The effect of teacher involvement in the decision making on their performance in Harare Primary Schools

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Abstract

The continued low pass rates by Harare Primary schools at grade seven level despite the number of training workshops held by the Civil Service Commission, who is the employer made the researcher want to find out what could be the contributory factors. The researchers investigated teacher involvement in decision making and the effect this had on their performance. Fifty primary school trained teachers and 10 primary school heads were randomly selected for the research. The descriptive survey research method was used for this study. Closed-ended questionnaires and structured interviews were used in order to get credible data. The closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers and the structured interviews were conducted with heads. The data were presented in tables and pie charts. From the study, it was noticed that teachers were not involved in key decision areas. When involved it would be on issues concerning the classroom. Teachers indicated the need to be involved in matters concerning the school as they are part of the school system. The findings of the study showed that involving teachers in decision making made teachers go an extra mile in their performance. The researchers recommend training workshops to be conducted were current information on the importance of teacher involvement in decision making processes is given. The training workshops should involve officials in the education ministry, heads, teachers and other stakeholders. School heads should better understand that trained teachers of today hold professional qualifications that qualifies them for leadership positions. Heads should thus tap on this knowledge. Further research needs to be carried out to determine the correlation between high teacher involvement in school decision making processes and high pass rates.

Key Words: Teacher involvement, work performance, decision making

Introduction

Mbare - Hatfield district is one of the seven districts in Harare – Metropolitan Province of Zimbabwe. It is composed of thirty-one primary schools. With this number of schools in the district only two private schools had a 100% pass rate at grade 7 level in 2014 in public examinations basing on subjects, 2015 only one private school had 100% pass rate, the same school which had a 100% pass rate in 2014 (Mbare/Hatfield District: 2015 Cluster ranking, 28 December 2015). In 2016, three private schools had a 100% pass rate (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017). One of these private schools maintained its 100% pass rate. These are the only schools that got 100% pass rate
despite the many workshops conducted by Ministry officials on teacher development.

Besides the Ministry facilitated workshops carried out, school heads also carried out supervision of teachers in schools and the Civil Service Commission personnel also carried out frequent supervision and audits in schools. Still pass rates were low. The researchers therefore sought to find out whether teachers were involved in decision making at their schools and whether this had an effect on teacher performance. The researchers believed that teachers were not being involved in making decisions that affected them. Schools may have magnificent buildings, the most ambitious curriculum and sophisticated material equipment but these will remain meaningless without the human touch of an able administrator and subordinate staff (Bhatia, 2002). The services of both competent heads and teachers are needed if schools are to function properly. This is essential if schools are to improve. Decisions made closer to the client who is the student, would in most cases be better and effective. The resultant effect would be greater satisfaction and commitment on the part of the teacher.

The expansion of the education system resulted in many schools being built, and in turn the number of students and teachers increased. This has also meant an increase in the responsibilities of heads particularly in decision making. Alam and Ahmad (2017) advocate that the achievement of pupils in school is a result of the indirect influence by heads through the support given to teachers. As the head’s responsibilities has increased the education level of teachers today has also increased. The level of qualifications teachers now has range from certificates, diplomas to degrees in different specialty areas. Some might even hold qualifications above those of heads. The voices of such teachers cannot be ignored. Such teachers have subject area knowledge, intellectual expertise, experience from classroom practice and as such have powerful elements to share (Eakle, 2012). As decision making is ever present, no function is possible without giving a thought to what is to be done. All functions in an organisation undertake decision making at one moment or the other during the process of operation. Organisational activities centre on decisions made. In a school setup, decisions are made at different levels depending on type of school and decisions to be made. Decisional areas include administrative issues, curriculum and instructional practice, student welfare, teacher development and the allocation of resources. Depending on the school head, teachers may be involved in making decisions on instructional issues. With the changing world of today teachers now seek for greater professional autonomy and authority in making decisions regarding their work and their welfare. The traditional role of autocracy is slowly fading in organisations. Griffin (2011) talks of giving employees a voice when it comes to deciding their own work. Simply involving employees in organisational decision making enhances employee’s self-esteem and commitment to executing decisions properly. Worker involvement could be formal or informal and in most cases the degree of involvement depends with the management in place. Involving workers in decision making enables them to have a sense of belonging to the organization. Maslow talks of belonging in his hierarchy of needs (Chapman, 2001). This is an important need which leaders should take note of. Workers who feel that they are important to their organizations are more likely to put their highest effort towards achieving organisational goals.

