEAM is to reduce the number of children dropping out and reach out to children who have never been to school due to economic hardships that came as a result of sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the United States and its Western Allies like Britain. The main development objective of BEAM is to prevent irreversible welfare losses for poor households who resort to perverse coping mechanisms, like withdrawing children from school, in response to increasing poverty. To date millions of children in Zimbabwe have benefited from this noble module. This study was carried to establish the efficacy of BEAM in the provision of life skills to orphans and vulnerable children.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The research study sought to answer the question. How effective is the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM)

as a Social Safety Net for Orphans and Vulnerable children in Zimbabwe?

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions underpinned the study

1. Are children's assets considered during payment of BEAM funds?
2. Do children have a choice in selection of subjects?
3. Is BEAM gender sensitive?
4. Do BEAM beneficiaries receive life skills training?

2. Literature Review

2.1.1 Basic Education Module (BEAM) Concept

It is one of the various forms of social protection that the Zimbabwean Government is providing to orphans and vulnerable children. BEAM is administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Services in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. It assists vulnerable children with the payment of levies, tuition and examination fees. (BEAM Module Draft Version 7). For children to benefit from BEAM they are selected as follows:-

- In every ward the Councillor, working together with the community Child Protection Committee (CPC) convenes a meeting of households in the primary school catchment's area to elect CSC members. The meeting receives nominations of potential beneficiaries for

primary, secondary and special schools based on the OVC Village Register.

- The CSC considers submissions from the community and selects the neediest children.
- The final list of beneficiaries is submitted to the District Education Officer and the District Social Welfare Officer for joint verification against the school budget.
- The DEO sends the list to the Ministry of Labour and Social Services BEAM Project Management Unit. She/he also sends copies to the local authority and the Regional Director of Education.
- The same list of beneficiaries is kept at the school. The CSC advises the CPC and the community about the selected children.

Having now the basic knowledge of what BEAM is and number of pupils in Zimbabwe who have benefited from this, focus will now be on whether BEAM beneficiaries have any choice in selection of subjects in their school curriculum.

2.2 Choice of subjects and assets consideration

Rarely do school student have choices in curriculum selection (BEAM Module Draft Version 7). A study by USAID (2008) on programmes that benefit orphans and vulnerable children carried out in communities in Sub-Saharan Africa found out that:-

- Most programmes focused on provision of material
- Payment of basic education regardless of asset
- Education did not consider the abilities of the an individual

An analysis of the all children safe school programme in Swaziland was carried out by Catholic Relief Services in (2008) observed that emphasis on the programme was on provision of material support, payment of fees for basic subjects. Programmes generally look at the immediate needs of the community. These programmes are usually community based and the community volunteer teachers and classroom assistants to mitigate the burden of increased enrolment.

The community child mentoring programme in Rwanda focuses on the needs of orphans and vulnerable children. The government of Rwanda pays for the school fees and non-governmental organisations provide material support to these children within their community. The community child mentoring programme prepares the child academically. There is no selection procedure for this project. Children have no choice in subjects they will be doing neither does payment of fees consider the abilities of children (USAID 2008).

A research by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) (2008) provisions for orphans and vulnerable children in Burundi found out that orphans and vulnerable children were provided with basic education, stationery, school uniforms. The criteria for payment of fees did not consider the assets of these children. Payment of fees was up to secondary level. Government efforts were supported by the Nzokira Project which empowered communities.

In Zimbabwe the government has a Basic Education Assistance Module which pays for basic education. The government pays fees from primary up to secondary school. Subjects paid for the compulsory and do not take cognizance of the abilities of the children. From the research studied above most projects by government to help orphans and vulnerable children do not consider the assets of these children, Government pay for compulsory subjects which they deem are essential. Examination fees paid by the safety nets only pay for specific subjects which to some students are not beneficial. Focus now will be on the sensitivity of BEAM on gender.

