

Human capital management in Zimbabwean rural schools: A socio-economic analysis

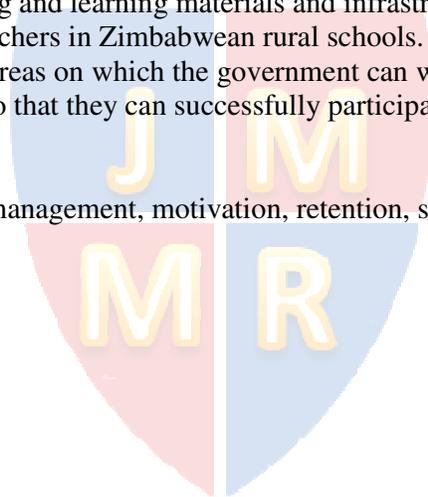
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the impact of socio-economic factors in the management of human capital in Zimbabwean rural schools. A case study approach was taken focusing on Mazowe District. The researcher used observations, questionnaires, telephone interviews and face to face interviews to obtain data from teachers and administrative staff in Mazowe District who were randomly selected. The study found that teachers were disgruntled with their current salaries, poor working and living conditions thereby leading to poor educational results at both Primary and Secondary school levels. Accommodation for teachers and other infrastructure in most schools under the study were found to be inadequate and inhabitable. The study recommended that good compensation, good working conditions, adequate accommodation and teaching and learning materials and infrastructure are critical in motivating and retaining teachers in Zimbabwean rural schools. The study is significant in that it identifies promising areas on which the government can work on to provide quality education to the rural folk so that they can successfully participate in the national and global economy.

Keywords: human capital, management, motivation, retention, socio-economic factors



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INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic status of employees has great influence on the performance of employees. Organisations should regard their employees as the greatest assets who make organisations function (Cole, 2004). If employees are not happy they can move from one organisation to another looking for better salaries and good working conditions. When working conditions are not favourable, employees lose enthusiasm to work for the organisation. Since employees are failing to have time for everything in their lives outside their ever demanding careers and this has the potential of reducing the quality of work. The physical and mental health of employees is also affected and this normally leads to stress thereby affecting productivity. Organisations should strive to motivate their employees through various means. Paramount to the survival of institutions or organisations is the motivation and job satisfaction of its workforce (Baron and Greenberg, 2003).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human capital is defined as people who work in organisations to achieve set goals and objectives (United States General Accounting Office Report, 2000). Employees are keen to work hard in conducive environments, get good pay, fair treatment, security and power to control their work. To this end, organisations are then made to understand that motivation and retaining staff is critical and needs a holistic approach. It can also be concluded that employees are the most important and complex resource, who determine whether organisations will fail or survive. Organisations must make sure that their reward systems are well designed to meet the expectations of their employees (Okojie, 2009).

Retention and motivation are becoming a challenge since employees and labour laws are increasingly becoming demanding and more complex on a daily basis (Lumley, Coetzee, Tladinyane, and N. Ferreira, 2011). Job satisfaction is influenced by working conditions. Motivation can be defined as the force that prompts action in a positive direction (Maicibi, 2004). Motivation refers to all forms of forces that are positive and are shown in employees through the achievement of organisational and individual goals. Research has shown that there are many variables at play that motivate employees. Taylor (1917) had an assumption that employees are motivated by high salaries and this notion was however, refuted by Herzberg (1959) in his "Two Factor Motivation Theory". Management should be concerned with the creation, development and maintenance of an environment to which individuals work together in groups towards the accomplishment of common organisational objectives and goals (Maicibi, 2004). An organisation cannot effectively and efficiently achieve its mission without motivating and retaining its personnel to work together towards the achievement of set goals and objectives.

Most rural schools lag behind in terms of infrastructure, learning and teaching materials and basic services (Peresuh and Nhundu, 1999). It is difficult for rural schools to recruit and retain qualified and experienced teachers for various reasons, which include poor accommodation, limited availability of clean water supplies, unavailability of electricity, unreliable transportation, lack of social services and other facilities as well as poor remuneration. Studies from various countries indicate that most teachers prefer to work in urban areas due to the disadvantages inherent in rural areas. Studies carried out in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda and Tanzania, identified the above as problems being faced by rural school teachers (Mulkeen, 2005).

Poor working conditions and poor infrastructure are some of the reasons why teachers were not happy to work in rural schools (Akyeampong, and Lewin, 2002).

