

ZIMSEC's Online Results Checking System: A Parent-Guardian Perception Survey

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) online results system through a parent-guardian perception survey. With the introduction of a digital platform in 2019, ZIMSEC enabled candidates to access, view and download examination results directly from its official website. This study aims to evaluate how this online system is received by parents and guardians, focusing on their perspectives on its benefits, challenges, and potential areas for improvement. The research explores the perceived advantages of accessing results online, such as convenience and accessibility, while also highlighting concerns related to security, reliability and ease of use. The study employs a qualitative methodology, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the online results system impacts Zimbabwean families and offers recommendations for enhancing functionality and user experience.

Keywords: Online results system, ZIMSEC, education, technology, examination results, Zimbabwe education system.

Introduction

In 2019, the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) - Zimbabwe's national body, responsible for performance assessment in primary and secondary education - introduced an online platform where examination class students could access their examination results without going to their respective centres for physical collection (Dube, 2019). This intervention was a new model - at least in Zimbabwe - a departure from the traditional way where ZIMSEC would release examination results for Grade 7, Form 4 (Ordinary level) and Form 6 (Advanced level). Candidates used to sit for their examinations, with learners collecting results at their respective examination centres. This online system enabled candidates or their guardians to access, view, and download or 'screenshot' their results directly from the ZIMSEC official website or results portal. To use this platform, required are the students' details such as the candidate number and centre number.

ZIMSEC was created in 1994 through the Zimbabwe School Examinations Act of 1994. This marked a departure from a schools' examination system that heavily relied on external examination bodies (Musarurwa & Chimhenga, 2011). These bodies included the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), the University of London Schools Examinations Board (ULSEB) and the Associated Examinations Board (AEB) (Musarurwa & Chimhenga, 2011). The institutionalisation of ZIMSEC in 1994 was a culmination of the dedication by the post-colonial government in the newly independent Zimbabwe, to take control, not only of the education sector but the examinations as well. Following the creation of ZIMSEC, the localisation of examinations was completed in 2002 when ZIMSEC finally took over the control of Advanced Level examinations.

Exams are currently set and administered by the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) for all national primary and secondary examination classes in Zimbabwe. However, there are options for students to sit for exams set by foreign or international organisations, like the Cambridge Examination Board, in various Zimbabwean schools, especially private schools.

ZIMSEC is under the purview of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, although it operates as an autonomous institution governed by a board of directors that represents various societal stakeholders with an interest in education. Over the years, ZIMSEC has collaborated with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, especially with schools and other stakeholders, to oversee a number of aspects of the examination process. The exam process includes setting exams, invigilating, marking, announcing and gathering results.

When ZIMSEC introduced the online results checking platform in 2019, Dube (2019) noted that Zimbabweans welcomed the initiative with mixed reactions. Some noted that it would be challenging for schools to track down students with outstanding fees. Traditionally, schools take advantage of the occasion when students arrive to pick up their results to pursue the debt that each student owes the institution. Concerns about data security, privacy and confidentiality were also raised regarding the online system as other people could access other's results.

In November 2019, it was reported that a twelve- year-old girl had committed suicide over unpleasant Grade 7 results (Vhenge, 2019). Such instances provoke inquiries or assessments into the pros and cons of the ZIMSEC online results checking systems. Over five years since the introduction of ZIMSEC's online results checking platform, this study sought to assess the effectiveness of ZIMSEC's online results systems through the lenses of the parents and or guardians.

Research Objectives

1. Assess Zimbabwean parents and/or guardians' perspectives of the benefits of the ZIMSEC online portal for examination results checking.
2. Highlight the parents' concerns and challenges regarding learners' access to examination results online
3. Find ways through which the ZIMSEC online platform can be improved.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived benefits of the ZIMSEC online results checking platform?
2. What are the major concerns of parents in Zimbabwe about online access to examination results?
3. What are the major challenges faced by parents in Zimbabwe when trying to access examination results online?
4. What solutions can be implemented to address the concerns and challenges of online access to examination results?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for ZIMSEC, as it offers an assessment and evaluation of the online results viewing system implemented over the past five years. The results could guide improvements, changes, or a system review, which would eventually help to improve service delivery. Furthermore, the study provides a platform for parents and guardians to share their experiences, thereby allowing them to possibly contribute meaningfully to the ongoing development and further refinement of the system. Their perspectives may reveal practical challenges and suggest user-oriented improvements. Lastly, this research serves as a foundation for future scholarly inquiry into online results dissemination platforms. While the current study focuses on parental perceptions, subsequent research could explore the views of other key stakeholders, such as educators and students, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the system's effectiveness and impact.