When teachers are involved in making decisions at school it shows that school heads value ideas from others. This can lead to teachers choosing the best instructional practices that are effective in classrooms as they see themselves as valuable assets at their schools. Such opportunities to make decisions at school empowers teachers and enhances
their morale. Through shared decisions, teachers make use of their expertise to promote student learning thereby making implementation of decisions successful (Sarafidon and Chatziioannidis, 2012).

In view of the above positions, it is crucial for workers and managers to have mutual trust. When employees believe and trust their managers there will be increased cooperation on the part of the workers. Appelbaum et al. (2013) contends that once employees trust their management they will most likely be willing to participate in decision making. School heads and teachers should have mutual trust so that teaching and learning processes are successfully achieved. Decision making as the core of planning requires the participation of other members especially when it is organisational planning. Both heads and teachers are concerned about the progress of the school therefore sharing ideas is crucial as it brings in varied thoughts which the head alone might fail to have. Teachers’ involvement in decision making is important when it comes to implementation especially when the implementation of the decisions require cooperate effort of subordinates. If subordinates understand the reasons for the decisions, they will be prepared to see them successfully implemented as the workers regard the decisions as ‘ours’ and not ‘theirs’ that is if they see themselves as part of the decisions made. This reduces the probability of resistance as members would have participated in the decision process. Introducing new programmes at school without the involvement of teachers might not be very effective as the programmes may not be handled with the enthusiasm they deserve. New programmes introduced in schools should have the input of teachers in the crafting stage so that the implementation would be effective.

It is no good making a decision without involving those who will be affected by the decision. Enabling workers to participate in work processes intrinsically motivates the workers and this makes their work interesting and meaningful. Cole (2004) advocates that complex decisions are better made by two or individuals. Ghillyer (2009) also says decisions made collectively are superior because group’s knowledge is greater than that of an individual and that a group has a wider range of alternatives in the decision purpose.

As much as it might be important to involve teachers in decision making, some teachers might not be willing to partake in decision making in areas that are outside their expertise. Some might think that by being involved in decision making they will be overworked. Heads should understand the type of teachers they have. At times quick decisions have to be made, waiting for collective decision making might delay in getting to a final decision (Ghillyer, 2009). This might result in heads making sole decisions. When done, this has to be with clear understanding of the problem because selecting a wrong solution might have negative effects on work processes in the long run. A clear knowledge and understanding of teachers is a good basis on whether to involve them or not in decision making and to what degree.

It is also vital that for workers to make valid decisions they should have sufficient information to base their decisions on. Without full information it is difficult to make informed decisions (Muindi, 2011). Involving workers in decision making is important for the productivity of organisations. George and Jones (2005) contend that uncertainty in organizations is reduced by allowing employees to participate in making decisions that affect them and their jobs. This helps in planning purposes as teachers know that there won’t be any change of plans in the implementation process because of external influences.

The subject of decision making is vital in schools and is required in the day to day running of schools. Since no one can do without them should teachers be involved in
decision making at school and does involving teachers have any effect on their performance. School heads sometimes hold staff meetings with teachers and decisions are sometimes made, at times it’s the Head, Deputy Head, Senior teacher and the teacher in charge who hold meetings and make decisions which will be sent down to teachers for implementation. Though teachers participate in some of the staff meetings where decisions might be made, how this involvement affected teacher performance in their jobs was the subject of this research.

The teachers of today are well educated with first and second degrees, now if these are not appreciated and treated fairly the anticipated results will not be produced. It is often seen that organisations fail to improve or accept change because those in authority would be unaware of the problems being faced while teachers might know the problems but would have little or no authority to make decisions. On the basis of the preceding arguments, the researchers sought to examine the effect of teacher participation in decision making on their performance with particular reference Mbare/Hatfield District in Harare Metropolitan Province of Zimbabwe.

Methods and materials

Research design

The descriptive survey method was used to collect data to answer the research question. This approach is a one-shot survey used to describe the characteristics of a sample population at a particular point in time, (Mertens, 2005). This approach enabled the researchers to collect in-depth information from a sample on the effects of teacher involvement in decision making on their performance at school. The information from these samples could be used to infer the characteristics of a larger population, (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Using a sample of 10 schools comprising 10 school heads and 50 teachers lessen the time and costs involved in studying the whole population consisting of 31 primary schools in Mbare/Hatfield District of Harare Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe. It is cumbersome and inefficient to study the whole population. Survey research had an advantage that a great deal of information can be obtained from the population through a sample. Mostly the information is accurate. The disadvantage of survey research is that it does not go very deep below the surface.

