

Teachers' Assessment of the Work Environment

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Abstract: This study discusses teachers' assessment of their work environment in Primary Schools in Botswana. The study is based on the June, 2007 report on An Evaluation of the Sustenance of the Primary School Management Development Program (PSMDP). The research was sponsored by the Office of Research and Development, University of Botswana. The aim of the program was to improve the primary school management and instructional leadership skills of Senior Management Teams (SMTs) in order to make them more effective in their Research. The teachers' assessment of the work environment centered on the following indicators: In-service workshops, teacher management, work relations, leadership, motivation, communication and teacher welfare. The study adopted the survey research design with questionnaires for different categories of teachers being the main instrument used. The study targeted 3 out of the 6 primary education regions, namely Central North, Southern and South Central. The delimitation of the study comprised of 3 out of 6 primary education regions namely the Central North, Francistown Southern and South Central. A total of 24 Government primary schools were used with a total sample of 125 teachers in all there were a number of significant areas in which the majority of teachers expressed satisfaction with regard to their work environment. Teachers were generally satisfied on the way they are managed, their involvement in decision making process in schools and communication structures that have improved however, there is still room for improvement in areas such as technology, supervision, assessment and monitoring of school activities and team study. Some recommendations were made with regard to teachers' work environment.

Key words: Teacher's assessment, work environment, education, government primary schools, PSMDP

INTRODUCTION

Primary Education in Botswana has, before and immediately after independence, not been treated as an important a foundation as it deserves to be. This manifested itself in terms of the poor resourcing. For instance, at independence the country had many of its primary teaching staff offering their services without any training. For most of those who were qualified, entry into teacher training college was the primary school leaving certificate. The situation as reflected in the report of the National Commission of Education (1977) shows that even a decade subsequent to independence, as high as 81% of untrained teachers had only completed standard seven, while 56% of trained teachers had completed standard seven to qualify for training in colleges of education (Republic of Botswana, 1977).

The Government of Botswana has, however, since, the first commission on Education made some effort to improve the quality of primary education. For instance, during National Development 5, in line with the recommendations of the National Commission on Education (1975) Primary Education was given the highest

priority within the education sector (Republic of Botswana, 1985). National Development 6 also emphasised, inter-alia, to raising the quality of primary education through the training of education officers and head-teachers in professional supervision of teachers.

The government took an initiative to invest heavily in the training of teachers and ultimately the minimum entry qualification for training as a primary school teacher was raised initially to Junior Certificate (JC) and later to Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC). However, for over 30 years since independence not much relevant training was provided to prepare teachers for positions of leadership. Many of the school heads and other members of the School Management Teams (SMTs) were thrown into the deep end with minimal management skills and experience. There was not much in-service training to assist those who had been elevated to such critical positions of leadership.

The history of in-service education in Botswana dates as far back as 1968 when it was based at 1 of the teacher training colleges. It was mainly aimed at equipping teachers with specific pedagogic skills including child-centred approaches which encouraged learning through

activity or discovery or experimenting. It has to be noted however that, with the passage of time, in-service education became more diversified as was illustrated by the introduction of Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) and the establishment of Education Centres. The former facilitated in-service workshops, while the latter acted as venues for these workshops (Republic of Botswana, 1991).

It has to be noted that schools did not engage in any school-based staff development, but relied mostly on education centre based workshops conducted by officers based in these education centres, as well as resource persons from colleges of education and the University of Botswana. In-service training activities provided during this period were therefore held at residential facilities away from schools.

The turning point came in the early 1990s when there was a shift from the centralised model of training to a more school-based in-service training with accountability of programmes left in the hands of school staff. The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) of 1994, which was a review of the implementation of the recommendations of the 1977 Commission on Education point to a blend of a school-based in-service training for school managers and for teachers (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The RNPE saw this as having the potential to halt a decline in educational achievement in primary schools, hence it recommended that:

The head as an instructional leader, together with the deputy and senior teachers, should take major responsibility for in-service training for teachers within the schools, through regular observation of teachers and organisation of workshops, to foster communication between teachers on professional matters and to address weaknesses (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

This recommendation suggests that school managers should assume the role of curriculum leaders, whose primary purpose is to assist others to shape the purposes and meanings that they use to make sense of and to justify their contribution to educational development (Day *et al.*, 1993) citing Duigman and MacPherson (1992). Dunham (1995) suggests that the well-being of all the members of the school community and even the survival of the school itself are dependent on the decision-making skills of senior and middle managers. Teachers would perform best when there is a collegial and supportive environment (offered by a school manager) that respects their autonomy and builds upon their experience.

In 1999, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) launched the Primary School Management

Development Project (PSMDP). The Primary School Management Development Project (PSMDP) was a response to the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE, 1994) recommendation 1.5. The recommendation emphasized the need to focus on improving the quality of primary school management. The School Management Teams (SMTs), according to the policy, are viewed as critical forces that need professional skills to foster change and quality in schools. Further more, 1 of the main objectives of National Development Plan 8 (NDP 8) was to improve the quality and effectiveness of Primary Education.

The goal of the PSMDP was 'to improve the quality of primary education in Botswana by providing effective management training and support to school management teams' (Republic of Botswana, 2002). The overall aim of the project was therefore to establish a sustainable primary school management system, hence improve the quality of primary education in Botswana.

This partnership between DFID and the Government of Botswana was to develop management and instructional leadership skills in primary school heads so as to make them more effective in their job (MoE, 1999BS).