2.3 BEAM and Gender Sensitivity

The World Bank (2000) pointed out that most countries had developed national policies and plans for orphans and vulnerable children. These policies promoted gender equity in disbursement of funds to support their education. Education was targeted as a right for all children disregarding sex. A survey by USAID (2008) on responses of impact of children orphaned at an early age in several sub-Saharan countries found out that:-

- Some countries had more females in schools compared to males at the lower primary but the task declined as children moved up with their grades.
- Support programmes requested equal representation of the sexes in some countries.
- Developing countries had girl child empowerment programmes that encouraged the education of the girl child.

A study by UNICEF (1994) in Zimbabwe highlighted that entry to primary school stood at 100% for girls and boys. Drop out for girls remained higher than for boys. Article 10 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in early 1991 promoted positive discrimination to advance women and girls. UNICEF (2007) on research carried out on Girls Education in Zimbabwe noted that the country had ratified the United Nations charter on the rights of children, people with disabilities and women. There was some representation at higher level to try and address these gender disparities. In Lesotho a gender steering committee was established in 2004 which was later transformed into a gender unit. The committee led initiatives to promote gender issues in the ministry of education. The committee's task was to establish equal representation of both sexes in resource allocation, training and education at very early levels (UN 2007).

Whilst in most countries a great deal has been done to promote girls education and gender parity studies in most African countries have shown that these immense gains could be eroded unless the gains were institutionalized into the relevant ministries of education and training. The UN(2007) also noted that in these African countries that had taken an initiative to create Gender parity there was no specific budgets for the education of the girl child and countries were highly dependent on UNICEF in financing or from donor funding. While this may be understandable in the beginning of the programme, this could constitute problems when the programmes were established. Vulnerable children needs protection in society they need to

be independent in life so that they can sustain their lives. Let's now focus on why children in these special circumstances need life skills training.

2.4 BEAM and Life Skills Training

One of the fundamental principles in reaching orphans and vulnerable children is that they should develop independent living skills. Life skills training cover areas that are often neglected in formal school education, these include values and attitudes. There is need for this training for orphans and vulnerable children since they would be tackling the real challenges of life faced by children at school and after school (UN 2007). Life skills programmes are based on the WHO definition. It is training that aims to develop abilities for adaptive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO 2007).

The ten core life skills can be grouped into three areas; self-knowledge, relating to others and creative thinking combined with problem solving. Self-knowledge includes self-awareness, self-esteem, self-control and setting and following goals in life (WHO 2007). Relating to others entails interpersonal skills through formation of relationships, adjustment to society, advocating for change, empathy, ability to resist unhealthy pressures from adults and peers, and negotiating ways through difficult life situations.

Interpersonal skills include empathy building, active listening, giving an deceiving feedback, nonverbal communication, assertion and refusal skills, cooperation and team work and relationship and community building skills. According to UNICEF (2003) creative thinking entails making appropriate decisions and developing skills to solve problems. Other are skills for identifying important influences on values and attitudes, skills for acting on discrimination and stereotypes and skills for understanding the different social norms, beliefs, myths and culture including concepts of gender (UNICEF 2003). Life skills generally and naturally take into consideration the actual social environment of the learners (UNICEF 2003). A study carried out in Zimbabwe in to establish the education of children and women in special circumstances by UNICEF in 2006 found out that women they were not taught life skills. In fact their education was too academic and tended to create an individual who only believed in white collar employment. Research has shown that life skills training fill gaps in academic education.

Unemployment, HIV and AIDS are real problems ravaging the societies in most sub-Saharan countries the teaching of life skills addresses the problems. Life skills training provide a catalyst for problem solving by looking within the individual for the resources to handle real life situations. Presently most school curricula in developing countries give little guidance on how to cope with challenges mentioned earlier (UN 2007). Their education did not allow them to explore their existing values and to form new ones.