Research instruments

Gall, Borg and Gall (2003) posits that the descriptive survey method depends heavily on instruments for measurement and observation. In this research study two instruments were used to gather data, these were questionnaires for teachers and interviews for heads. Through the use of this method people’s knowledge of what happens in schools has been increased (Gall, Borg and Gall, 2003). The use of more than one instrument to collect data was to increase credibility of results on the effect of teachers’ involvement in decision making on their performance. The researchers made use of structured questionnaires, and interviews, document observation to gather data. The advantage of using different methods was that it added insight and deep understanding that might be missed when one method is used. It also increases generalisability of results. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research was to produce more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice. A disadvantage in using different methods was that it was time consuming and expensive. To offset this, the researchers interviewed school heads on the very day the researcher delivered questionnaires to teachers. This reduced the amount of travelling expenses.
Questionnaires are operational instruments used to measure a number of variables in a sample, (Hart, 2011). They were seen as an objective and cost effective way to gather information from the sampled teachers. When crafted well questionnaires seek factual information which include background and biographical information, knowledge and behavioural information, measures of attitudes, values, opinions and beliefs, (Punch, 2009). The researchers personally hand delivered the questionnaires and collected them. This was in an effort to get the cooperation of teachers and improved quality of the data collected.

Interviews

Interviews can be used to assess people’s constructions of reality, perceptions and definitions of situations, (Punch, 2009). Structured interviews were used in this research. This method enabled the researchers to collect data through a one to one talk between the researchers and respondents. Creswell (2003) says structured interviews are quantitative research methods commonly employed in survey research. The researchers were objective and avoided influencing the interviewee’s statements. Ten school heads were interviewed using a face-to-face structured interview.

Sampling procedures

The target population of the study was 31 primary schools in Mbare Hatfield district in Harare. From these a sample of ten primary schools was randomly selected. From each of the schools five teachers were randomly selected using the random sampling method. The heads of the sampled schools were the respondents for the head’s interviews. The simple random sampling method was used in this study to determine the five schools, 10 school heads and 50 teachers to be respondents. The method gave each unit the same chance of independent selection, (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). Equal chances of selection to all schools and teachers was given.

Data analysis and presentation

The data collected were presented in forms of tables, pie charts and graphs. Analysis was done question by question from all instruments to enable the researcher to make valid conclusions. The data collected from structured interviews were presented in tables and pie charts to clearly show heads’ responses. The results from the instruments were used to answer the research problem.

Ethical considerations

When conducting research that involves people, researchers should be conscious of the ethical issues that arise from the interactions with the respondents. These are the moral principles which guide research, (Gray, 2009). In conducting this study, the researchers were granted permission to visit the research sites by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education on 8 February 2017 (See Appendix 1). At the research sites, the researchers informed respondents of the purpose of the research and that the information they gave would be treated as private and confidential and that it would be used for the study purpose only.

Results and discussion

The results of this study were two-fold, namely, demographic characteristics of researchers and the actual research results.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

The results from this study are presented and discussed from the two perspectives of teachers and school heads from Mbare - Hatfield District primary schools in Harare Metropolitan Province of Zimbabwe.
Teachers’ demographic data

Table 1: Teachers age groups (N=50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group in years</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 25</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 40</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 40</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the respondents (72%) were above 40 years of age with the least number 2% in the 26 to 30 years’ age group. This signified mature age of the majority. This also suggested that they were people who could make decisions about their work. The information pointed to the fact that given the opportunity, the teachers could take responsibilities, could contribute valid ideas to their organisations and could even apply for consideration for deputy headship when vacancies arose.

The information showed that there were more females 56% than males 44% among the respondents. This shows the proportions of males to females in urban areas, females are more than males, 13571 females and 3627 males in urban areas (2017 Annual Education Statistics Profile, p. 40).

Table 2: Teachers’ highest professional qualifications (N=50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Degree</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Degree</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of those holding degrees and diplomas was almost equal, 44% had diplomas as their highest professional qualifications while 42% had degrees. All the teachers were primary school trained with the requisite teaching qualifications needed for one to be a primary school teacher.
Ten heads were interviewed. Nine (90%) of the ten heads interviewed indicated that they were above 50 years old. This showed that all the heads were mature people who had been in the service for a long time.

Forty percent of the heads had been in the service for 36 to 40 years. The lowest had been in the service for 20 to 25 years. This showed that the heads were experienced people who had been in the service for many years.

The highest professional qualification of the heads was a Master’s degree. Seventy percent of the heads held Master Degrees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of heads</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-six percent (76%) of the teachers indicated that supervision timetables were a guarded secret of heads; they were not displayed. This had a negative impact on teacher performance as they regarded supervision visits by heads as ambushing other professionals. Making supervision visits unannounced was dissented by teachers who regarded it as lack of trust of teachers by heads. Teacher feelings of not being trusted by heads negatively impacted on work relationships.

