

# WORKING PAPERS IN ECONOMICS



**DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS  
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THE NOSE BRIGADE AND SRBs; UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND  
CLASS FORMATION IN ZIMBABWE DURING THE 1980S.

Paul Bennell and Mkhululi Ncube\*

1. Introduction

In Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, secondary and tertiary education and training have been the principal vehicles for socio-economic advancement among the African population. This has been as true for the post-colonial period since 1980 as it was during the ninety years of colonial rule by white settlers. Just who obtains access to education and training institutions is, therefore, of central importance in any analysis of the social structure and, more specifically, the process of class formation in contemporary Zimbabwean society.

At the pinnacle of the education system, the university educates and trains young people for careers in professional, managerial and other high level occupations. Without a university degree, entry into these 'middle class' occupations via alternative education and training routes, has become increasingly difficult.

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\* Lecturers, Department of Economics, University of Zimbabwe, P.O. Box MP 167, Harare. The Research Board of the University of Zimbabwe generously funded this research. Research assistance was very ably provided by Killion Dembe, Ray Kumadiro and Pardon Muzenda.

The government's second objective focused on the need to increase substantially the outputs of graduates from the university in order to meet the much enlarged national manpower requirements of post-colonial Zimbabwe. Again, this objective was quickly realised with total student enrollments increasing to nearly 5000 in 1985 and 9200 in 1989.

The third and, in many ways the most ambitious, objective was the transformation of the institution itself- from what was seen to be an elitist colonial university based on an imported and thus inappropriate British model into a developmental university "dedicated to the attainment of explicit socio-economic goals as formulated by government" (UZ, 1985: 3). A "new orientation" was required, therefore, that would ensure that the "university played an active and meaningful role in the development of Zimbabwe in all its facets" (ibid: 6).

In his opening address to the 1981 Conference on the Role of the University in Zimbabwe, Prime Minister Mugabe stated that:

Training people is one thing, imparting an appropriate and relevant orientation is another. Our university will fail us if their products turn out to be imbued with an individualistic, elitist and reactionary outlook more suited to other social environments perhaps, but certainly fundamentally at odds with our circumstances, perspectives and aspirations. We must at all costs ensure that the young men and women who come out of our institutions of higher learning have a socialist, people-centred orientation" (UZ, 1981:6).

By 1985, the members of the university's Triennial Review Committee concluded that "the foundation of this new orientation is already well established and accepted" (ibid: 7).

Not only should the university produce socialist graduates but its curricula also had to be comprehensively revised so that the skills of these graduates would be appropriate to the development needs of the new nation. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake had created an 'ivory tower' during the colonial period. UZ

had, therefore, to forge new relationships with the communities it was to serve and the most effective way of doing this was to ensure that university training was fully consonant with the development needs of these communities.

The fourth objective was that UZ should maintain its 'international standing' as an institution of higher learning. Consequently, academic entry requirements for students remained unchanged after Independence. In fact, as the demand for university education increased steadily during the 1980s, these requirements became even more stringent. It was only in those faculties where whites continued to be dis-proportionately represented that some politicians demanded that the rules of access be modified<sup>3</sup>. But, this was strenuously resisted by the Ministry of Education and the university community itself.

Interestingly, the need to change rules of access to UZ so as to ensure that the student body was truly representative of the African population as a whole, both in terms of geographical location and ethnic and class composition was never actively considered by either government or the university administration. In part, this can be attributed to the overriding importance that was attached to the attainment of the four objectives outlined above, namely Africanisation, enrollment growth, socialist transformation and maintenance of international academic standards. Implicitly, therefore, it was assumed that the realisation of these objectives was consistent with the creation of a university student body that was representative of Zimbabwean society as a whole and that consequently no specific policy intervention was necessary to achieve this. And, as the earlier quote from Professor Chavunduka illustrates, it was also widely believed that African students did come from mainly peasant and proletarian backgrounds.

