



The relationship between parental education and children's schooling in a time of economic turmoil: The case of East Zimbabwe, 2001 to 2011



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ABSTRACT

Using data collected from 1998 to 2011 in a general population cohort study in eastern Zimbabwe, we describe education trends and the relationship between parental education and children's schooling during the Zimbabwean economic collapse of the 2000s. During this period, the previously-rising trend in education stalled, with girls suffering disproportionately; however, female enrolment increased as the economy began to recover. Throughout the period, children with more educated parents continued to have better outcomes such that, at the population level, an underlying increase in the proportion of children with more educated parents may have helped to maintain the upwards education trend.

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1. Introduction

Zimbabwe experienced a major economic crisis during the 2000s, from which it is still recovering. The Zimbabwean economy began to decline in the late 1990s, particularly following the ending of the World Bank/IMF supported Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. However, the land redistribution programme, starting in 2000, is viewed as the main catalyst for the economic and social crisis that would define much of the 2000s in Zimbabwe (Koech, 2012). Hyperinflation peaked at almost 500 billion percent in December 2008 (Koech, 2012; Chimhowu, 2009), before the adoption of a multi-currency system (primarily utilising the US dollar) in early 2009.

This crisis was not limited to the financial sector, with news reports suggesting that the education sector, among many others, suffered during this time (Raath, 2008). Contemporary Zimbabwe has some of the highest levels of primary school completion and adult literacy among countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)¹ (see Fig. 1 based on World Bank Education Statistics) (World Bank Edstats, 2014). This resulted from the implementation of mandatory free primary education after independence in 1980 (Kanyongo, 2005), with universal primary education being achieved in the late 1980s (Chimhowu, 2009). However, primary

school fees were re-introduced in 1991 and have risen steadily since then (Kanyongo, 2005). These rising school fees have affected the education system together with macro-economic and social shocks. Declines in productivity led to falls in employment and disposable income, which, coupled with rising primary school fees, meant that many families—particularly those in rural areas—were either unable to afford school fees, or needed their children to contribute to income generation, which forced children to drop out of school (Kiernan, 2008; Koech, 2012). In the 2000s, over 30% of all children who enrolled in primary school dropped out before finishing their final year and summative high school exam ('O' level) pass rates fell to just 11% (Chung, 2008). The education sector in Zimbabwe has started to recover since the adoption of the multi-currency system, with schools reopening and large investments being made. Other challenges still face the education system, however, including the lower proportion of females receiving education as compared to males (Koech, 2012). Moreover, rising levels of orphanhood, children caring for sick parents, and other vulnerabilities linked to the HIV epidemic have posed challenges to sustaining and improving education levels in the population (Birdthistle et al., 2009; Nyamukapa and Gregson, 2005; Case et al., 2004; Kembo, 2010; Pufall et al., 2014).

Given Zimbabwe's education history and the number of national-level events that have influenced the education system, it provides a good setting in which to study education trends during a time of economic turmoil. Previous work in Indonesia has suggested that education may be negatively impacted by economic

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¹ Abbreviations: SSA: sub-Saharan Africa; SES: socio-economic status.