Chakuchichi et al (2009) highlighted that independent living skills are skills that enable the individual to manage

themselves in their environment independent living skills are essential to help children acquire skills to manage the challenges associated with growing up. Studies by De Jong in 1981 on Quality Of Life for vulnerable children found out that education system should profiteer the necessary support through training according to Freire's critical pedagogy in dialogical and dialectical classroom and community discourse Chimedza and Peters (2001). Studies by De Jong in 1981 quoted in Chimedza and Peters (2001) on empowering vulnerable children found out that fulfillment and empowerment for children required them to be trained in life skills at an early age. The study found out that vocational training was essential to equip and empower children.

USAID (2008) reporting on effective support programmes in different countries stated that 74% of orphans and vulnerable were provided with basic education needs, programmes that reduce hunger, malnutrition and diseases, critics of this strategy have expressed concern that children potentials are never exploited as the main goals of these programmes are to make people literate.

Observers assert that empowering community groups to monitor the support provided, community cooperatives, microfinance services, community based assert mapping are needed in order to come up with effective programme to empower orphans and vulnerable children. Attaining employable skills and basic education are both important in providing life skills to orphans and vulnerable children (<http://www.unaids.org>). A variety of approaches to increase access to education among orphans and vulnerable children are important. UNICEF (2008) advocated for assert mapping and vocational skills training for children. This would make them attain life skills that would make them independent in life. In fact life skills training give young people opportunities to make decisions about their lives (<http://www.unaids.org.lifeskills training>)

Although studies highlighted above have focused on the need for skill training and the need for independent life skills training, studies did not focus on the relevance of the skills training and the focus on the assets and ability of the vulnerable child. Focus should also have been on environmental assets which have a high bearing on the specific skills training that should be initiated for the child.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the use of mixed methodology. The research questions were designed in the way that they require qualitative responses. However, some questions which were derived from the research questions demanded quantitative presentation and analysis. These were based on the responses gathered from the respondents. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) define mixed methods research as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study or set of related studies. Rossman and Wilson (1985) cited by Johnson et al. (2007) identified three reasons for combining quantitative and qualitative research that is to enable confirmation or collaboration of each other through

triangulation, to develop analysis in order to provide richer data and to initiate new modes of thinking by attending to paradoxes that emerge from the two data sources. In this study, the researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently and then analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a survey design since data was collected from schools that are in Harare Metropolitan Province. The study also employed this approach as questionnaires were used to gather data from the respondents. This approach eliminated the possibility of manipulating the variables as the case with experimental approach. The main disadvantage of this approach is that it relies heavily on respondents' willingness to respond and their willingness to answer the questions.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population for this study was made up of 10 secondary schools in Highglen District. The ten secondary schools had total of 480 children under Basic Education Assistant Module (BEAM). Three schools with the highest number of beneficiaries automatically constituted the research field. Purposive sampling was used to come up with a representative sample of 30 BEAM beneficiaries from the three schools.. Simple random sampling was also

used to select 10 teachers at each of the 3 schools. The constituted a teacher representative sample of 30.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

The questionnaire was the primary data collection tool used for both teachers and the BEAM beneficiaries. It had both closed and open ended questions. The questionnaire for the teachers was different from that of the beneficiaries although there was little difference on thematic issues.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 1: Composition of Respondents by sex

	Teachers	Pupils	Percentage %
Males	10	18	46.7
Females	20	12	53.3
Total	30	30	100

Table 1 shows that 53.3% against a 46.7% of all the respondents were females. Female teachers contributed immensely in the survey as compared to male teachers with a 66.7% and 33.3% respectively. 60 % of all pupils were males. Therefore, the distribution of participants' responses was sensitive to gender.