### 3. Research Methodology and Data

The socio-economic backgrounds of first year students who enrolled at UZ in four years, 1980, 1981, 1985 and 1990 were ascertained using data contained in student admission records kept by the university and grant and loan application forms submitted by parents and other sponsors to the Ministry of Education\*. Students studying in six subject areas namely arts, economics, engineering, law, pharmacy, and science were selected for detailed analysis.

The following four standard indicators of socio-economic background were relied upon; father's employment activity and occupation, father's income, last secondary school attended, and location of the family home.

From university admission records, lists of all first year students in these six subject areas were compiled for each of the four years under investigation. The home addresses of students were also obtained from these records but, unfortunately, information on first and second (ie. 'O' and 'A' level) schools attended was incomplete or inaccurate so could not be relied upon. For students who had applied for a government grant and loan<sup>2</sup>, it was possible to collect reliable data on 'last school attended' and father's occupation and income as well as 'A' level examination grades.

At Independence in 1980, most African university students received financial support from private local and foreign scholarship funds. This is the principal reason for the relatively small number of government grantees in 1980 (See Table 1). It was decided, therefore, to also include the 1981 African student intakes since much higher proportions of these students were in receipt of government loans and grants and

the overall number of African students attending UZ was much higher than in 1980.

Table 1: UZ student enrollments and grantees in the six subject areas.

Year	Total enrollments	Grantees sampled	% total	Non-parental sponsors as % of grantees sampled
1980	223	55	24.7	34.5
1981	287	133	46.3	26.3
1985	695 (347)	222	64.0	25.7
1990	1046 (523)	359	68.6	35.9
Totals	2251	769	-	-

Note: Figures in brackets are the fifty percent random samples of the 1985 and 1990 intakes.

UZ student intakes in the six subjects increased to 695 in 1985 and 1046 in 1990. In order to keep the survey at a manageable size, fifty percent of the students within each subject group in 1985 and 1990 were randomly sampled. As can be observed in Table 1, grant application forms were tracked down at the Ministry of Higher Education for well over half of these students. Those for whom files could not be found were likely to have been (i) students whose father earned high incomes and were not, therefore, eligible for government assistance. This means, therefore, that the sampling procedure was probably biased in favour of students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. (ii) Students who continued to receive financial support from non-government sources. (iii) Students who had paid off their loans and whose files had been archived and were not, therefore, available for inspection.

As can be observed in Table 1, between 25-35 percent of student in receipt of grants and loans were sponsored not by parents but

by guardians or other individuals prepared to act as surety holders. This meant that information on the parental occupations of these students was not provided in the grant application forms. Because students from poorer families may have been sponsored by better-off relatives, excluding these students could have seriously biased the analysis in favour of students from professional and middle level family backgrounds. It was decided, therefore, to try to obtain this information directly by writing to these students. Response rates were relatively low for the 1980-81 and 1985 groups at 37.0 percent and 29.8 percent respectively but quite high (53.6 percent) for the 1990 group who were still at UZ and could, therefore, be contacted via their faculties. These sample data were used to derive the employment activity and employment profiles for the non-parental sponsored group as a whole which were then combined with those of the majority group of parent-sponsored students.

In total, data on all four socio-economic indicators were collected for 789 students. These data were coded for computer analysis using SPSSPC software.

#### 4. Research Findings

The following discussion examines the background profiles of each of the annual UZ student intakes under investigation with respect to the four main socio-economic indicators, namely father's employment activity and occupation, father's income, last secondary school attended, and residential address.

**Father's employment activity:** The extent to which students from various socio-economic backgrounds were over- and under-representation at UZ during the 1980s can be ascertained by first comparing the employment activity profiles of student fathers with the overall employment profiles for males in the country as a whole.

while somewhat less than anticipated, are still sizeable. But, as is evidenced by the disproportionate representation of teachers whose incomes were no higher than the middle level mental occupations, father's income alone could not have been the only factor that determined an individual's access to the university during the 1980s. In particular, the values and attitudes of parents and especially their levels of commitment to getting their children to university and their ability to create conducive learning environments in the home must also be taken into account.

