

Human capital problems in Zimbabwean rural schools: a case study of Mazowe District

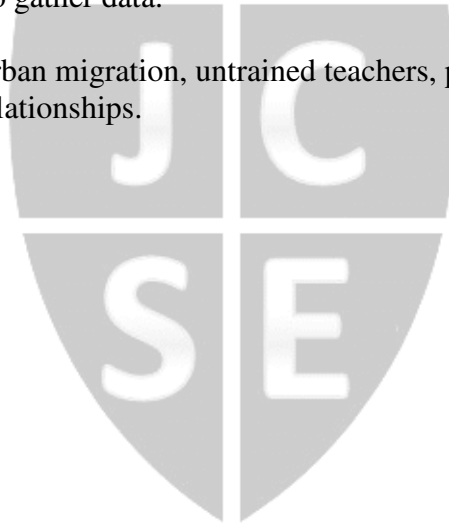
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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the management of human capital in Zimbabwean rural schools. It was observed that teachers in rural schools preferred urban postings which turned out to have better facilities and incentives. Rural to urban migration of teachers is a cause for concern in Mazowe District. This study was motivated by the high teacher-turnover in Mazowe District. The District still has a high number of untrained teachers resulting in the low pass rates. There is a decline in educational standards due to poor remuneration and poor working conditions. The district has poor infrastructure, poor road networks and is faced by challenges in trying to motivate and retain qualified teachers. Questionnaires, documentary analysis, telephone and face to face interviews were used to gather data.

Key Words: establishment, urban migration, untrained teachers, poor remuneration, dilapidated accommodation, unfriendly relationships.



BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Rural to urban migration of teachers is a cause for concern in Mazowe District. This study was motivated by the high teacher- turnover in Mazowe District. Many teachers are seeking transfers to urban schools. Mazowe District still has a high number of untrained teachers resulting in the low pass rates. There is a decline in educational standards due to poor remuneration and poor working conditions. The district has poor infrastructure, poor road networks and is faced by challenges in trying to motivate and retain qualified teachers. There is still a negative attitude towards education beyond primary level in the district.

Accommodation for teachers is in bad state. Teachers share dilapidated houses and in most cases, with no electricity and running water. The most remote schools get mobile clinics once in a while. Mobile phone network is not available in some of the schools, making communication very difficult.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Zimbabwe experienced an economic down turn from 1998 to date. Many professionals notably teachers, crossed the borders seeking green pastures as their salaries were no longer sustaining for their families. Many teachers resigned between 1998 and 2008. The current situation in the national education system is characterized by rural-to-urban migration of teachers. This phenomenon raises the issue of how best the Government, (through the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Culture) retains and motivates teachers to teach in rural schools. The above challenges might be attributable to the decline in educational standards in Mazowe District. Some major problems are low salaries, unfriendly relationships between teachers and parents and poor accommodation. Studies on the migration from rural to urban areas of teachers have been carried out in Zimbabwe without giving special emphasis to factors that relate to the motivation and retention of teachers in rural schools. Mazowe district has a total of 2090 teachers for both primary and secondary schools.

Fixed Establishment for Mazowe District

School Levels	Fixed Establishment	Teachers in Posts	Open Posts	Open posts as a percentage (%)
Primary	1210	1176	34	2.9
ECD	180	44	136	76
Secondary	700	682	18	2.6
Total	2090	1902	188	9

Source: Recruitment registers: (2011)

There are always vacant posts at any given time. Teachers are receiving extra cash from parents and this is called an incentive. The idea is to motivate and retain teachers to work hard and improve on the pass rate. The major setback is that most rural schools cannot afford this luxury. Urban schools and boarding schools are paying higher amounts. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that there is no clear policy on the governance of these incentives. There is no policy direction from the employer. The Ministry of Education,

Sport and Culture came up with this measure after government failed to motivate and retain teachers.

Chaneta (2005) explains that motivation helps people to understand why people behave in the way they do and what can be done about it. This brings us to the understanding that motivation is complex and has a lot of variables at play. It also brings us to the attention that dealing with workers at an individual level is complex.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- analyse and evaluate remuneration and the conditions of service of teachers;
- identify and evaluate social factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools;
- identify and evaluate economic factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools;
- identify and evaluate technological factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools; and
- identify and evaluate political factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- a) What are the social factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools?
- b) What are the economic factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools?
- c) What are the technological factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools?
- d) What are the political factors related to management of human capital to curb the flight of skills in Mazowe rural schools?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Education drives the economy. The study will bring in new insights and strategies to deal with human capital challenges in rural schools. The issue of human capital management in rural schools should be looked at holistically by taking note of social, political, economic, legal and technological factors. Policy makers need to come up with a total package when addressing human capital problems in rural schools. This can be an eye opener to all the employees in the civil service, since the same regulations and conditions of service that affect teachers also affect the rest of the civil service.