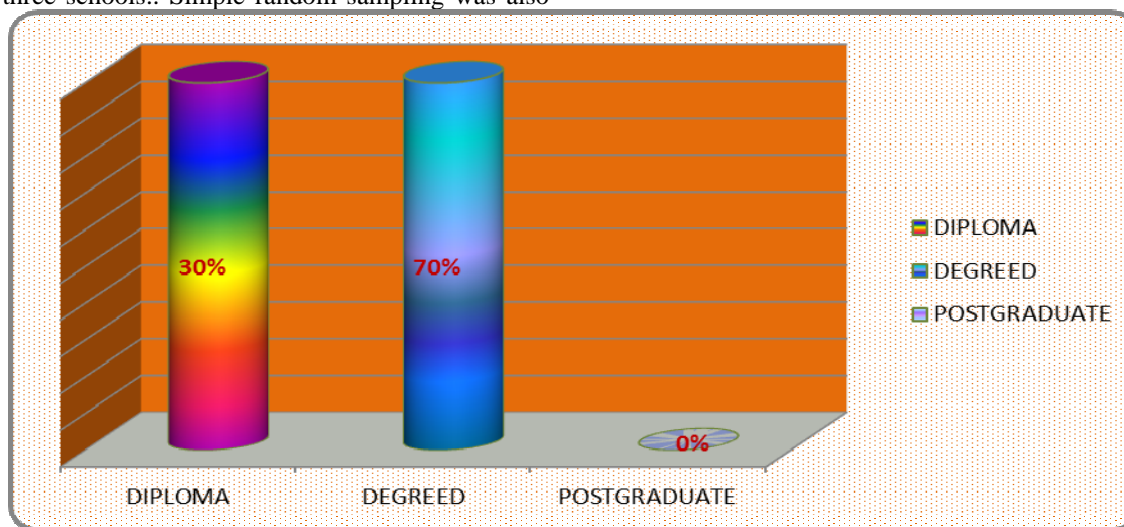


Figure 1: Teachers Professional Qualifications

30% of respondents had diplomas and 70% had first degrees. None in the survey catchment area had postgraduate profession..