Table 5: Median annual gross incomes of student fathers and sponsors by occupational level (Z\$)

Occupational level	1980-81	1985	1990
<u>Professional</u>			
Teachers	2445(8.0)	7662(18.6)	11166(7.3)
Other	4552(14.9)	10317(25.0)	16049(10.4)
<u>Middle level</u>			
Mental	2141(7.0)	7069(17.2)	10348(6.7)
Manual	1725(5.6)	4115(10.0)	9794(6.4)
<u>Semi-unskilled</u>	1794(5.9)	4747(11.5)	6392(4.2)
<u>Communal farmers</u>	306(1.0)	412(1.0)	1538(1.0)

Note: Figures in parentheses are income differentials between communal farmers and occupation group for each specific year.

Last school attended: In 1980, there were approximately 30 secondary schools in the country that had Sixth Forms and where, therefore, students could sit for GCE Advanced level examinations. As can be seen in Table 6, 55.9 percent of first



year African students who enrolled at UZ in 1980-81 had attended just five of these secondary schools<sup>9</sup>. By 1990, the number of secondary schools offering 'A' levels had increased to around 110. While this led to a halving of the percentage representation of the top five schools among the 1990 student intake, nonetheless, over sixty percent of these students had received their Sixth Form education at twenty five secondary schools (ie. less than twenty percent of the total number). In short, therefore, getting a place at one of these elite secondary schools is the first and, in many ways, the most critical step in obtaining a university education in Zimbabwe.

Table 6: Percentage attendance of UZ students at secondary schools.

Number of schools	1980-81	1985	1990-91
Top 5 schools	55.9	26.8	20.5
Top 10 schools	79.2	49.4	34.1
Top 25 schools	95.8	82.2	61.6
Top 50 schools	-	-	85.5
Total number of schools	32	49	84

**Geographical Locations:** The provincial breakdown of the residential addresses given by UZ students is presented in Table 7. The most striking change that occurred during the 1980s was the very significant fall in the proportion of students from Harare (from 31.2 percent in 1980-81 to 12.3 percent in 1990) and corresponding increases in the relative number of students from the other provinces in both Matabeleland and Mashonaland (with the single exception of Manicaland). In particular, the percentage representation of students from Masvingo Province increased from 11.6 percent in 1980-81 to 16.2 percent in 1990.

Table 7: Provincial breakdown of student residential addresses

Province	1980-81	1985	1990	% total pop. 1982
Bulawayo	11.1	10.8	11.8	} 11.7
Matabeleland-North	0.0	1.4	2.2	
Matabeleland-South	0.5	0.9	2.5	
Sub-total	11.6	13.1	16.5	18.6
Harare	31.2	27.9	12.3	} 19.8
Mashonaland-East	7.9	9.0	13.7	
Mashonaland-Central	3.2	3.2	5.0	7.5
Mashonaland-West	7.4	4.5	8.4	11.7
Masvingo	11.6	9.0	16.2	13.7
Manicaland	15.9	15.8	13.7	14.6
Midlands	11.1	17.6	14.0	14.5
Sub-total	88.3	87.0	83.3	81.4

By 1990, the first year intake of UZ students was fairly representative of the provincial distribution of the population as a whole in Zimbabwe. Students from Matabeleland South Province remained under-represented at UZ while those from Harare/Mashonaland East Provinces were over-represented. Nonetheless, the extent of over- and under-representation is not particularly marked and, on balance, the geographical balance of the UZ student population improved during the 1980s.

In 1980, students with residential addresses in the eight main urban centres in the country (namely Harare, Bulawayo, Chitungwiza/Seke, Gweru, Kadoma, Kwekwe, Masvingo, and Mutare) comprised 76.1 percent of the total student intake. By 1985, this had fallen to 60.4 percent and, by 1990, 47.3 percent. Nonetheless, with no more than 35 percent of the total population residing in these urban areas in the <sup>mid-</sup>late 1980s<sup>10</sup>, access to UZ continues to exhibit some urban bias.