Researchers have further expressed that rural teachers are mostly subjected to social and professional isolation, risks to personal safety and challenging conditions (Akyeampong, and Stephens, 2000). It is believed that teachers are staying in their current jobs because there are no better opportunities elsewhere. In some cases teachers bribe senior education officials to get better placements (Hedges, 2000). Lack of proper balance between the demands in a person's personal life can be detrimental to the mental and physical health and job performance. Family problems such as death and illnesses can affect the performance of employees (Bloom, 2007). Social support in the forms of provision of housing, transport and counselling can keep employees going in difficulty times. Teachers want support in the form of cooperation between students, parents and communities in improving the standards of schools.

Reward systems also need to be well communicated to the employees, otherwise the reward systems will face resistance. Organisational and individual goals need to be in tandem in order for an organisation to achieve excellence. Teaching as profession is undervalued in Africa because it is poorly remunerated (Adedeji, and Olaniyan, 2011). It is felt that poor salaries given to teachers compared with others who are engaged in other professions with comparable level of education are a major concern. It has been noted that salaries given to Nigerian teachers are not even adequate to cater for their basic needs. Schools can achieve quality education when:

- schools are staffed with motivated, committed qualified and experienced teachers,
- adequate infrastructure in terms of classrooms, teacher accommodation, libraries, social amenities, electricity and internet connectivity are in place,
- provision of basic facilities such as clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, and
- adequate free textbooks and other learning materials are available (Mitra, 2008). It has been reported that Zimbabwean teachers were the lowest paid in the region (News Day, 2012).

Pass rates for Grade Seven and O'Level have been going down as show in the Table 1 below. The low pass rates have been attributed to demotivated staff. It is therefore, believed that these low salaries, coupled with poor working and living conditions are leading to high staff turnover. On the other hand, results for Advanced Level are good and this has been attributed to good working and living conditions and monetary incentives available in boarding schools.

Table 1: Pass rates for Mazowe District for the period 2007-2010

| Level | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| O' Level | 23% | 20.6% | 27.2% | 25.8% |
| A 'Level | 91% | 87.4% | 89% | 80% |
| Grade Seven | 85% | 75% | 18% | 26% |

Source: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to evaluate the socio-economic factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning in Zimbabwean rural schools.

METHODOLOGY

A case study approach was used targeting schools in Mazowe District which is in Mashonaland Central Province of Zimbabwe. The methodology included observations, questionnaires, telephone interviews and face to face interviews. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gather data.

Population and sample

Mazowe District had 96 schools with an establishment of 2090 teachers at the time of the study. Simple random sampling was applied to come up with 10 schools and 170 respondents. The 170 respondents were selected from the 10 schools. The District Education Officer, one Education Officer and the Human Resources Specialist became key informants since they deal directly with teachers. The sample for this study was therefore, 173.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Teacher accommodation

The researcher observed that facilities in most schools in the District were inadequate, non-existent or dilapidated. These included classrooms and houses for teachers. At satellite schools, tobacco barns and farm sheds were used as classrooms and in some cases, as accommodation for teachers. Most of the teachers had on average, a family of five yet they were allocated at most two rooms only. All teachers had shared accommodation and in some schools only Heads of schools were not sharing. Eighty one percent (81%) of the respondents had shared accommodation, and nine percent (9%) lived in barns. Ten percent (10%) who happened to be heads of schools were not sharing.

Classrooms and other buildings

The situation regarding classrooms and other buildings was worrisome. The buildings were very old and were in need of major repairs and refurbishments. Some of them warranted demolition as they posed danger to teachers and students. Most classrooms had leaking roofs, cracked floors and walls. Some classrooms did not even have doors or proper security forcing teachers to carry books and other teaching materials to their homes on a daily basis. The four satellite schools visited were using barns as classrooms. Out of the secondary schools only one had a laboratory and in satellite schools, only the teachers had the resource book.

There were also critical shortages of essential structures and facilities. These buildings included halls, clinics, ablution facilities, staff rooms, laboratories, libraries as well as sporting and recreational facilities. It was found that most schools were not offering science subjects which required the use of the laboratories since these were non-existent. A rough estimate showed that 90% of the buildings needed repairs and that most schools were in dire need of extra buildings. However, it was difficult for the researcher to provide an accurate assessment of the state of infrastructural needs of these schools. There is therefore, a need for other future studies to focus on defining standards for these buildings and then assessing the current infrastructure against these standards and criteria.