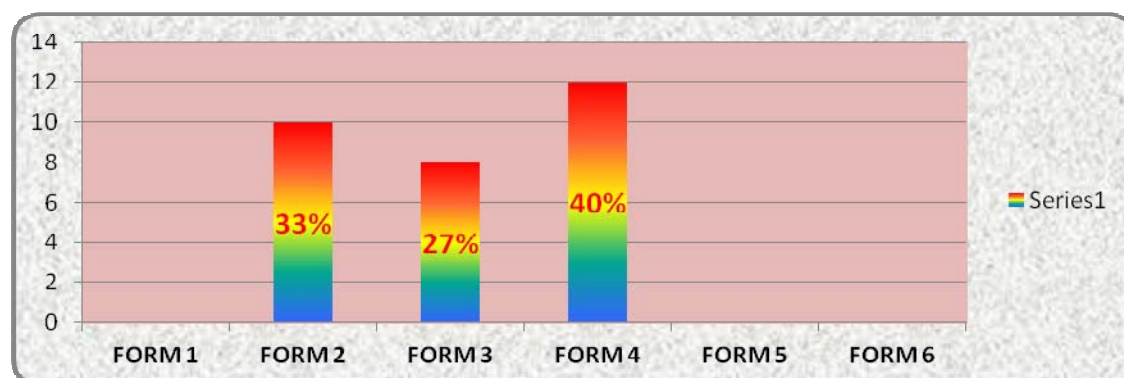


Figure 2: Learners (beneficiary) Participation

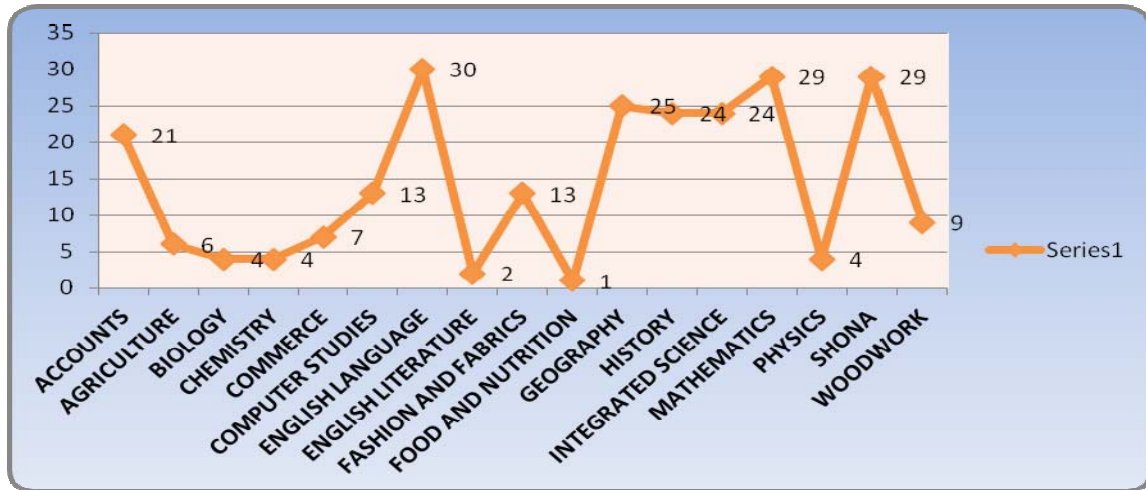
From fig two above it can be deduced that most of the respondents were drawn from form two to form four.

4.2 Subjects being done by Respondents (Pupils)

The results showed that on average 8 pupils per school were doing a single practical subject against an average of 27 pupils per school who do core subjects such as English,

Mathematics, History, Shona and Integrated science. The BEAM funding support a student doing up to six subjects (five core subjects and one practical subject.)

4.3 Subjects being done by BEAM beneficiaries



4.4 Whether pupils (beneficiaries) have any choices in the selection of subjects

The study investigated the extent to which pupils had choices in selection of subjects.

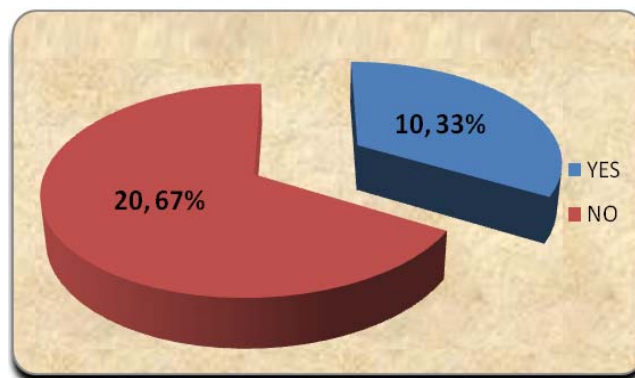


Figure 4: Choices in the selection of subjects

The figure above shows that there is little independence of BEAM funded pupils in the selection of subject to do and write at O- level. (67%) of the pupils' responses said no. On the same question a survey carried on teachers reflects that there is little choice in selection of subjects. Fig 5 below shows teachers' responses.

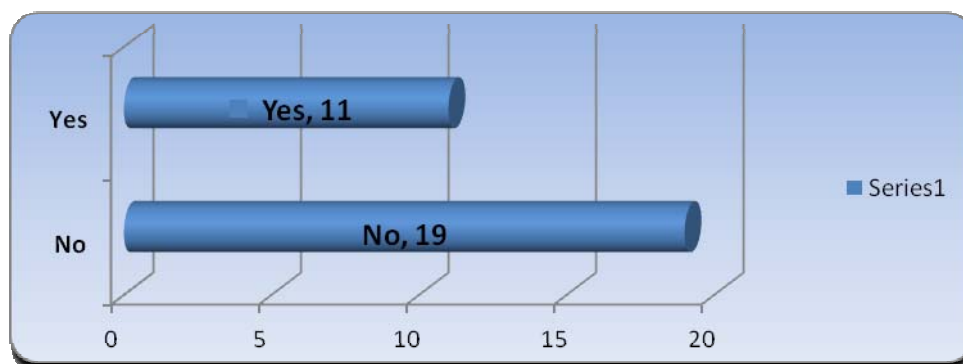


Figure 5: Teachers' responses on the pupils choice in selecting subjects

The responses from teachers and pupils closely tally.

