AJOTE
African Journal of Teacher Education

THE DEVELOPMENTAL CONDITIONS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ZIMBABWE

Sibonokuhle Ndlovu
University of Cape Town, South Africa
and

Azwihangwisi E. Muthivhi
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Abstract
This article is based on research carried out to investigate the prevailing conditions of schooling and classroom teaching and learning in southern Zimbabwe, using the Vygotskian socio-cultural theory to analyze the consequences that the breakdown of schooling and classroom teaching and learning had on learners' performance and cognitive development. According to findings from the case study of a specific primary school in Gwanda district, classroom teaching and learning in rural Zimbabwe were adversely affected by a conglomerate of contextual factors and worsened by the prevailing socio-economic and political problems resulting in contradictory classroom practices of teaching and learning. The analysis reveals the extent to which classroom teaching and learning have deteriorated and how the cultural practices of this particular tradition of schooling impede on possibilities for meaningful learning activities in the classroom. The article contributes to an understanding of how specific cultural conditions of schooling affect learners' learning and cognitive development within the prevailing context of socio-economic and political instability in Zimbabwe and suggests ways in which teachers could organise pedagogy to assist their learners' learning and cognitive development.

Introduction

More recent research in developmental psychology seeking to understand the relationship between learning and cognitive development elaborated in the Vygotskian socio-cultural framework, argues that socio-cultural context has a significant impact on a child's cognitive development. According to the studies, different sociocultural contexts import different developmental consequences for learners in developmental psychology. Other studies carried out in rural South Africa by Moll (1994) and Muthivhi, (2008) respectively have provided findings related to the specific relationship between learning and sociocultural contexts. Influenced by these studies, this paper explores the ways in which this relationship occurs and plays out in rural Zimbabwe as an environment distinguished from other socio-cultural contexts by its unique culture and conditions of schooling during the period of crisis from around 2000 to date.

It is important to understand a socio-cultural context and the uniqueness of a culture because culture in developmental psychology concerns economic activity and way of life which, in turn, affect the way people think in a particular historical period. This article focuses mainly on the social organisation of the larger society, cultural traditions, and the conditions of schooling because of their bearing on teaching and learning and subsequently cognitive development.

Describing the sociocultural context and cultural traditions of rural Zimbabwe, Owomoyela (2002) argues that the European presence in Zimbabwe since the colonial period caused profound changes in the way people live. According to Owomoyela, this trend among Africans towards westernisation was in response to new lifestyles appropriate to their new economic status and environments as they relocated to European-controlled areas for employment. From the developmental psychology perspective, when people engage in new economic ways of life, an accompanying development takes place in response to changes experienced. In essence, Zimbabwean culture up to the present has undergone transformations due to Western influence. African traditions have become integrated with, and even subsumed by, Western ways of life. Thus one could say that the "Zimbabwean culture" is a complex mix of past and present traditions and customs. Schooling in Zimbabwe is thus generally located within a context of both the past "African" and the present "Western" culture. The majority of the country's population (65%) remains rural. While culture generally has continued to change since the onset of colonisation, in rural areas it could be described as more traditional and African than Western. Rural traditions, values, and norms influenced by the culture from the past are still practiced and revered by the majority of the people (Child, 1968). This means that the greater part of rural schooling in Zimbabwe is generally located within a more traditional and rural culture than Western. It could be argued that despite the influence of Western culture, people in rural Zimbabwe retain most of their African traditions and customs.

Child rearing practices in rural Zimbabwe are more traditional than Western. Commenting on child rearing practices of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe, Child (1968), echoed by Ewomoyela (2002), describes the high value given to discipline. They teach children to be obedient to those in authority such as parents, and to respect their elders who include older children, adults in the community, and teachers at school. This means that the value of respecting the authority of elders by children is emphasised in the communities. This is significant for this study because it provides an understanding of the cultural traditions that influence schooling and consequently teaching, learning, and cognitive development in learners.

Discipline, highly regarded in children and administered to insure children's conformity both in the community and in schools, is enforced through corporal punishment. Parents believe that practicing this form of discipline, which represents an African child-rearing practice guarantees that children will perform well at school (Shumba, 2003a). Thus they endorse this form of punishment by teachers.