Water, electricity and other basic services

Most schools faced the challenges of inadequate basic services. Water supply was erratic and also available at distances that were unfavourable. In some schools, teachers and pupils got water from unprotected sources. Sanitation was a problem where water was in short supply, thus posing health risks to students and staff. It was noted that malaria, cholera and typhoid were a major concern at the time of the study.

Although electricity was available in all the schools under study, mobile network was also not available in some of the most remote schools. It was discovered that conventional telephones provided by Tel One were no longer working. The landline telephone system was vandalized and there was nothing in sight to suggest that this problem was being solved. The challenges made communication between the District Offices and schools very difficult. Most roads were found to be in a poor state and some of them were impassable during the time of the study due to heavy rains. Indications were that these gravel roads were last serviced some years back. Some bridges were destroyed and parents had to construct temporary bridges so that their children could safely go to school. The respondents indicated that they had to walk for ten kilometres to get transport to the nearest town or to the District Office. They indicated that public transporters had withdrawn their services due to the poor state of the roads in most parts of Chiweshe area.

Economic factors

The respondents indicated that their salaries were not adequate and were well below the poverty datum line which currently stands at USD550.00. It was found that the low salaries and poor working conditions led teachers to develop a negative attitude towards their work leading to poor educational results. The majority of the respondents (109) indicated that their salaries were not adequate and 61 of them indicated that there was another earning hand in their families and these happened to be their spouses or their children working elsewhere. Some respondents indicated that they were not even getting incentives from the parents and those who were getting them, received as little as USD20.00 per month. Circular No. 12 of 2008 on Fees and Levies, stipulates that schools should pay 10% incentive to their teachers. This circular was not being adhered to since most schools were paying according to their ability. One teacher said "I have been in this profession for over thirty years now, and I do not even have a car or a house, let alone being able to send my children to good schools". Another teacher said "How can I put more effort when conditions of service and salaries are so bad, this is just an allowance". "Boarding fees for my two children are USD1500.00 per term yet I only get USD900.00 for the four months". An irate teacher had this to say, "What we are doing is community service and as such, how do you expect us to work hard and produce good results when the employer is not committed to our welfare. What we are getting is peanuts and this is unbelievable. We are still in this profession because there are no other opportunities available to us". Clear indications are that they will continue with extra lessons as long as their salaries and working conditions are not improved. Extra lessons are normally done outside normal working hours to get extra money from parents. It was found that teachers would work extra hard during extra lessons. All respondents stated that they would be very happy if their economic status was improved. Some teachers also indicated that they were involved in farming and cross-border trading to augment their paltry salaries.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Teacher accommodation

Infrastructure and supporting services are critical for creating a favourable work environment for employees. Human Resources aim to achieve both efficiency and justice at the workplaces. Organisations should seek to bring together a committed workforce for the best contribution to the success of the organisations. The organisation should in turn offer a conducive working environment and good salary. All rural schools in Zimbabwe need to have decent accommodation for teachers. The reason being that teachers come from different parts of the country and there is no rented accommodation in rural areas. The working conditions of teachers in rural schools tended to make teachers deployed to such schools feel demotivated and ultimately affecting the quality of delivery. In some schools, accommodation for teachers was found to be dilapidated and inadequate. The houses were on the verge of collapse. Some teachers had large families and it was very difficult for them to live under such conditions. The sharing of houses compromised privacy. If the poor accommodation problem is not attended to, qualified and experienced teachers will continue to shun rural schools, thereby compromising on the quality of education delivery. The poor physical work environment directly affects motivation and performance of teachers. Improvement of accommodation will go a long way in motivating teachers to teach and stay in rural schools.

Basic services

Zimbabwe was facing challenges of controlling typhoid, malaria, cholera and other diseases when this study was carried out. The most hard-hit areas were those that practised poor hygiene due to unavailability of clean water and inadequate sanitation facilities. Some schools were found to be getting their water from unprotected sources, thereby exposing both teachers and students to diseases. The dusty conditions were not good for teachers and students who had allergies. It was observed that there were no emergency health services in the District. Consequently, that was one of the reasons why teachers sought transfers to urban schools where they would get medical attention on time. Teachers were not comfortable to work in such an environment.

Electricity is critical for promoting learning in rural schools through the use of computers and internet facilities. The availability of electricity also allows teachers to conduct evening classes. The internet enables teachers to communicate, research and socialise. The use of the internet can also open new opportunities for teachers such as e-learning which also allows prompt communication between students and teachers. Computers can also be used as reservoirs of information. Teachers can also advance themselves professionally by enrolling with online institutions and this mode of learning is affordable and does not affect their work. The use of computers can also ease the work of teachers since everything will be done electronically. Communication is made easy, fast and affordable. This bridges the gap between urban and rural schools. The use of information technology allows communication with anyone around the globe. Like in developed countries, business is done online and this can also become a reality for rural teachers. If such facilities are availed, rural-to-urban migration could be minimised. The issue of transport problems and long walking distances to get transport to the nearest town was a cause of major concern. Teachers spend the whole day to travel to town and coming back. Whilst this is an impediment to teachers, students would also lose the whole learning day.