4.5 The subjects in which pupils are good at.

Fig 6 attempted to capture statistical data, which sought to compare different subjects the BEAM pupils are good at. English language topped the interest list.

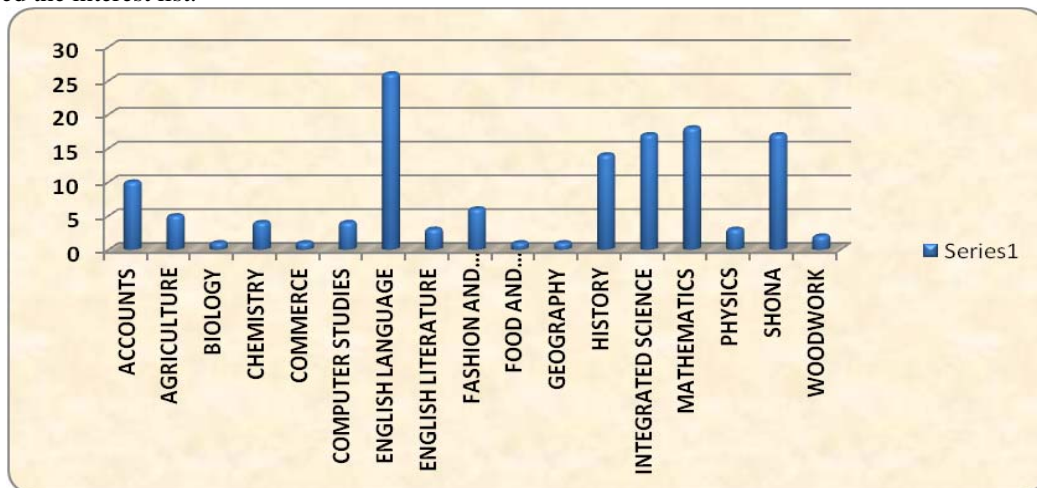


Figure 6: Responses on subjects pupils are good at.

Most of the pupils were good at the 5 major core subjects with a few interested in the practical subjects such as Agriculture, Fashion and Fabrics, Food and Nutrition and Wood work. The trend also showed that fewer pupils were not gifted in pure sciences such as physics, chemistry and

biology. Practical subjects heavily demand additional funds of buying practical kits.

4.6 The special assets among pupils

80% of the pupils had several assets which needed support.

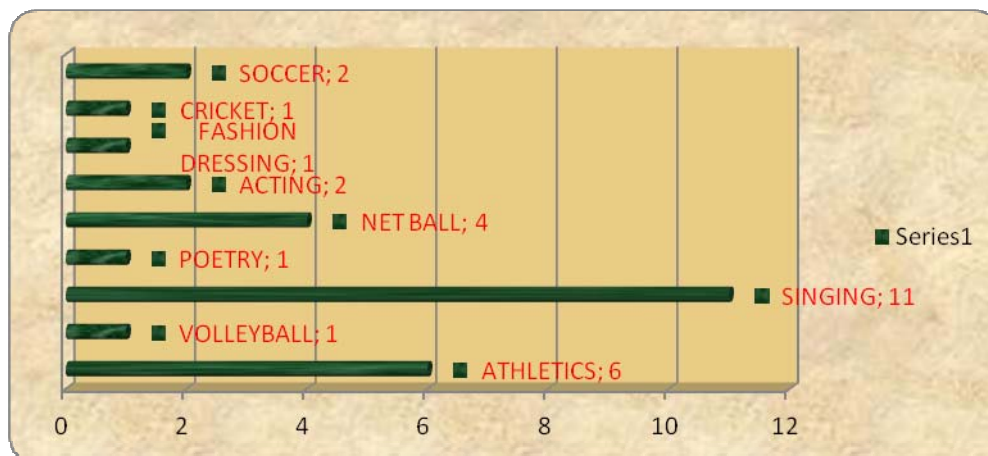


Figure 7: The special talents and abilities among BEAM pupils

These results show that beneficiaries of BEAM had diverse skills and abilities besides academic subjects.