In addition, the Zimbabwean president has also argued publically in favour of corporal punishment. He stated that corporal punishment is good for children and referred to occasional corporal punishment as in line with the Zimbabwean culture (Africa news, 2007). Beyond the acceptance of corporal punishment as an appropriate cultural practice, the national Constitution (1990) allows for it and its administration in schools, controlled through education policy (Education Act, 1990). Given the strong influence of cultural traditions in schooling, it is imperative to examine the impact such a sociocultural context has on teaching, learning, and ultimately learners' learning and development.

In rural Zimbabwe and Gwanda particularly, subsistence farming and small scale animal rearing constitute the main economic activities. Civil service jobs include those in the education, police and military sectors accounting for a large proportion of wage employment. The rural economy and economic activities of rural Zimbabweans is important to this study because it involves what people are doing as a way of life, which has an impact on how they think, thus shaping the schooling and practices of teaching and learning.

Political and Economic Conditions

Inequality and longstanding political tensions that date back to the political transition from the colonial to a nationalist regime in 1980 continue to plague Zimbabwean society. Land ownership and redistribution served as the rationale for the ZANU-PF nationalist regime to unlawfully seize commercial agricultural land, an action which resulted in the imposition of sanctions by the international community and ushered in the economic and political turmoil that Ncube (2008) describes as "distinct"—a distinction originating from a kind of economic crisis generated from isolation by the West and as yet not experienced by any other country in Africa. This political and economic crisis, in turn, affected the education system, which in the past ranked at the top in the human development reports, since before independence and in the post-independence period to the beginning of economic and political turmoil in 2000. Thereafter the crises took its toll from 2003 to 2008, when the coalition government was formed. During that period, the political and economic conditions had negative implications for education in general and most especially for classroom teaching and learning in rural areas. This development holds special significance for this study because Zimbabwean education ranked the best in quality in the Southern region before the period of crisis (Mungazi, 1992, 1993; Chung, 2006).

Due to a collapsed economy, poverty levels have risen affecting communities and consequently teachers and learners in schools particularly in rural areas. Zimbabwe ranked 169th out of the 169 countries in a poverty survey (UNDP, 2010). The country, once named the "breadbasket" of Africa for its strong economy, currently ranks last in 2010 poverty survey rankings. The UNDP (2010, p. 42) describes Zimbabwe as the poorest country and and about 25% poorer than the poorest country in 1970, which then was also Zimbabwe. In 2010, the income poverty rate was around 62%, up from 42% in 1995 (UNDP, 2010). This shows that poverty levels in Zimbabwe have continued to rise, with negative implications for good nutrition (UNICEF, 2009, p. 11). The use of malnutrition as an indicator of poverty shows the extent to which the continuing increase in poverty has affected access to food for ordinary Zimbabweans including school children.

In describing some of the instances of political violence that affected schooling in Zimbabwe before the coalition government, Stiff (2000, p. 402-404) states:

> An armed gang of 60 Zanu PF thugs cordoned off the school and forced its closure. They rounded up five teachers, accused them of being MDC supporters and locked then in a room, before sending 900 children home...A secondary school teacher at Madziwa northeast of Harare was assaulted with iron bars and whips...War veterans arrived at Njangu primary and secondary schools in Chimanimani while classes were in session. They ordered the teachers and pupils, ranging in age six to about seventeen, to assemble outside. None of the pupils were of the voting age. They nevertheless subjected them to're-education'; giving their version of the history of Zimbabwe...At Maringambizi school veterans burnt the library...

The situation described above shows the severe effect of political disruptions on schooling. Political violence in schools, exacerbated by worsening economic conditions, drove many teachers out of the country to seek employment in other neighbouring states especially in South Africa (Cross, Seager, Wentzel, Mafukidze, Hoosen, & Van Zyl, 2009, p. 25-26). Condemning political violence in schools, the present Minister of Education, David Coltart stated in an interview (Johnstone, 2011):

> I was saying it in Parliament today, the education ministry in any country should be the least political of any because children should be allowed to develop their own thought processes. In the Zimbabwean situation, schools have been used as bases for militia and teachers have been threatened and that is abhorrent.

