

ICT in Education in Zimbabwe

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Source: *World Fact Book*¹

Please note:

This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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Overview

Zimbabwe has been beleaguered by economic, social, and political turmoil in recent years which has had a debilitating effect on its already-declining education system. The country nevertheless has a dedicated national ICT policy that was adopted in 2005 and that makes significant references to the promotion of ICTs in education including pedagogical use in educational institutions. Zimbabwe also has a vibrant civil society sector that promotes ICT for development and education, of which organisations such as World Links Zimbabwe has played a pioneering role since the late 1990s.

Introduction

Over the past few years, the Zimbabwean economy has been beset with crises, characterised by an unsustainable fiscal deficit, an overvalued exchange rate, and rampant inflation (which stood at 1,000% in 2006). The government's controversial land reform programme has reportedly been the cause of significant damage to the commercial farming sector rendering the country a net importer of food after having traditionally been the source of jobs, exports, and foreign exchange. Financial support from the International Monetary Fund was also suspended due to arrears in repayments on loans.²

Zimbabwe ranks higher on the UNDP Human Development Index than Angola, Eritrea, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Zambia which are all, along with Zimbabwe, classified as low-income countries. Over 50% of Zimbabwe's population lives on less than \$1 a day. The country faces a food emergency and has among the sharpest increases in child mortality in history. According to UNICEF, Zimbabwe also has the world's fourth-highest rate of HIV prevalence with about 25% of the population reportedly HIV positive. Young people, especially girls, bear the brunt of the pandemic. Approximately 1.3 million, or one-fifth of all Zimbabwean children have lost a parent; most have been orphaned by AIDS. UNICEF further suggests that the HIV/AIDS pandemic has slashed the average life expectancy from 61 to 33 years since 1990.³

Table 1 provides some selected socio-economic indicators for Zimbabwe.

Table 1: Socio-economic Indicators: Zimbabwe

| Indicator | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Population | 13 million (2005) |
| Languages | Official language: English. National languages: Shona and Ndebele. |
| 2005 Economic activity (% of GDP) | Agriculture: 22.4% Industry: 28.0% Services: 49.7% |
| Human Development Index | 151 (out of 177 countries) |
| Per capita Gross National | \$620 (2004); \$340 (2005) |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Income (US dollars) | |
|---------------------|--|

The Education System

In the first two decades after Zimbabwe obtained independence in 1980, the country boasted one of the best education systems in the southern African region. During these years, the government focused on expanding education access by building schools in marginalised areas and disadvantaged urban centres, accelerating the training of teachers, and providing teaching and learning materials to schools. Double shifts were introduced to manage increasing enrolment, untrained teachers were hired to help with the teaching load, and low-cost teacher training schemes were introduced where only two terms of the four-year course were spent in college and the remaining two years were spent training in schools.

Currently, primary education is compulsory, commencing at age six and running a seven-year cycle to Grade 7. Secondary education commences at age of 13 with Form 1 (Grade 8). Parents can choose either expensive private, church-affiliated, or government boarding schools or the cheaper day schools. Secondary education comprises a four-year O-level cycle and a two-year A-level cycle.

Both primary and secondary education is run by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, while tertiary education is managed by a separate Ministry of Higher Education. Tertiary education incorporates all universities, technical colleges, polytechnic colleges, teacher-training colleges, and other vocational skills training centres.

In 2003 the country boasted among the highest literacy rates in the region with an overall rate of 90.7% according to the UNDP (male literacy 94.2%; female literacy 87.2%)⁴ However the tremendous strides made in primary and secondary education enrolment in the first two decades of independence were soon eroded as soaring school fees made education increasingly unaffordable and many teachers left the country.⁵

Table 2 provides a quantitative perspective of some selected system indicators.

Table 2: Selected Education Data

| Indicator | |
|---|---|
| Enrolment in primary education (% gross)* | 96 (2004) |
| Enrolment in secondary education (% gross)* | 36 (2004) |
| Transition to secondary | 70 (2003) |
| Enrolment in tertiary education (% gross) | 4 (2004) |
| Gender Parity Index (GPI)** | 0.98 in primary; 0.91 in secondary; 0.63 at university (2004) |

*Percent of gross is the number enrolled as a percentage of the number in the eligible age group.