LIMITATIONS

Some respondents were not cooperative. The researcher did not have ease accessibility to some schools due to poor roads and unavailability of mobile network.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mc Milan and Schumacher (1993), related literature is that which is obviously relevant to the problem such as previous research to investigating the same variable or a similar question. This is also supported by Gay (1987), who views related literature as a systematic identification, location and analysis of documents. Literature review forms a central component of research reports and technical articles for an important reason that the research should fill (or help fill) a gap in what is known about a topic.

This study has its origin in the field of human resources which is concerned with people at work and their relationships within the organization. The issue of motivation and is also central to this study as this makes the employee go an extra mile, in achieving set goals and objectives of the organisation. Cole (2009) indicated that the functions of Human Resources aim to achieve both efficiency and justice. It further seeks to bring together and develop into an effective organization, the women and men who make up the enterprise, enabling each to make his/her own best contribution to its success. It seeks to provide fair terms and conditions of employment and satisfying work for the employed. The interests of management are directed primarily at matters which include reducing the worker absenteeism and turnover, improving productivity and job involvement, facilitating the introduction of change and so on. These interests have largely determined the activities of the majority of organisational researchers. This has brought in variables such as self actualization, organisational democracy, feelings of self control and self-worth, equity and justice. Most often, increasing worker satisfaction has been seen as a means of improving productivity. This has meant that the idea of worker satisfaction, as a legitimate goal in its own right, has not been widely acknowledged (Blunt & Jones, 1992).

The 1986 Annual Report for the Secretary for Education pointed out that in the regions with large proportions of rural primary schools, 50% of the teachers are untrained. This is supported by Peresuh and Nhundu (1999), who say that the Government of Zimbabwe still invests more in urban than rural education, in spite of recent initiatives to redirect more funds towards rural schools. In rural areas, it is generally difficult for responsible authorities to recruit and retain qualified and experienced teachers for various reasons, including poor accommodation, water supplies, electricity, transportation and lack of social services and other facilities. The News Day of 21 May 2012 acknowledges that Zimbabwean teachers are the lowest paid in the region.

Teachers in rural schools have been affected by socio-economic and political factors differently from their urban counterparts. According to a research that was carried out in Rawalpindi City in 2004, in United States of America, with the intention of finding out factors that affect motivational level of teachers, it was found out that teachers play a very important role in the learning process of students who try to copy them. The motivation of teachers is therefore, very important as it directly affects their performance.

According to Cole (2004), goals sought by individuals can be relatively tangible, such as monetary reward or promotion and self-esteem or satisfaction. However individuals in organisations are motivated by various things. This alone brings us to a scenario whereby it is concluded that this subject is complex. Motivating teachers should be on an individual basis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sarantakos (1998) defines Research Methodology in two ways. He avers that methodology is identical to a research model employed by a researcher in a particular project including basic knowledge related to the subject and research method in question and the framework employed in a particular context. Methodology is not determined by the research model, but rather by principles of research entailed in a paradigm.

This study employed both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. This was done so as to draw up on strengths of both approaches. This helped to come up with a powerful study which focused on things in their natural settings, and also seeks to understand the phenomena in context specific settings, such as a real world setting. This means that the qualitative researchers, study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

In this study, multiple data gathering methods were applied. This approach strengthened the reliability and validity of data. Even though the qualitative approach has its own weaknesses, it still remained the most appropriate approach in this study. The approach allowed for building up of a complex and holistic approach in addressing real issues affecting the management of human capital in Mazowe District. However, the qualitative approach was preferred over others because the researcher gathered first hand information direct from the respondents who are the teaching staff in Mazowe District. One of the major strengths of qualitative approach is that it allowed the researcher to become the research instrument. On the other hand, the quantitative approach has its strength in reducing numbers to meaningful information. This approach allows vast amounts of information to be reduced to meaning through the use of tables, charts and graphs. In this study, the researcher used the quantitative approach to present and analyse primary data. These two approaches complemented each other.