Literature Review

The integration of digital technologies in education has transformed traditional teaching and models of administration, leading to a more streamlined, accessible and data-driven educational ecosystem in various parts of the globe (Sargiotis, 2024). One significant innovation in this transformation is the development and adoption of online result checking systems, which function as a subset of the broader e-learning paradigm. E-learning, as described by Tunmibi et al. (2015), is not limited to the digitisation of content but also encompasses comprehensive changes in the design of the curriculum, educational infrastructure and teaching approaches. E-learning are systems or mechanisms that support the delivery of academic services in more flexible and responsive ways (Liu & Yu, 2023). According to Mohamed Hashim et al. (2022), digital tools in education, including result management systems, enhance efficiency, transparency and communication between institutions and stakeholders.

Online result checking systems are especially valuable for facilitating immediate access to academic performance data for students, parents and educators (Ohini, 2016). These systems align with global trends toward data-driven education, enabling informed decision-making and supporting self-regulated learning. By reducing reliance on manual result dissemination, such platforms contribute to increased accuracy, faster turnaround times and minimised administrative errors. Despite these advantages, the adoption of online result systems in developing countries remains uneven. Tin and Manoharn (2023) argue that infrastructural limitations, low internet penetration and digital literacy gaps continue to hinder the widespread implementation of mobile and web-based technologies in many regions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated digital adoption across Africa. Zinyemba et al. (2021) note that the crisis exposed the vulnerabilities of traditional education systems and highlighted the need for resilient digital platforms, including for result dissemination.

Historical developments starting in the early 2000s illustrate the progressive uptake of online result checking systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) was among the first examination bodies on the African continent to launch an online result checking system as early as 2004 (Ghana News Agency, 2004). This milestone marked a turning point and over the years several national examination bodies have followed suit. For instance, the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) launched its online results checking portal, enabling candidates and institutions to register and access results digitally. (Wangare, 2025). Likewise, countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe have also introduced online portals for results checking. Adelabu and Odunayo (2023) emphasise the critical role of mobile and computing technologies in enhancing the delivery of educational services across all levels. Scholarly focus has shifted to assessing the efficacy of digital technology, especially in terms of administrative efficiency and accessibility, as the use of online result verification systems has grown. However, a notable gap persists in the existing literature regarding the perceived effectiveness of these platforms from the perspective of end users, specifically students, parents and/or guardians. This current study sought to address this gap by contributing insights into user experiences and satisfaction with online result checking systems.

Methodology

The study employed purposive sampling to select twenty-five (25) participants, comprising parents and guardians who had interacted with the ZIMSEC online results portal at least once within its five-year period of operation or implementation. To further refine the sample, the snowball sampling technique was used, whereby initial participants referred the researcher to other individuals who met the selection criteria. The researcher administered twenty-five (25) semi-structured questionnaires to the twenty-five participants. From the original group of twenty-five, three participants were randomly selected for follow-up qualitative interviews,

providing detailed narratives and contextual insights to complement the findings from the twenty-five administered questionnaires.

Demographic details of respondents

Out of the 25 parents who participated in the study, 17 were female, while the remaining eight (8) were male. Among these participants, 16 reported using the online results checking platform to access Ordinary Level examination results for their children. Two parents used the system to view Advanced Level results, while seven accessed it to check Grade Seven results.

Regarding frequency of use, 19 parents indicated that they had utilised the platform once. Four parents reported using it on two different occasions across separate years, and two parents had accessed the system three times in different years. These instances of repeated use were associated with checking results at various educational stages, including Grade Seven, Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations.