Not only were there political disruptions of the nature described above; but also numerous other disruptions caused by labor strikes among civil servants which were most prevalent during 2007-2010.Teachers also participated in these labor strikes. Reporting on the most recent one, Latham (2011) revealed that:

> Many teachers in Zimbabwe are on strike and may be joined by other state employees after the government offered a 'paltry' wage increase, the daily news said, citing Ray Majongwe, the secretary general of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe. During such times schooling and teaching would be affected.

At other times schools remained closed during the school term because teachers demanded salary increases before they would start working (Kwenda, 2009). Examples of practice of unique cultural traditions and the accompanying historical political and economic conditions situating the schooling experience within a specific sociocultural context warrants the examination of how cultural practices influence schooling from the perspective of developmental psychology, in order to understand the developmental consequences for learners' learning and cognitive development.

Theoretical Background

For an understanding of how classroom teaching and learning impacted cognitive development as influenced by the conditions of schooling and cultural tradition in rural Zimbabwe, it is important to consider the theoretical background on the relationship between socio-cultural context and cognitive development and also the relationship between teaching, learning, and cognitive development. This theoretical background is discussed from the

perspective of the Vygotskian theoretical conception, which is the specific framework used to understand the concept of the unique sociocultural context of rural Zimbabwe and cognitive development in this article.

Sociocultural Context and Cognitive Development

According to Vygotsky (1978), social and cultural context plays a major role in influencing the development of the higher psychological processes in an individual. The social and cultural context provides an individual with the psychological tools for learning. These mediate the individual thought processes, enabling changes in his or her functions in the process.

Vygotsky argues that culture plays an important role in development through the mediation of the psychological tools in children to develop and use in order to understand the world. In his elucidation of the Vygotskian idea of sociocultural context influencing development, Matusov argued that the social, cultural, historical and political particularity of a situation that influences an individual may lead to different developmental directionalities (Masutov, 2008, p. 9). This means that different sociocultural contexts and conditions of living influence development differently. The sociocultural contexts and conditions of schooling have an impact on learners' development. Thus to understand the process of this development it is important to consider it within the larger context of cultural traditions and conditions that influence the process itself.

Matusov argues further that "Technologically advanced societies develop new cultural tools that mediate psychological processes in new and more advanced ways" (Matusov, 2008, p. 18). This suggests that technologically developed social contexts, in turn, influence advanced development, which results from the mediation of advanced cultural tools in the process of cognitive development. So differences in development between technologically or industrially advanced societies and traditional societies stem from the influences within different sociocultural contexts. Such understanding helps to illuminate and underpin the analysis and discussion of ways in which the unique socio-cultural context and conditions of schooling have affected the practices of classroom teaching and learning, and the processes of learners' learning and development in the particular rural context of Zimbabwe schooling. Masutov's idea of sociocultural contexts influencing development differently according to context aligns with Vygotsky's explanation of development:

> Higher psychological processes are not superimposed as a second story over the elementary processes, they represent new psychological systems…..The formation of a new functional learning system includes a process akin to that of nourishment in body growth, wherein at any particular time certain nutrients are digested and assimilated while others are rejected (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 124).

In essence, the development of higher psychological processes is largely dependent on the extent to which the cultural context supports this development. A rich cultural context will to a larger extent more greatly influence the development process, just as the body develops faster and better when it receives rich nutrients. For the purposes of this article it is important to analyse whether the conditions of schooling that include socioeconomic and political conditions and various elements of a unique traditional and rural society within which schooling takes place, have provided a rich context for cognitive development.

As previously noted, the economic activity in which people are involved at a particular historical time influences cognitive development. Vygotsky uses this in his sociohistorical theory of understanding development. According to his theory, societies are in

a constant state of flux and change, and social context continues to change, thus development needs to be understood in a historical context. What people are doing as an economic activity at any given time has an impact on their way of thinking.

The Vygotsky-Luria expedition illustrates the inter-relatedness of social and cultural context and cognitive development in individuals (Luria, 1976). Their study of the Uzbekistan community during the 1930s reveals that change in the social context of individuals also manifests change in their ways of thinking. The study was carried out during the rapid cultural and social changes which came about as a result of the Russian Revolution. This period involved radical transformation in the social economic lives of the Uzbekistan traditional community. There were rapid changes involving formal schooling for adults, collectivisation, and advanced agricultural developments.