## 5. University Education and Class Formation

In conclusion, three main features of the socio-economic background of students who attended UZ during the 1980s can be identified. First, the continued over-representation of students whose fathers were in wage employment and, in particular, fathers in professional occupations. Second, the disproportionate number of students who attended a small group of well endowed secondary schools. And thirdly, by 1990, a reasonable equitable composition of students according to provincial population distribution but continued over-representation of students from urban areas.

Above all else, however, it has been the employment and occupational status of an individual's father that has most strongly determined his or her chances of attending the university. Despite the proclaimed role of the university as a key institution in the socialist transformation of Zimbabwean society, children from professional and other middle level social strata continue to be massively over-represented at UZ.

What we have witnessed in Zimbabwe since 1980 is the subordination of the radical nationalism of the independence struggle to the imperative of achieving rapid Africanisation which, in turn, has resulted in the consolidation of a much enlarged African middle class.<sup>11</sup> It is this newly empowered middle class that has dominated the process of class formation in Zimbabwe since Independence. As elsewhere in Africa, therefore, Africanisation in Zimbabwe has been an essentially conservative process with educated Africans merely 'stepping into the shoes' of the whites they have replaced.

Like all middle classes around the world, members of the Zimbabwean middle class are acutely aware of the importance of high quality education and training in ensuring that their children continue to enjoy the same privileged status and

material rewards as themselves. In other words, gaining access to the right kinds of education is the essential prerequisite for the reproduction of this class. But, unlike the majority of the population, middle class Zimbabweans have the intellectual and material resources that generally enable them to send their children to the best secondary schools in the country and thereby acquire the 'O' and 'A' levels necessary for university entry. Unless, therefore, there is a considerable increase in the availability of high quality, low cost secondary education (in particular at the Sixth Form level), it seems likely that university education in Zimbabwe will increasingly become the preserve of this middle class.

## ENDNOTES

1. A second public university, The National University of Science and Technology was established in Bulawayo in 1990.

2. As a working paper intended for a local audience, we have not provided background information on the structure of education and the associated examination system in Zimbabwe. We would welcome readers' comments.

3. In particular, the relatively large number of whites in the Faculty of Medicine prompted the Minister of Health to request that the university lower its 'A' level entry requirements for African students. The Minister of Education insisted that the present entry requirements be maintained.

4. A new Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1988 which since then has had overall responsibility for UZ.

5. For eligible students, 50 percent of the costs of their attendance at UZ is covered by a grant from government and 50 percent from a low-interest loan.

6. Accurate, reliable information on occupational stocks in Zimbabwe at any time during the 1980s is simply not available. The most recent data on the occupational breakdown of Zimbabweans in wage employment are contained in the 1984 and 1985 Annual Reviews of Manpower published by the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare. Establishments employing approximately only half of waged persons were covered by the 1984 survey. From data presented in Table 3.5, 5 percent of all males in wage employment in 1984 were enumerated as being professionals. This is certainly too low. Indeed, in the following table 3.6, employment totals for 'selected' professional occupations (excluding central government) are listed which, in total, amount to 11.1 percent of all men and women sampled. Assuming, therefore, that professionals comprised around 11 per cent of total male wage employment at the time of the Labour Force Survey in 1986-87, then 5.2 per cent of the economically active male labour force were in professional employment.

7. Taking the country as a whole, approximately only 8 percent of Form Four school leavers went onto the Sixth Form in the late 1980s.

8. In 1980, these schools were (in order of UZ student numbers) Goromonzi, Hartzell, Fletcher, St. Ignatius and St. Augustine. The 1990 line-up was: Gokomere, Goromonzi, Hartzell, St. Augustine and Chibi.

9. Population data come from the 1982 Census so some changes may have occurred in the provincial distribution of the population by the late 1980s.

10. We shall have to wait for the results of the 1992 Population Census in order to determine more precisely the relative size of these urban populations.

11. The promulgation of a Presidential Directive in 1980 resulted in the very rapid Africanisation of the public sector. Africanisation of middle and senior positions in the private sector has been at much <sup>slow</sup>er pace.

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