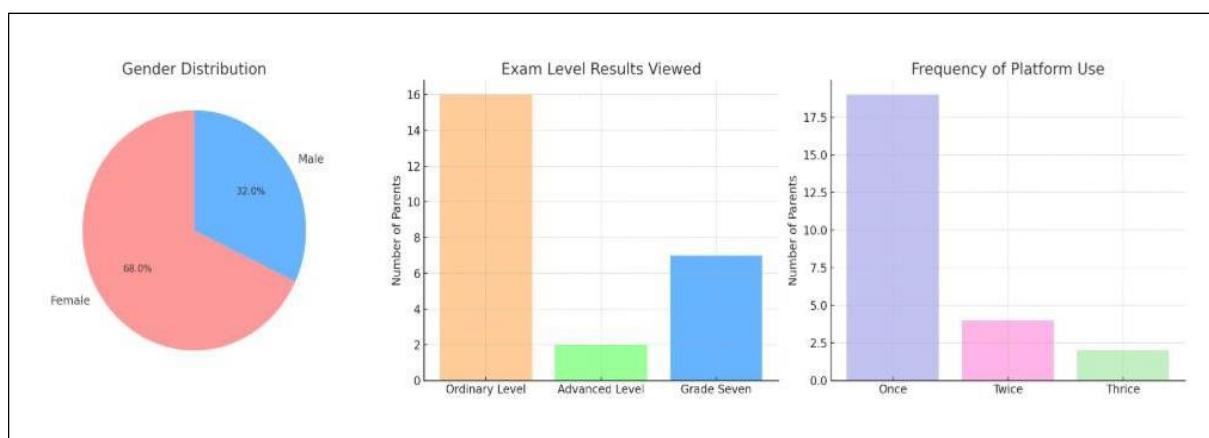


Figure 1: Demographic details of research participants

Limitations

Although the ZIMSEC online results platform is accessed by thousands of parents across Zimbabwe, this study focused on a relatively small, qualitatively selected sample. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalisable to the wider population.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study. As a point of reference, the research had three aims, firstly, to explore Zimbabwean parents' and guardians' perspectives on the benefits of the ZIMSEC online portal for accessing examination results. Secondly, the study sought to examine the challenges parents faced in relation to accessing results through the online platform. The findings outlined below address these two focal areas. The third objective discussed in the subsequent recommendations section was proposing strategies for improving the ZIMSEC online system.

Benefits of the Online Results Checking Platform

One of the repeatedly mentioned benefits of the ZIMSEC online results checking platform was the issue of convenience and accessibility. Most respondents (20 out of 25) highlighted convenience as a key strength of the system. Parents and guardians appreciated the ability to access results remotely, thereby eliminating the need to physically visit their children's schools. This was especially beneficial for those residing in rural areas or geographically distant locations from the schools which they would have sat the examinations.

One participant noted,

Ordinary level results are usually released during mid-month. What it means is that, traditionally, one would have to look for money urgently for the child to travel to collect results from the school especially for those who learn at schools which are not close by. Fortunately for me, when ZIMSEC introduced the system in 2019, we used it. It was very convenient. Once we saw the results, we took our time to travel and collect the physical copies of the results

Secondly, respondents stated that the online system saves parents and their children from anxiety often associated with examination results as the platform allows for speedy and timely viewing of the results. The system was widely praised for its real-time access to results, enabling parents to view outcomes immediately after they are released. Interview participants explained that traditionally, parents and children were exposed to days and in some cases weeks of anxiety, planning the logistics surrounding the collection of results. An example repeatedly mentioned were instances where students or parents owing the school would spend weeks, months or even years trying to cover the arrears whilst not privy to know the outcome of the results. Parents noted that whilst the measures to withhold results were useful for schools, they disadvantaged children as it fuelled anxiety. Parents admitted that the online results checking platform, however, could be taken advantage of, by errant parents to avoid paying the fee arrears. One parent stated that she was aware of a parent who took a 'screenshot' of his son's Grade 7 results and proceeded to secure enrolment at a private school in a certain peri-urban settlement.

Challenges of the Online Results Checking Platform

Despite the perceived advantages of the online system, research participants identified several notable challenges. The most frequently cited concern related to the accuracy and reliability of online results. In three out of the five in-depth interviews conducted, participants consistently expressed apprehension and scepticism regarding potential discrepancies between the online results and the official printed copies issued by schools. One participant specifically noted that the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) includes a disclaimer on the online results slip stating 'not for official use.' According to the participant, this disclaimer suggests that in cases where discrepancies arise, the printed version provided by the school would be considered authoritative. Consequently, the participant emphasised that relying on online results could lead to premature celebrations due to their provisional nature.