Comparing the cognitive functions of the schooled and unschooled subjects at the time, Luria found that schooled subjects manifested changes in their cognitive functioning. They were able to categorise objects in abstract terms and use general terms in classification. On the other hand, unschooled subjects manifested contextualised thinking tendencies. Although these findings were generalised to other sociocultural contexts, subjecting them to contestation by Cole (1996), the study revealed that change in the social context also, in turn, influences changes in cognitive development. The study also revealed that formal schooling plays a major role in the development of cognitive functioning.

Sociohistorical understanding of development is important because it enables us to trace development in historical terms. This is important for this study. The Vygotsky-Luria experiment relates to the understanding of conceptual manifestations within a socio-cultural context of a non-industrialised traditional setting. During the time of socio-economic and socio-political upheavals in the Zimbabwean context of schooling in 2010, profound and rapid changes were experienced in the social, cultural, economic, and political lives of the participants in the rural Zimbabwean context. This could have implications for the practices of classroom teaching and learning and consequently for the cognitive development of learners requiring the tracing of changes in development. The idea of understanding cognitive development in historical terms is further explained in the argument that:

> The entire existence of the Australian aborigine depends on his boomeranging, just as the entire existence of modern England depends upon her machines. Take the boomerang away from the aborigine, make him a farmer, then of necessity he will have to completely change his lifestyle, his habits, his entire way of thinking Vygotsky & Luria (1993, p. 74).

Changes that occur in the social and economic context impact on cognitive development due to individual - society dialectical processes. When the social context changes, individuals' thought processes also change. The Vygotsky-Luria expedition with the Uzbekistan community strikingly illustrates such developmental changes (Luria, 1976), which for the purposes of this article underpin the understanding of how socio-cultural, political, and economic changes presently experienced in a particular school in rural Zimbabwe have influenced further changes in the thinking of teachers and learners.

Sociocultural Context of Formal Schooling and Cognitive Development

According to Vygotsky, the sociocultural context of formal schooling promotes cognitive development. Therefore, the sociocultural context of formal schooling should differ from the everyday social context of learners if it has to facilitate cognitive development. He argues:

> School education is qualitatively different from education in the broad sense. At school the child is faced with a particular task to grasp the bases of scientific studies, i.e., a system of scientific conception. The early concepts that have been built in the child in the process of living, and which were assisted by rapport with his social environment, are now switched to a new process, to a new specially cognitive relationship to the world, and so in this process the child's concepts are transformed and their structure changes. In the development of a child's consciousness the grasping of the bases of a science-system of concepts now takes the lead (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 130).

This means that in formal schooling there exists a systematic procedure that specifically promotes cognitive development. This explanation increases an understanding of the school as the socio-cultural context in which cognitive development takes place. The practices of teaching and learning should therefore not be considered in isolation from the cultural context that influences cognitive development. It is important to understand that formal schooling and its conditions influence teaching and learning which, in turn, influence cognitive development in learners. Such understanding is critical for explaining the nature of the schooling conditions in rural Zimbabwe and their consequences for children's learning and cognitive development.

The main difference between the sociocultural context of formal schooling and that of the everyday context is in the manner of learning and the promotion of cognitive development. Learning in the everyday context is spontaneous, and the development of everyday concepts is unconscious. In formal schooling there is a highly systematised way of learning through which the scientific concepts develop. Explaining this Vygotsky states:

> Spontaneous concepts are those the child learns in the course of his daily life. Their learning is not usually made conscious; the child uses such concepts with ease and without any awareness that there is such a thing as a concept. Scientific concepts are typically learned in a school setting as a system of knowledge. They have explicit verbal definitions. Their learning is made conscious. They are taught in the context of academic subjects such as social studies, language instruction and mathematics (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 177).

The key distinction between the everyday context and the schooling context is that it is the latter which promotes cognitive development. Further extricating the need to distinguish, Kuzolin (1990) argues that Vygotsky's distinction between everyday and scientific concepts is inadequate because spontaneous concepts can display a certain degree of systematicity, while much of what is traditionally taught at primary school does not go beyond "non-scientific" empirical generalisations (Kozulin, 1990, p. 256). This means that basing the systemic level of learning on the binary distinction of the two contexts on their sources of acquisition as asytematic and systemic is inadequate because they overlap.