**GPI = gross enrolment ratio (GER) of females, divided by the GER of males and indicates the level of access by females to education compared with males. In Zimbabwe, the GPI suggests there is slightly less than parity at the primary and secondary levels, and significantly under parity at the university level.

Infrastructure

According to the World Economic Forum's *Global Information Technology Report*, Zimbabwe ranks 105th out of 115 economies in 2005-2006, based on a networked readiness index, which measures the degree of preparation of a nation to participate in and benefit from ICT developments.⁶ This ranking is slightly higher than Benin, Chad, and Ethiopia.

Table 3 provides a snapshot of the state of national ICT infrastructure in Zimbabwe.⁷

Table 3: ICT in Seychelles

| Indicator | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Fixed-line subscribers (2004) | 317.0 per 1,000 persons |
| Mobile subscribers (2004) | 424 per 1,000 persons |
| Dial-up subscribers (2004) | 32.0 per 1,000 persons |
| Broadband subscribers (2004) | 0.75 per 1,000 persons |
| Internet users (2004) | 820 per 1,000 persons |
| Television broadcast stations | 16 (1997) |
| Radio stations | AM 7; FM 20; shortwave 1 (1998) |

A major boost to Zimbabwe's ICT infrastructure is the impending establishment of the East African Submarine Cable System (EASSy), which is a submarine optical fibre system running along the east coast of Africa and which includes Zimbabwe. This project is facilitated by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) e-Africa Commission in partnership with a host of telecom companies in Africa.⁸

ICT Policies

The Zimbabwean government adopted a national ICT policy in 2005 that was informed both by a Harvard University-guided e-readiness survey, which suggested the country was not uniformly e-ready, and by a host of preceding general and sectoral policies including Vision 2020, the national science and technology policy adopted in 2002, and the Nziramasanga Education Commission Report which in 1999 recommended the promotion of the educational use of computers for teaching and learning in educational institutions.

The policy's *vision* is to transform Zimbabwe into a knowledge-based society by 2020, while its *mission* is to accelerate the development and application of ICTs in support of economic growth and development. The policy's *objectives* are to promote the development of ICT infrastructure, provide education and training programmes to

produce knowledge workers and qualified human resources, to establish relevant structures and institutional mechanisms to promote ICTs, and to encourage equitable access to ICTs across genders and to youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities

It also has a separate section on human resource development where it promotes skills training and capacity-building at all levels in the private and public sectors and in all training centres and institutions of learning.⁹

Current ICT Initiatives and Projects

AVU Teacher Education Project

The African Virtual University (AVU) established an ambitious teacher education project involving 10 African countries, in partnership with African Development Bank (AfDB) and the NEPAD in 2006. Zimbabwe is one of the 10 countries involved.

The programme focuses on mathematics and science education and the integration of ICTs in and across the teaching of the curricula in these two subject areas. The intention is to contribute to the growth of more and better quality teachers through the use of flexible, open, distance, and e-learning (ODEL) methodologies at an affordable cost for diploma, undergraduate, and graduate levels.

The specific objectives of the project are to enhance the capacity of teachers in the use of ICTs in teaching and learning of mathematics and science, to develop the capacity of teachers to deliver ICTs as a subject in secondary education, and to increase the number of mathematics and science teachers by expanding access to training through ODeL methods.

The project has set targets of developing six ODeL modules by early 2007, the content of which will be available in Portuguese, French, and English. The authors are drawn from 12 institutions in the 10 countries that the funding covers. The University of Zimbabwe is one of these 12 institutions.

For more information: www.avu.org/documents/Fact-Sheet.pdf

College IT Enhancement Programme (CITEP)

CITEP is a local capacity-building project supported by the Flemish Office for Development Co-operation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) in 10 Zimbabwean colleges. The focus is on developing capacity to maintain and manage ICT equipment and strategies for effective use of ICTs in the colleges. The project focuses on the following outcomes:

- Clear ICT policies in place in participating colleges and being effectively applied
- Technical and professional skills of college ICT unit staff upgraded
- Present ICT infrastructure in participating colleges fully utilised (including the development of staff development strategies for the promotion of ICT-supported teaching and learning)

- Creative human resources management in place in participating colleges for recruiting and retaining IT unit staff

For more information: www.citep.ac.zw

Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe

The Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe, which includes an NGO network organisation called the NGO Network Alliance Project (NNAP), has been established to strengthen the use of e-mail and Internet among Zimbabwean NGOs and civil society organisations and to provide human rights and civic education information and materials. Kubatana has a network of 240 NGOs and community service organisations which are involved in its lobbying and advocacy campaigns. Kubatana also provides Internet space to these organisations via an online directory.