Sixty-six (66%) percent of the respondents indicated that working environments had effects on teacher performance. Thirty percent strongly agreed that the type of working environment had effects on teacher performance. A sum total of ninety-six (96%) indicated that the type of working environment had effects on teacher performance, latter alone on pass rates. Environments where
teachers feel marginalised negatively affect their performance. Low pass rates in schools can signal the feelings of teachers towards heads’ leadership preferences. It is important for school heads to ensure that there are conducive working environments at their schools in order for workers to give their maximum performance. In line to this, Mullins (2002) says it is management’s responsibility to create conducive working environments which motivate people to work willingly and effectively. Head, as managers in schools should ensure conducive working environments prevail.

Table 5: Teacher involvement in decision making increases teacher performance (N=50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to whether involving teachers in decision making at school increased teacher performance, 74% of the respondents agreed that teacher involvement in school decision making increased teacher performance. Teachers viewed getting involved in decision making as a sign that heads had trust in them, valued their contributions and perceived teachers as professionals.

The majority of heads (80%) disagreed with the idea of displaying supervision timetables. Their argument was they wanted to see teachers’ every day performance and not superficial performance. The heads’ responses were in contrast to those of teachers’ responses who saw the display of supervision programmes as a democratic way of operating. With the level of education in teachers nowadays heads must take cognisance of such level of education and experience. Heads should also not kill teachers’ initiative to do their work.

When asked whether involving teachers in core decisional areas boosted teacher performance, 50% of the heads agreed and 50% disagreed. These responses could be a signal of when the heads were trained, how they handled teachers in the past and whether they saw changes in the level of education teachers now have. With the majority of the heads being over fifty years old, such heads could regard decision making in core areas as the prerogative of the head. Those who saw the importance of teacher involvement knew that a decision made by two or more
people is better and superior than one, (Cole, 2004; Ghillyer, 2009). Schools as systems are made up of different parts. Classroom practice does not stand alone. It comprises different aspects such as the teacher, teaching materials, learners and the environment. The malfunctioning of one of these aspects affects implementation in the whole system leading to low or mediocre performance. From the research study it was found out that teachers wanted to be involved in decision making in aspects that affected the school system as this had an impact on their performance.

Conclusion

The researchers drew five conclusions from the conduct of the present study. First, from the research it has been found out that teachers are part of a school system whose parts should all co-operatively work so that the systems attain its goals. For effective functioning of the system teachers need to be involved in decision making at their schools.

Second, involving teachers in decision making at school improves their classroom instructional practice. Commitment to work is enhanced as teachers identify with their schools. Once teachers increasingly feel that they are not marginalised they work hard towards the achievement of the school goals. Involving teachers in decision making is an empowerment drive on the part of teachers which in turn lessens the working load on heads. Once teachers are empowered there no need for heads to be found everywhere doing everything. Sharing activities brings together different ideas from different persons for the development of schools.

Third, school heads should develop the spirit of team work to make schools develop. Teachers as operatives on the ground could provide crucial information very close to the sources of problems which might be affecting the instructional classroom practice, staff, learners or the school as a whole.

Four, school policies need implementation. If ever they are to succeed with the implementation of school programmes they need teachers who have the zeal to achieve otherwise good programmes either fail to take off or die along the way. Teachers go an extra mile with their work without being forced if working environments are conducive and are recognised as professionals capable of making decisions on their work programmes. They become self-motivated and committed to the ideals of their work, thereby, optimising their performance levels.

Five, it is motivating for teachers to know that their heads value their contributions. Once teachers get such motivation they are bound to excel in their performance thereby meeting school goals. Such motivated teachers are positive minded and committed to the development of the school.

Recommendations

On the basis of the preceding findings and conclusions, the researchers made three recommendations. First, heads should know that small things matter. Getting teachers’ opinion in matters concerning the school goes a long way in improving teacher performance. Heads should understand the strengths of their teachers and make the best use of their skills in those areas. This motivates teachers and once motivated performance is likely to increase.

Second, teachers should be given the opportunity to chair meetings at school such as when staff development programmes are being conducted. This experience on its own motivates teachers.

Third, workshops must be held where information on recent research concerning the importance of teacher involvement in decision making processes in schools is given. These workshops must include heads, teachers, officials in the education ministry and other stakeholders. This will enable people
to understand the importance of involving teachers be it in policy making or in introducing new programmes.

Fourth, further research in the area of teacher-involvement in decision making to boost their classroom performance should be done nationally using methods research and qualitative research methodologies.

References