According to Davydov cited by Kuzolin (1990), the central discriminating factor between scientific and spontaneous concepts should be their content, which is theoretical for the scientific concepts, and empirical for the everyday spontaneous concepts. Thus a distinction is achieved only in teaching and learning where theoretical approaches which differ from empirical approaches are used in formal schooling. This is in agreement with Karpov (2003) who argues that scientific knowledge should be taught directly to students rather than "discovered" by them. The type of learning that meets this requirement has been called theoretical learning (Karpov, 2003, p. 71). According to this model, it is through

theoretical methods that scientific concepts can be learned by learners in formal schooling. This facilitates an understanding of the dominant approaches used in classroom teaching and learning.

Teaching, Learning, and Cognitive Development

Explaining the relationship between development and learning as he understood it, Vygotsky argued that learning precedes development. This means that learning precedes development, and development occurs only after learning. Vygotsky argues that the reason and rationale for this lies with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He defines the Zone of Proximal Development:

> The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The actual level of development refers to those functions that have matured in a child, enabling him or her to solve problems on his or her own. Potential development refers to those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturing. In other words, there are two levels of development in a child—the first and second. When functions at the first level have matured the child is able to solve problems independently. On the second level of development, the functions have not yet matured. They are in the process of maturing. They enable the child to solve problems with assistance from an adult or others more knowledgeable on this level than the child. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the space between these developmental levels. It is where learning occurs.

The ZPD concept is a methodological tool in the context of teaching, learning, and development. The idea of the ZPD can help teachers to understand at what precise stage learning occurs in a learner. Classroom teachers can use it to inform the organisation of their lessons. Teachers who utilise the concept of ZPD in their teaching can facilitate learning that is oriented towards the cognitive development process of learners because they are targeting the process of learning at the level where development takes place in the learner. Vygotsky argues that teaching and learning should target those functions that have not yet matured but are ready to. Teaching and learning should not target those functions that have already matured, but instead should take place or be directed at a level above the actual developmental level of the child. These ideas are important in understanding the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning to promote cognitive development in learners from the Vygotskian conception.

Methodology

A case study of one rural primary school was used to carry out this study. The rural context was utilised because the setting is thought to be one of the most vulnerable because of the impact of the present economic crisis. According to the African Government Report (2009, p. 58), 70% of poor Africans live in rural areas, and poverty in the continent is largely a rural phenomenon. The effects of the current conditions of schooling in a rural context should provide the crucial results of what the long term effects of the complex contextual factors on classroom teaching and learning and learner's development would be.

The observation method was used to collect data and was followed up with interviews. The observation and interview methods used enabled the gathering of data useful

to understand how classroom teaching and learning have been adversely affected by the prevailing conditions of schooling. The research design and methodology proved adequate for yielding valid and reliable data which was successfully analysed using theoretically informed interpretations and discussed using the Vygotskian theoretical conceptions.

Findings

Findings indicate that the classroom teaching and learning in rural Zimbabwe was adversely affected by local contextual factors and worsened by the prevailing socio-economic and political problems of Zimbabwe. The extent to which classroom teaching and learning in rural Zimbabwe have deteriorated is manifested in the contradictions of schooling and its breakdown. The unfavourable conditions manifested in poverty, gross absenteeism, disruptions, and disturbances interfered negatively with learning as less time was spent on teaching and learning.

According to Vygotsky (1978), developmental processes require special conditions in which to be effectively promoted. For example, cognitive developmental processes such as mediation and internalisation require conditions in which both the teacher and learner are fully participating in the learning activities. Instances of absenteeism, hunger, poverty, and/or disruptions resulting from political and economic crises do not provide conditions conducive to learner development. In the Vygotsky-Luria study, those subjects who participated actively and effectively in schooling activities transformed their thought processes and were even able to classify objects in abstract categorical forms. However, Luria (1976) found that the thought processes of those subjects he referred to as "unschooled" were not transformed because of their lack of participation in schooling. Similarly the learners in this study lacked the opportunity to participate actively in effective schooling activities during a time of political and economic upheaval, with negative developmental consequences for their thought processes, in particular their development of abstract concepts which remained untransformed and stagnant.