It is therefore, critical for local authorities and government representatives to make sure those roads are well serviced and that basic services are available within reasonable distances. The poor state of the roads led to the withdrawal of services by public transporters.

Classrooms and other buildings

In most instances, classrooms and other buildings were found to be either inadequate or dilapidated. The situation was particularly bad in satellite schools which were established following the land reform in the year 2000. Schools used make shift classrooms which were not safe for both students and teachers. In most cases, there was non-existence of proper structures to function as classrooms and teachers' accommodation. The structures on the farms where people were resettled were used as classrooms and teachers' accommodation. However, these did not have proper ventilation and lighting. In some cases, classrooms were inadequate and sub-standard, resulting in some lessons being conducted in open spaces. One cannot imagine what the situation would be in winter and during the rainy seasons. This meant that learning time was lost and students could not make up for the lost time.

The findings of this study concur with (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002; Towse et al, 2002 and McEwen, 2009) who submitted that most rural schools lacked basic facilities such as toilets, clean water, electricity and classrooms as well as accommodation for teachers. The same sentiments were also echoed by teachers in Mazowe District. In Zimbabwe, Peresuh and Nhundu (1999) averred that the government invested more in urban than rural education, instead of redirecting more funds towards rural schools. These findings were also supported by Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011) who indicated that most African governments were not doing enough to uplift rural schools.

Motivation and organisational commitment are affected by the physical working environment. Teachers in Mazowe District were not happy with the working conditions and could not produce good results because of the poor working environment which lacked basic resources and facilities to function as schools. It was also interesting to note that most schools in Mazowe District were under Mazowe Rural District Council, yet most schools in towns were government schools getting some funding from the Government.

Even though Rural District Councils were the responsible authorities of these schools, they lacked resources to uplift them to the same levels of urban schools. Schools Development Committees (SDCs) were put in place to oversee the running of these schools with no resources at all. Parents were requested to pay development levies which in most cases were difficult to come by due to the poor economic status of the rural communities. Most parents in Mazowe District were subsistence farmers, and they did not have constant income. On the other hand, development grants from the Government were not forthcoming thereby compounding the problem. The schools' and classrooms' characteristics affected the quality of the teachers' work environment leading to poor results. The inadequate government support for rural schools was evident through shortage of textbooks, furniture, equipment, inadequate classrooms and teachers' accommodation.

It was established that some teachers taught multiple grades due to shortage of teachers, infrastructure and other facilities. The lack of basic and special facilities such as libraries and laboratories were detrimental to the quality of teaching and learning. Students needed to use the libraries for reading and research. The non-existence of libraries meant that students did not have adequate reading and reference materials when doing assignments and reading for examinations.

Most schools in Mazowe District were not offering science subjects which required the use of the laboratory.

That meant that students ended up doing combinations which they were not comfortable with. It was not only difficult for those who required the laboratory to carry out experiments, but also for those who were doing practical subjects such as woodwork, brick-laying and technical drawing. Infrastructure and resources for practical subjects in most schools were inadequate or non-existent. The schools also lacked a variety of sporting facilities and resources thereby depriving students from playing some games such as rugby, cricket and tennis. The facilities for some of these games were only available in the three boarding schools. Rural students were disadvantaged in all spheres of learning and recreation. Given all these challenges faced by teachers and students, it was very difficult to produce quality results.

The proper management of human capital in rural schools is therefore critical since it determines the quality of results. This study found out that the Government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, was failing to motivate and retain rural teachers. As long as these challenges are not addressed, rural-to-urban migration would continue and results would remain poor. The government should come up with strategies to improve the socio-economic status of rural teachers. The study found that teachers in rural schools were neglected in as far as developmental issues were concerned. As long as the work environment remains in its current state, service delivery would remain compromised. The study found that teaching as a profession was undervalued, due to its lack of support from most of the stakeholders.