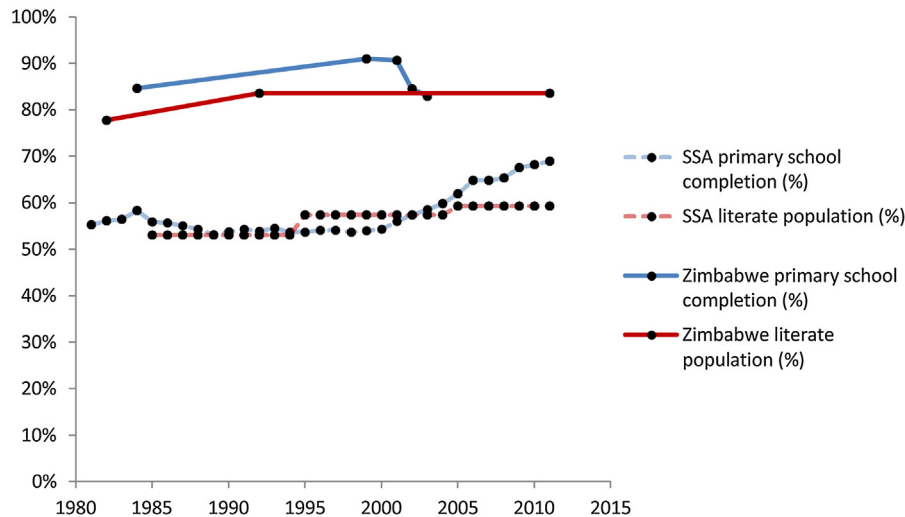


Fig. 1. Comparison of primary school completion rates and the proportion of adults (aged 15+) who are literate in Zimbabwe and SSA over time. Source: The World Bank: Education Statistics: UNESCO Institute for Statistics ([World Bank Edstats, 2014](#)).

turmoil, with households reducing their expenditure on health and education by 40% during the late 1990s (Frankenberg et al., 2002), but the associations between macro-economic events and education outcomes have not previously been studied in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although macro-economic and social changes can influence education, evidence suggests that micro-level determinants can moderate the effects. In other settings, better educated parents have been found to be more likely to educate their children. Parental literacy, years of schooling, and education level are correlated with child education measures in developed countries (Benjamin, 1993; Dickson et al., 2013; Dubow et al., 2009; Chevalier, 2004), with paternal education suggested to be more influential than maternal education in West Africa (Ermisch and Pronzato, 2010).

In this paper, we use data from eastern Zimbabwe to examine education trends during a time of economic decline and crisis, and whether children with more-educated parents are less likely to experience detrimental effects to their education during times of widespread economic hardship. We hypothesise that, at the population level, long-term increases in parents' education can help to sustain high overall levels of school education during periods of economic decline.

2. Data and methods

2.1. Study population and data collection

We analysed data from a population-based, open cohort study in 12 geographically distinct study sites in Manicaland province eastern Zimbabwe, which are representative of the Manicaland population (4 subsistence farming areas; 4 large-scale commercial estates; 2 small towns; and 2 roadside settlements) (Gregson et al., 2006, 2002; Lopman et al., 2008). Manicaland is a primarily rural province and, as rural areas were more likely to suffer during the economic crisis (Kiernan, 2008; Koech, 2012), provides an ideal location to examine education trends during this period.

Population surveillance data were collected during five survey rounds occurring approximately every 2–3 years from 1998 through 2011. Each round of the survey involves a census of all households in the 12 study sites, followed by interviews with individual household members aged 15–54 years. Prior to round three, data were only collected in males aged 17–54 and in females

aged 15–44. The main focus of the survey is on trends and risk factors for HIV infection and AIDS mortality (Gregson et al., 2006), but the questionnaires also include questions about education, employment, household assets, and socioeconomic status, enabling investigation of trends in education indicators during the economic collapse.

The survey rounds correspond broadly to the different stages of the economic collapse: Round 1 (1998–2000) corresponds to the period before the worst of the turmoil; round 2 (2001–2003) corresponds to the time of the land redistribution programme and the start of the economic collapse; round 3 (2003–2005) corresponds to the period of rapidly accelerating inflation and growing shortages; round 4 (2006–2008) corresponds to the period of hyperinflation, culminating in economic collapse; and round 5 (2009–2011) corresponds to the adoption of a multi-currency system and the beginning of the economic recovery. Although these are not perfect proxies for stages in the Zimbabwean economic collapse, they do allow us to assess whether education levels changed over time in the face of a rapidly evolving national economy.

Parental data, including information on education, were collected in the Manicaland survey and linked to their children aged 24 and under from round 2 (2001–2003) onwards based on a household roster and, for mothers, confirmed through fertility histories and children's reports on their biological mothers. Because of this, although education trends were examined overall from 1998 to 2011, but the associations between parental and child education were only tested from 2001 onwards.

Ethical approval for the Manicaland HIV/STD Prevention Project was obtained from the Research Council of Zimbabwe (Number 02187), the Biomedical Research and Training Institute Zimbabwe's institutional review board (Number AP6/97), and the Imperial College London Research Ethics Committee (Number ICREC 9_3_13). Written informed consent was obtained prior to survey participation. Participants were informed that, at any point, they could refuse to answer a question or decline to continue the interview.

2.2. Education measures

Six measures of education were examined in the study: enrolment in school (ages 15–16 and ages 17–18), correct grade-for-age (a measure of progression through school), primary school

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