Moreover according to Vygotsky (1978), development precedes learning. Cognitive development occurs at the onset of formal school learning. In this instance, disruptions and disturbances negatively affected schooling and formal learning taking place in the classrooms. Based on Vygotskian's proposition of learning preceding development, this, in turn, had negative developmental consequences for learners because contextual factors operating in the schooling situation delayed learners reaching vital cognitive developmental milestones.

Beside the unfavourable conditions that impacted negatively on learners' learning and cognitive development, the dominant forms of teaching and learning were empirical, characterised by rote memorisation, repetition and drilling. Teaching proceeded from and utilised the everyday experiences of learners. This was endorsed as teaching from the "known to the unknown," meaning the focus was on emphasising what learners already knew in order to teach them what they did not yet know.

Vygotsky (1978) also acknowledges the usefulness of learners' prior knowledge in the process of acquiring new knowledge. However, Vygotsky (1978) contends that formal schooling should develop scientific knowledge in learners—a kind of knowledge whose acquisition requires a highly systematised procedure and abstraction and generalisation from universal to particular contexts. Elaborating on this, Kuzolin (1990) explains that scientific concepts proceed from the top to meet the everyday experiences of learners which proceed from the bottom. In essence, to enable learners to acquire scientific knowledge, formal school learning should be structured and facilitated in ways that differ from the spontaneous forms learners use to acquire everyday concepts in their everyday contexts. The empirical

approaches that dominated schooling in this study, endorsed as teaching from the "known to the unknown," did not offer learning opportunities that were different from learners' spontaneous everyday forms of learning. This had negative developmental consequences for learners because cognitive development arises from systematically mediated experiences of learning presented to learners in abstract forms.

The quality of the mediation in the teaching process was also insufficient to promote learners' learning and cognitive development because of the cognitive level at which lessons were prepared. Teaching and learning were matched or tailored to the expected performance level or below of the learners. This was the result of teachers teaching strictly according to the ministry syllabi which provided subject content and was structured according to the curriculum designers' expectation of learners' mental developmental stages at different grade levels. In cases where teachers planned their teaching below grade levels, their argument was that these learners' levels of performance were low.

Vygotsky (1978) posited that the only "good learning" is that which is in advance of a learner's development, and this kind of learning takes place in the ZPD. Learning oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective because it does not aim for, or is not pitched at, a new stage of the developmental processes and lags behind the process. Thus the meditational process did not afford learners the necessary developmental gains that occur at the ZPD.

The cultural practices adopted in the specific tradition of schooling utilized limited meaningful learning activities in the classroom. This resulted in dominant modes of teaching used by teachers to present knowledge to their learners fundamentally shaped by the culture and society in which schooling took place. The relational modes that privileged teacher domination and learner subordination were the cultural traditions of protocol, respect for authority, and corporal punishment that dominated classroom teaching and learning. Vygotsky (1978) explained the relationship between culture and the development of higher cognitive functions. According to him, higher psychological functions are not superimposed as a second story over the elementary ones; they represent new psychological systems (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 24). In essence, it is during the process of mediating cultural tools and the internalisation of these, that individuals transform their thinking processes.

Cultural traditions of respect, authority, and protocol did not provide a socio-cultural context in which these cultural tools that transform thinking could be effectively mediated. This lack of mediation could be seen in those kinds of social relationships resulting from respect, authority, and protocol which hindered learners in acquiring the kinds of cultural tools they could use to develop their thought processes. The language tool, for example, a crucial "tool" for the organising of thought processes could not be usefully or effectively developed when learners were not actively involved in the activities of learning.

Besides hindering the acquisition of cultural tools, passive learning metamorphoses into dependency and authority-based relations between teachers and learners, in which the teacher is seen as the sole source and transmitter of knowledge. The consequence of this is that learners come to depend on the teachers' interpretation of content matter which in turn leads to rote learning and parroting.