For more information: www.kubatana.net

World Links Zimbabwe

World Links Zimbabwe is part of the international network of World Links organisations and has historically been a pioneer in the promotion of education through ICTs. The organisation has been active in Zimbabwe since mid-1999 when 12 ICT centres were established with the support of the World Bank and in partnership with the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture. Each of these pilot World Links centres were established near schools so that they could service both the schools and the community. In this sense World Links Zimbabwe pioneered the concept of school-based telecentres.

World Links Zimbabwe was also known for its introduction of a bus, known as the Big Blue, installed with computers supplied by groups such as Computers for African Schools based in the UK. The bus moves to remote rural areas to encourage access to ICTs by these communities.

World Links Zimbabwe is now an independent registered trust and has established partnerships with a host of organisations and institutions including Computers for African Schools and SchoolNet Africa, the latter for whose Campaign for 1 Million PCs it now leads and with whom, in partnership with the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, promoted access to open source software in schools as well as support for a local PC refurbishment centre. It now has 43 telecentres throughout the country of which 35 have dial-up connectivity to the Internet.¹⁰

For more information: <http://www.world-links.org/en/countries/alumni/zimbabwe.html>

Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

Table 4 provides a summary of the current stage of ICT development in Zimbabwe in terms of enabling or constraining features in the education system.

Table 4: Factors Influencing ICT Adoption

| Factors | Enabling Features | Constraining Features |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Policy framework and implementation</i> | Zimbabwe has a national ICT policy which includes references to ICTs in education. | Zimbabwe does not have a dedicated specific national policy on ICTs in education. |
| <i>Advocacy leadership</i> | Zimbabwe has had dedicated champions for the cause of ICTs particularly within its vibrant civil society sector. | |
| <i>Gender equity</i> | The national ICT policy refers to access of ICTs across gender, reflecting an interest in promoting equal access. | More detailed elaboration on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is not available in the national ICT policy. |
| <i>Infrastructure and access</i> | Zimbabwe's national ICT policy promotes the idea of developing an ICT infrastructure including a local industry. | |
| <i>Collaborating mechanisms</i> | The national ICT policy refers to the establishment of a national ICT authority that will promote policy coherence and collaboration, particularly within government. Civil society organisations have also established online networks on issues relating to ICT for development. | |
| <i>Human resource capacity</i> | | Zimbabwe has limited human resource capacity. |
| <i>Fiscal resources</i> | | Limited if any fiscal resources are committed by government to support ICT access and use. |
| <i>Learning content</i> | | There is little digital education content based on the local curriculum frameworks available in Zimbabwe educational institutions. |
| <i>Attitudes</i> | The leadership of Zimbabwean government and civil society organisations have demonstrated an enthusiasm and positive | |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | attitude in promoting ICTs for development in general and in education in particular. | |
|--|---|--|

Notes

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/zi.html>

² Ibid.

³ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zimbabwe_1403.html

⁴ Kanyango, G. "Zimbabwe's Public Education System Reforms: Successes and Challenges." *International Education Journal*. 2005 6(1); 65-74.

<http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education/iej/articles/v6n1/kanyongo/paper.pdf>

⁵ <http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/zimbabwe/development?gclid=CPewoaT8yYsCFRw8gQodbRbMBQ>

⁶ <http://www2.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Competitiveness+Programme/Global+Information+Technology+Report.html>

⁷ World Telecommunications Development Report. 2006. ITU.

⁸ NEPAD ICT Infrastructure Program: Addressing Africa's ICT Infrastructure Challenges Using Broadband Networks. www.doc.gov.za/signing/Infrastructure.pdf

⁹ Zimbabwe National Information and Communication Technology Policy Framework. December 2005. Government of Zimbabwe.

¹⁰ <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/elearning/rc/ItemDetail.do~343620?itemId=343620>

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