Even communities no longer had the respect for teachers as the drivers of socio-economic development for the country due to their poor socio-economic status. It is wrong for teachers to beg from parents in the name of being paid for extra lessons and incentives. The employer was not concerned with the welfare of teaching staff in Zimbabwean rural areas. Incentives which were paid to teachers by parents pointed to the fact that all was not well in the Zimbabwean education sector. This was found to be true owing to the poor conditions of service and poor salaries. This poor status made teachers lose enthusiasm and the will-power to work hard and produce good results.

Teachers in Mazowe District indicated that they were staying in their current jobs because there were no other opportunities available elsewhere. The poor performance of the economy was also one of the reasons why teachers were involved in other income generating activities so as to augment their low salaries. A large number of teachers left their employment in 2008, and this was at the height of the economic crisis in the country. Their salaries could not sustain them. It would appear that most teachers left because of poor salaries and poor working conditions. Some resigned or absconded, while others were discharged for being away without official leave.

It is important for spouses to be together as this could reduce cases of misconduct due to absenteeism. The deployment of spouses at the same school could also reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and stress among teachers. Most teachers complained that their meagre salaries were being wiped out whenever they travelled to see their spouses who worked in towns. Due to these cited challenges, some teachers could extend their weekends into Monday or Tuesday.

The behaviour of teachers coming to work late could have been caused by poor salaries and poor conditions of work. This led to lack of commitment by teachers as they struggled to find other means to supplement their meagre salaries. This was evidenced by the respondents who submitted that the employer had failed to fulfil their contractual obligations to the extent that teachers vowed to continue conducting extra lessons until their remuneration packages were improved.

The negative attitudes of teaching staff towards work led to poor results as evidenced by the poor pass rates for Mazowe District. The pass rates for grade seven and form four remained below 30 percent. Qualified and experienced teachers shunned rural schools.

Economic factors

Teachers indicated that their salaries were low. This assertion was buttressed by a local newspaper, "News Day" of 21 May 2012, which claimed that Zimbabwean teachers were the lowest paid in the region. However, it was beyond the scope of this study to confirm the position. What came out of the interviewees was that their salaries were below the poverty datum line, and thus were inadequate to cater for their basic financial needs. The finding was in agreement with Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011) who found that salaries for teachers in Nigeria could not meet their basic needs.

Mulkeen (2005) stated that a number of countries around the world had tried the strategy of paying various forms of incentives to rural teachers and these had not succeeded in motivating teachers to take up rural postings and improve on results. The primary focus of reward systems in organisations is to motivate and retain staff. In the Zimbabwean context, salaries for all government employees are the same regardless of the different environments they operate in. Zimbabwe tried a similar rural reward system in the early 1990s but this was discontinued for reasons not documented. This strengthens the notion that money is not the only motivator.

Even though all teachers were supposed to be paid incentives by schools through the Schools Development Committees (SDCs), these were creating gaps and disgruntlement among teachers. Teachers in boarding and urban schools were getting more in terms of the value of incentives than their rural counterparts. The circular on incentives was not being adhered to as schools were paying according to ability. It was disheartening to note that some schools paid as little as USD 20.00 per month yet boarding schools in Mazowe District were paying as much as USD500.00 per month. The motivation of employees is critical.

The limited attention given to teachers' welfare is contributing to poor results in most rural schools. Teachers were engaged in other fund raising activities such as farming and cross border trading so as to augment their meagre salaries. This was evidenced by respondents who indicated that they would continue with extra lessons as long as their salaries and working conditions were not improved. Even though salaries alone do not result in a well-motivated workforce, adequate salaries could go a long way in addressing some of the concerns raised by teachers. A pat on the back could go a long way in improving motivation and retention of employees. Recognition and special awards are also critical in keeping employees happy and committed. All teachers in Zimbabwe were getting same amounts of housing and transport allowances yet they operated from different environments. These amounts were not even enough to pay rent for a single room or pay for transport to work for the whole month.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Even though the researcher found out that infrastructure in Mazowe District was dilapidated, it was difficult for the researcher to provide an accurate assessment of the state of infrastructural needs of these schools. There is therefore, a need for other future studies to focus on defining standards for these buildings and then assessing the current infrastructure against these standards and criteria.

Research can also be done on salaries and other benefits to determine whether Zimbabwean teachers are the lowest paid in the region.

CONCLUSION

The study established that teachers working in Zimbabwean rural schools are plagued with various challenges that demoralise them and force them to seek transfers and resignations. The major challenges cited were the poor state of infrastructure and health facilities, inadequate teaching and learning resources, low remuneration, and generally poor conditions of service for teachers. It can therefore be recommended that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education improve the conditions of service and salaries so that the quality of education can be improved.

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