The traditional culture of using corporal punishment in schooling has negative psychological implications that impede learners' learning and cognitive development. Vygotsky is particularly opposed to this culture practice, arguing that every form of punishment places both the teacher and the student in the most painful and difficult of positions because neither love nor respect can be preserved between the teacher who is inflicting punishment and the child he is punished (Vygotsky, 1997). So corporal punishment

does not foster good teacher-pupil rapport and, in turn, affects the way learners' learn in the classroom and their cognitive development. Developmental gains in learners' learning and cognitive development are limited by the cultural traditions that negatively influence schooling and consequently the practice of teaching and learning as was the case in this particular schooling.

Suggestions for Improvement

This study reveals that teaching and learning in a particular context is fundamentally shaped by the culture and society, in which schooling occurs, privileging teacher domination and learner subordination. The presence of corporal punishment in classroom teaching appears to be the major factor hindering learner participation in learning. It is important first to ensure that teachers understand the negative psychological implications of corporal punishment for learners. Workshops educating teachers in the schools about the negative sides of corporal punishment would therefore be recommended. These workshops would encourage teachers to use other forms of punishment equally if not more effective in controlling and modifying learner behavior in the school. For example, teachers can discuss with learners strategies to avoid behaviors such as tardiness that interfere with schooling. Learners' suggestions of ways they can avoid tardiness could result in a code of conduct designed by learners themselves and used to self-regulate. In that respect, both teachers and learners develop and own a code of conduct which helps to guide and monitor the ways learners conduct themselves without enforcement through corporal punishment.

This study also recommends use of the ZPD to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning. Application of the ZPD underpins the process of restructuring and re-organising classroom teaching and learning. This recommendation is based on the Vygotskian idea that development is facilitated through teaching and learning pitched at a level above learners' actual performance levels, and that it is in the ZPD that new developmental pathways are opened during learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this particular case, teaching at the level above that of learners' performance and effectively utilising the ZPD may not come easily. Teachers would need assistance in determining learner potentials through assessment processes. When teachers determine learner potentials, then they can adjust the level of their teaching and learning to a level above the actual levels of learner performance by using learner potentials as a baseline. This would involve reorganisation of their lesson plans since the lessons would then be based upon both what learners have achieved and what they are able to do. When teaching and learning have been adjusted in this way, it will be possible to offer learners meaningful learning tasks that facilitate their cognitive development.

Holzman and Newman (1993, p. 85) argue that Vygotsky left the door open to pragmatic objectification of the ZPD, and that it is our task as educators and researchers to close it. Vygotsky realised that the use of ZPD in teaching and learning is potentially broad and dependent on the context within which it is applied. It is therefore up to the researchers and practitioners in education to see how best they can utilise the ZPD to reorganise and restructure teaching and learning. In this case study, Vygotsky's ZPD as a method for facilitating learning and the acquisition of knowledge is recommended as a foundation for the process of restructuring and reorganising teaching and learning, and as a means to promote more effective and meaningful cognitive development in learners.

Conclusion

This article investigated the prevailing conditions of schooling and classroom teaching and learning and their effect on schooling in the context of rural Zimbabwe. It reveals how

classroom teaching and learning in rural Zimbabwe was adversely affected by local contextual factors and worsened by Zimbabwe's prevailing socio-economic and political problems. What emerged is the extent to which classroom teaching and learning in rural Zimbabwe has deteriorated. It also described some cultural practices utilized in schooling that limited meaningful learning in the classroom.

The use of Vygotsky's ZPD is suggested as one way for teachers to organise pedagogy and potentially improve their learners' learning and cognitive development. Pedagogy informed by Vygotsky's ZPD idea would facilitate meaningful learning activities by helping to situate teaching and learning activity at the appropriate level for cognitive development. With the implementation of these suggestions and a view toward facilitating positive changes, classroom teaching and learning in rural Zimbabwe could experience and benefit from major improvements that may in turn have long term favorable effects on learners' learning and cognitive development.

REFERENCES

Africa News (2007, June 24), "Zimbabwean president extols corporal punishment," *M & G News*. Retrieved from www.monstersandcritics.com/news/africa/news/article_1321767.php/Zimbabwe_president_extols_corporal_punishment.

African Government Report (2009). *Economic commission for Africa*. Oxford: University Press.