Population

O' Leary (2010), defines population as the total membership of a defined class of people, objects or events. A population is the theoretically specified aggregation of study elements (Babbie, 1989). Mazowe District has an establishment of 2090 teachers for both primary and secondary schools. However, the current staff strength is 1902 and this formed the population of this study.

Sample

Sample is a subset of the population. Purposive and random techniques were applied in this study. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows for the extraction of rich information and experiences from the respondents. A sample captures all the various elements/characteristics of the population (O' Leary, 2010). The researcher used purposive sampling to come up with key informants/respondents from the District Offices. The District Education Officer (DEO), one Education Officer (EO) and the Human Resources Officer (HRO), were key informants since they deal directly with teachers. The Human Resources Officer interprets and advises the DEO on issues relating to employment regulations and conditions of service. Heads in all the selected schools were also purposively selected.

Mazowe District has 26 secondary schools and 72 primary schools with a total of 1902 teachers in posts. For secondary schools, all the three boarding schools in the District were part of the study and random sampling for the other seven secondary schools was applied. Names of the remaining secondary schools were written on a slit of paper and then put in a hat. The papers were mixed and seven secondary schools were picked. From every selected secondary school, fourteen teachers were randomly selected to participate in the study. The District has one boarding primary school and it became part of the sample. Nine primary schools were selected randomly using the same method as for secondary schools. Ten teachers from every selected primary school were selected randomly. The above numbers for both primary and secondary schools included Heads of all the selected schools. Out of the one thousand nine hundred and two (1902) teachers, three hundred and forty three (343) was the sample of the study representing, eighteen percent (18%) of the population.

Data Collection Instruments/Techniques

Data collection offers the opportunity for assessing research design within each tradition of inquiry. The researcher needs to have a determinate type of purposeful sampling from the array of possibilities and presents a rationale for the selected data collection instruments. The following instruments were used to collect data.

- questionnaire
- structured and unstructured in reviews
- telephone interviews
- participant or non-participant observation; and
- document analysis

WHY TEACHERS SHUN RURAL AREAS

One of the concerns about working in rural areas is that the quality of life is not as good as in urban areas. Akyeamong and Stephens (2002) indicated that teachers have expressed concerns about the quality of accommodation. The classroom facilities, the school resources and the access to leisure activities are non-existent in some schools (Towse et al, 2002). McEwan (1999) acknowledges that rural areas present more onerous living conditions than urban areas. He further says that rural teachers are mostly subjected to social isolation, professional isolation, risks to personal safety and challenging conditions. It is also acknowledged that both monetary and non-monetary incentives can go a long way in addressing the plight of rural school teachers. Even though the issue of rural incentives has been raised several times, there is no empirical evidence to show that these make rural teachers stay in their schools. Teachers are rational individuals who make decisions about their work and residence so as to maximize their utilities. Work gives a person a chance to utilise and develop his faculties, to overcome his inborn egocentricity by joining with other people in a common task and to bring forth the goods and services needed by all of us for a decent existence (Schumacher, 1979). According to (Schumacher, 2001), there is the dehumanising potential of inhuman working conditions and methods. Shutte (2001) bemoans that workers find themselves in the environment of work with issues such as life-destroying poverty and violence that produces crime and war, uncontrollable diseases and the disintegration of the natural environment.

Some of the schools are remote to the extent that teachers go to town on pay days only. Health facilities are too far and those with chronic diseases are facing serious challenges as they require regular visits to health facilities. This is one of the major reasons cited by teachers as to why they prefer urban schools. Urban schools offer higher incentives compared to their rural counterparts. Government has unveiled a housing scheme for civil servants and it is only those in the urban who are benefitting. No single teacher has benefitted in Mazowe District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers need to be treated as individuals when it comes to motivation. Government, through the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture need to take a holistic approach in managing human capital in rural schools. A business and sincere approach in dealing with teachers is critical. Individual packages need to be developed. Responsible authorities should take an active approach to fully resource rural schools to the same level with their urban counterparts. Schools through their Development Committees need to introduce internet facilities. There is need for review of policy that governs the employment of teachers.

CONCLUSION

It is believed and argued that management of human capital is complex since it involves issues of employee motivation and retention. Issues which affect employees at the workplace are many and varied and employees need to be treated as individuals.

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