4.7 Whether BEAM pays for the pursuing of pupils talents or abilities

Table 4 shows the responses on whether BEAM funds were also channeled to support the talents and abilities of pupils. Both groups of respondents overwhelmingly disagreed.

Table 4: Responses on whether BEAM is paying for Pupils talents and Abilities

	Teachers	Pupils	Percentage %
Yes	12	10	37.7
No	18	20	63.3
Totals	30	30	100

The results in table 4 are further presented in Fig 8 using pictorial method. This method actually shows a good comparison on the responses given by the respondents.

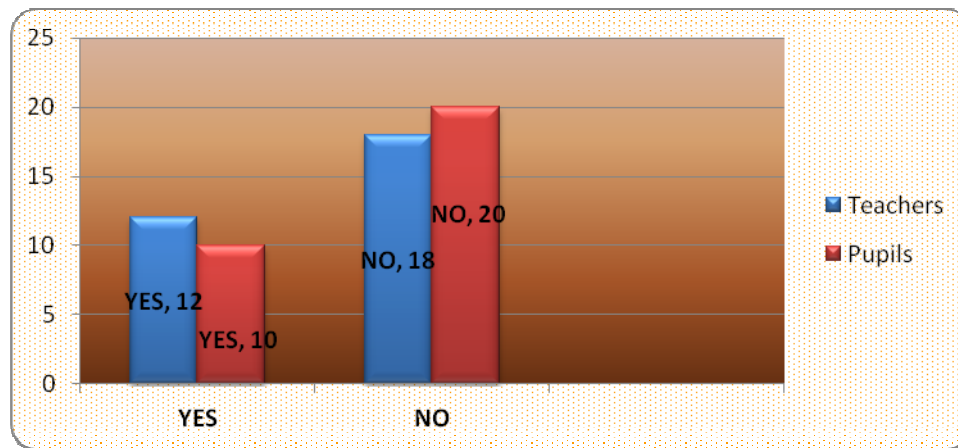


Figure 8: Responses on whether BEAM is paying for Pupils talents and Abilities.

The survey establishes that 53% of respondents from teachers said nothing is done by BEAM to support individual pupils' abilities and talents. This is also reviewed from the statistics taken from the pupils' survey where 66.7% of pupils are need of additional funds to pursue their talents and abilities.

4.8 Whether pupils (BEAM beneficiaries) receive any life skill training?

Respondents (pupils) were asked whether they receive life skill training. 93.3 % of the respondents said they were not receiving any life skills training. These results are shown in Fig 9 below.



Figure 9: Responses on whether pupils receive any life skill training

The trends in Fig 9 above negate one of the fundamental principles in reaching orphans and vulnerable children which states that orphans and vulnerable children should develop independent living skills. Studies by De Jong in 1981 quoted in Chimedza and Peters 2001 on empowering vulnerable children found out that fulfillment and empowerment for children required them to be trained in life skills at an early age.

Thus it can be deduced that although BEAM support financially in academics it is leaving a gap on vocational training which is an essential component in equipping and empowering children.

5. Discussion

5.1 Choice of subjects and children's assets consideration during payment of BEAM FUNDS?

The survey established that 53% of respondents from teachers said nothing was being done by BEAM to support individual pupils' abilities and talents. This was also reviewed from the statistics taken from the pupils' survey where 66.7% of pupils were in need of additional funds to pursue their talents and abilities. Results concurred with

results by UNICEF 2003 which found out that student had no choices in curriculum selection (BEAM Module Draft Version 7). USAID (2008) in a study of programmes that benefited orphans and vulnerable children carried out in communities in Sub-Saharan Africa found out that ,most programmes focused on provision of material. Payment of basic education regardless of asset and Education did not consider the abilities of the individual this concurred with the findings of the study.