Child, H. (1968). *The AmaNdebele*. Salisbury: Government Printers.

Chung, F. (2006). *Re-living the second Chimurenga: Memories from Zimbabwean's liberation struggle*. Harare: Uppsala Nordic Africa Institute Press.

Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Constitution of Zimbabwe (1990). *Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No 11, Act 30.* Harare: Government Printers.

Cross, C., Seager, J., Wentzel, M., Mafukidze, J., Hoosen, J. & Van Zyl, J. (2009). *Migration management challenges in South Africa*.Report sponsored by Human Science Research Council. Presented to Centre for Development and Enterprise at Pretoria, March 2009.

Holzman, L. & Newman, F. (1993). *Lev Vygotsky: Revolutionary scientist.* London: Routledge.

Johnstone, D. (2011, March 17), Interview with Zimbabwean Minister of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture [David Coltart's official web interview post]. Retrieved from http://davidcoltart.com/?p=2664.

Karpov, Y. (2003), "Development through the lifespan: A neo-Vygotskian approach," in A.

Kuzolin, B. Gindis, V. S. Agevey & S. M. Miller, (Eds.). *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context* (pp. 138-155), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Karpov, Y. (2003), "Vygotskian's doctrine of scientific concepts: It's role for contemporary Education," in A. Kuzolin, B. Gindis, V. S. Agevey & S. M. Miller, (Eds.). *Vygotsky's educational theory in cultural context* (pp. 65-82), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kwenda, S. (2009, February 2), "Zimbabwe: Teachers' strikes infringe children's rights to Education," *IPS*, Retrieved from:www.ipsnews.net/news.asap?idnews=45641.

Kuzolin, A. (1990). *Vygotsky's psychology: A biography of ideas.* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Latham, B. (2011, July 4), "Some Zimbabwean teachers strike over pay," *Daily News* Reports. Retrieved from http//:www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-04/some-zimbabwe-teachers-strike-over-pay-daily-news-reports.html.

Luria, A. R. (1976). *Cognitive development: Its cultural and social foundations.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Matusov, E. (2008), "Applying a sociocultural approach to Vygotskian academia: 'Our tsar is not like yours, and yours isn't like ours'," *Culture and psychology*, 14 (1), 5-35.

Ministry of Education (1990). *Education act*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Government Printers.

Moll, I. (1994), "School was far away: The formal perceptions, classifications and syllogistic reasoning of Kokwane Ndlovu," *Perspectives in Education*, 15(2), 189-217.

Mungazi, D.A. (1992). *Colonial policy and conflict in Zimbabwe: A study of cultures in Collision, 1890-1979.* London: Crane Russak.

Mungazi, D.A. (1993). *The fall of the mantle: The educational policy of the Rhodesian Front government and conflict in Zimbabwe*. New York: Peter Lang.

Muthivhi, A. E. (2008). *Socio-cultural Case Study of the Schooling System in Venda, South Africa*. Thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg: May, 2008.

Ncube, S. (2008)," Zimbabwean crisis: Problems and prospects," Research report submitted to the department of Sociology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of philosophy in developmental studies, Cape Town, University of Cape Town.

Owomoyela, O. (2002). *Culture and customs of Africa: Culture and customs of Zimbabwe.* London: Greenwood Press.

Shumba, A. (2003a), "Pupil physical abuse by secondary school teachers in Zimbabwe: A

child rearing practice or cultural dilemma?" *Journal of aggression, maltreatment and trauma,* 8, (4), 143-159.

Stiff, P. (2000). *Cry Zimbabwe: Independence-twenty years on*. Cape Town: Galago.

UNICEF (2009). *Multiple indicators monitoring survey (MIMS)*. Harare: Central Statistical Office.

UNDP Human Development Report (2010). *The real wealth of nations: Pathways to human Development.* New York: UNDP.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge: Mass, Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1987). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky: Problems of general psychology*. New York: Plenum.

Vygotsky, L.S. & Luria, A. R. (1993). *Studies on the history of behaviour: Ape, primitive and child.* Hillsdale, N.J., Erlbaum.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1997). *Educational psychology.* Boca Raton, Fl: St Lucie Press.