Online Result Slip

Subject	Qualification	Result
BIOLOGY	Advanced Level	B
CHEMISTRY	Advanced Level	D
PURE MATHEMATICS	Advanced Level	B
COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Pass	B

Number of subjects 3

Figure 2: A specimen of ZIMSEC 'A' Level results from the online platform

Parents also raised concerns on issues surrounding trust, privacy and security. Participants expressed significant apprehension regarding cybersecurity, particularly the potential for personal information to be hacked or leaked. The interviews revealed that fears of cyberbullying were perceived as both genuine and credible. This concern was largely attributed to the nature of the login credentials required to access the online results system, namely, the examination centre number and the candidate number. Participants noted that possession of these details by an unauthorised individual could enable access to another candidate's results, which could then be misused in various ways, including unauthorised online dissemination. Otherwise, the only security measure that could prevent unauthorised access is the requirement for the date of birth of the person who sat for the examination.

A third major challenge identified by participants was the cost of mobile data. Although the actual data required to access the ZIMSEC results portal is relatively minimal in terms of kilobytes, the financial burden of purchasing data bundles at the time of results release was reported to be significant, particularly for less-resourced families. Interviews revealed that many parents expressed concern over the high cost of data in Zimbabwe, noting that this often posed a barrier to accessing the online system. While the expense of purchasing data may be lower than the cost of physically travelling to schools, the limitation it imposes on the effective use of the ZIMSEC results portal cannot be overlooked. Closely related to this issue were challenges associated with internet connectivity, which were reported in rural areas, as well as in certain urban and peri-urban communities.

Most participants (18 out of 25) indicated that the ZIMSEC online portal was generally easy to navigate. However, the remaining seven participants noted that the platform could benefit from enhancements to improve accessibility, particularly for older parents or individuals with limited digital literacy. In addition to usability concerns, a critical issue raised was the lack of timely technical support especially in the absence of formal support mechanisms or helplines to offer real-time assistance as a significant limitation of the system.

Through the in-depth interviews, the research noted that parents generally had concerns relating to the psychological and social implications of the online results checking platform. Firstly, some respondents feared that children might access results on their own without adult supervision, potentially leading to psychological distress in cases of poor performance. Secondly, it was highlighted that the system seemingly favours those who are digitally literate and financially capable with parents lacking these resources risking temporary exclusion from critical aspects of their children's academic lives. Lastly, a few respondents cited societal misuse, where the system might be misused with parents neglecting responsibilities like school fee payments after discovering poor academic performance.

Recommendations

This section presents a set of recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the ZIMSEC online results checking platform. These consist of recommendations that were made by the research participants as well as others which the research deduced from the responses or interactions with the respondents. Four major recommendations were made, as follows:

Zero-rated data – Parents suggested that ZIMSEC should enter into partnership with local mobile operators in order to provide a zero-rated data provision for accessing the ZIMSEC results portal in order to ensure that everyone can be able to access the portal free of charge without the use of any data bundles. A case was cited on Pindula Zimbabwe - as a typical example, whereby the company at some point entered an arrangement with one mobile

operator, Econet Zimbabwe - ensuring that its news content was accessed on the web, free of charge, that is, without a requirement for data (TechZim, 28 January 2022). Parents felt that, through a zero-rated data platform, the results checking system could be made accessible to most parents, students and guardians.

Introduction of a USSD Code – Parents and guardians stated that to cater for all diverse Zimbabwean students, the ZIMSEC should move towards the introduction of an unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) code that can be used to access results even on the smallest phones that do not support broadband and internet services. A USSD code is a short string of numbers, often starting with an asterisk (*) and ending with a hash (#). For example, those used to check balance on the phone, or for services such as mobile money (*123#, *125#, *569#). It was stated that a USSD code could be a panacea for those in areas where network connectivity is a challenge.

Psychological support and career guidance - Whilst respondents could not clearly articulate how, it was repeatedly stated that the online portal or the USSD code once introduced should be supported by proper artificial intelligence capabilities to proffer corresponding counselling to the candidate or highlight the career guidance or course options that they may pursue with their results. It was noted that the results checking platform should somehow include information on career options or course options that match the results a student has.

Toll free call centre support services - If such a system mentioned above could not be developed for whatever reason, parents expressed the need for a dedicated helpline or online chat support service which should be able to address or respond to the psychological and technical needs of both students and parents. While technical demands could include difficulty with website navigation or login, psychological needs might include things like comfort and career assistance.

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