An analysis of the all children safe school programme in Swaziland which was carried out by Catholic Relief Services in (2008) also made the same observations that emphasis on programmes were on provision of material support, payment of fees for basic subjects. Programmes in most sub-Saharan countries generally looked at the immediate needs of the community than at the individual assets. From the results it can be deduced that assets of children were not considered during support of education for vulnerable children.

5.2 BEAM and gender sensitivity

Results from the study found out that there was equal representation of the sexes among the beneficiaries. Results

concur with studies by UNICEF (1994) in Zimbabwe which found out that entry to primary school stood at 100% for girls and boys. Article 10 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in early 1991 promoted positive discrimination to advance women and girls. This was found to be true and the results indicated that Zimbabwe had taken heed of the ratifications.

5.3 Whether BEAM cater for those Orphans and Vulnerable children who are not academically gifted?

The study found out that BEAM in Zimbabwe did not support those who were not academically gifted. Beam only paid for six basic academic subjects and children had no choice in subject or skill selection. From results it was also noted that those who were gifted creative and talented were not supported. From literature reviewed it was noted that talented and creative learners in schools had no provisions but were supported by non-governmental organizational in their personal pursuits.

5.4 Whether BEAM beneficiaries receive life skills training

The study found out that BEAM negated one of the fundamental principles in reaching orphans and vulnerable children which stated that orphans and vulnerable children should develop independent living skills. BEAM did not provide provisions for training in life skills for pupils. Results concurred with findings of De Jong in 1981 quoted in Chimedza and Peters 2001 on empowering vulnerable children who found out that fulfillment and empowerment for children required them to be trained in life skills at an early age. The overall conclusion is that although BEAM supported financially in academics, it is leaving a gap for vocational training which is essential to equip and empower children.

5.5 Whether BEAM provide with any other support besides paying for school fees

The study found out that BEAM did not provide any other support besides paying for school fees. The results though tended to disagree with findings of safety nets programmes in Lesotho, Swaziland, and Uganda and in Asia by UNICEF. Findings in these countries noted that the safety nets programmes e.g. the Nzokira, the GBEM also provided life skills training provided material support for the children.

6. Conclusion

On the basis of the research findings and answers to the sub-problems following conclusions were made

- Most of the schools follow the national curriculum in the selection of subjects for pupils. BEAM limits to six subjects only at 'O' level. These subjects were compulsory independent of whether the child was good in that subject.
- Most BEAM beneficiaries lack a financial support in their curriculum. Individual abilities were not being pursued i.e. sporting activities, creative arts.

- Life skills training and vocational skills were not being done for children under the BEAM project which has a negative bearing on their transition into adulthood and employment.
- BEAM was gender sensitive.

7. Future Scope

Future research must focus on the challenges being faced in the implementation of the BEAM and whether beneficiaries are being chosen on merit

8. Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings and conclusions the following recommendations were made:

- Pre assessment of abilities and assets of children under the BEAM programme should be done so that the beneficiaries would benefit by pursuing skills they were good at.
- Subject selection should not be compulsory but should be based on merit and funding should be directed to skills and vocational training to foster independence for orphans and vulnerable children.
- The unbiased ness in the selection of orphans and vulnerable children in any community must be also done through the talent or abilities of the child and the BEAM support it through its funding until the child becomes independent.
- The school curriculum should be child friendly and focus on creating an independent child.
- Government should relaxed the policy of paying only for compulsory subjects which it deem essential and cater for other core subjects and practical courses deemed beneficial to pupils' ability.
- Financial support in their curriculum sport activities their talented at such as music , soccer , Food and Nutrient and Dress-making.
- Financial support on other social needs such as food , school uniforms and school book.

References

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