It is worth noting that the whole process during the life span of the project was by both MoE and DFID, including the impact evaluation survey at the end of the project (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Statement of the problem: The Impact Evaluation survey held in 2002 found that the project had a positive impact on school management and thereafter the project was handed over to the Ministry of Education, Department of Primary Education as 1 of its regular programs. The improvements were notable in areas such as in-service workshops; management; work relations; leadership, motivation and communication. The study therefore wanted to find out whether or not after the ending of the donor funding the Ministry of Education was able to sustain the positive impact. The major argument is that foreign donors contributed significantly to the supervision and monitoring of projects as well as in terms of provision of resources therefore, the sustenance of projects when handed over to government depend solely on public revenues and sometimes fail. It is against this background that the researcher re-assessed the work environment of teachers after the handover of PSMDP project to the Ministry of Education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a survey research design. As pointed out by Donald and McBurney (1990) the purpose of a survey is simply to determine how people feel about

a particular issue, a view also shared by Fink (1995) who believes that perceptions which influence how people ultimately feel about a particular issue and how they react towards it are also determined through a survey. Therefore, how the SMTs perceive the PSMD program would influence how they feel about and react towards it. These feelings and perceptions were established through a survey.

Delimitation and population of the study: The delimitation of the study comprised of 3 out of 6 primary education regions namely the Central North, Francistown Southern and South Central. Since, the study aimed at teacher's assessment of the work environment, it is assumed that it might also be different from 1 type of settlement to the other. One inspectorial area was selected from each of the 3 regions thus a total of 3 inspectorial areas for the study. The population of the study comprised school teachers from selected regions.

Sampling: Though, the research team had aimed at using 40 schools selected through systematic sampling, this was made difficult by limited funding to reach some schools. A total of 24 government primary schools which is a focus of the PSMDP program was therefore used in the study. An unsolicited list of schools supplied by the MoE was used. This list was already presented alphabetically and without changing the order in which the Ministry provided it. Every *n*th school was selected until the desired sample was reached. As Cresswell (2002) pointed out, a systematic random sample is where every *n*th subject in the population is chosen until a desired sample is reached. From the list chosen, convenience sampling was done because schools which were easily accessible were visited and respondents who were available at the time of visits were used to provide the information required. From each conveniently chosen school, a simple random sampling procedure was used to pick 2 teachers from each stream (Stds 1-7) who then responded to a questionnaire.

Data collection procedures: The focused group interaction was deliberately used to validate the questionnaire data, interview data and observational data because as pointed out by Miles and Huberman (1994) it is useful when 1 needs to explain, illuminate or interpret quantitative data. Qualitative interviews can also obtain in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about the topic. It also allows the researcher to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain an understanding of that person's perspective (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).

Data analysis

Questionnaire data: To a large extent the questionnaires were pre-coded. The remaining questionnaire questions were coded after data collection. All data from questionnaires was scored. Data inputting into the computer was done followed by analysis through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

Interview data: After conducting the interview, the researchers immediately developed a case record per interview. The themes emerging from the data were then identified and used as the major themes. Coding of the case records was then conducted. This involved identifying text segments, placing a bracket around them and assigning a code word or phrase that accurately describes the meaning of the text segment (Cresswell, 2005). Content analysis was then done with data from both questionnaires and interviews. As alluded to by some authors (Cresswell 2005; Baker 1999), content analysis is often used where studies seek to understand values and social perspectives on issues. Content analysis was therefore appropriate in analyzing data from interviews and questionnaires as the study sought to establish perspectives of various subjects on a social programme. This involved establishing the frequency with which the established programme's effectiveness indicators occur in various data codes from various sources (Bell, 2003) and establishing whether the content represents the concept of effectiveness of the programme as defined by the indicators of the PSMDP (Cresswell, 2005). All data from interviews and questionnaires was triangulated and interpreted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristic of teachers: The first section of the questionnaire looked at the characteristics of teachers and a total of 125 responded to the questionnaire. Of the 125 respondents 102 were female, 22 male and 1 unidentified. The majority of the teachers (65) have as their highest qualification Primary Teacher Certificate (PTC), with 44 Diploma holders. Those with Master of Education, Bachelor of Education, Post Graduate Certificate in Education and Primary Lower combined were less than ten. Three had Cambridge Overseas School Certificate and Botswana General Certificate Secondary Education (BGCSE) without any teaching qualification.

The second sections of the questionnaire intended to gather information from teacher concerning their work environment using the following indicators to which teachers were asked to comment.

In-service workshops: In-service training in schools is there to improve the breadth of knowledge and skills related to relevant approaches to teaching and learning as well as moulding attitudes of all personnel in the school. It is the major avenue for improving teacher's performance. Research on school-based workshops (Monyatsi, 2006a, 1997; Irvin and Tombale, 1997) has revealed that they offer several advantages such as being contextual as they are based on the needs from the schools identified by the teachers themselves; cost effective as there are no accommodation and travel expenses; and managed by teachers in the schools thus ownership and commitment enhancement.

It involves learning a technical skill such as new teaching methods hence eliminating personal and organisational problems (Horine, 1995). Of the 125 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 104 (83.2%) indicated that there were school based staff development programmes undertaken in their schools between January 2004 and 2005, while 21 (16.8%) either did not indicate or claimed that there were no school based training activities in their schools. Eleven of these are Diploma in Primary Education (DPE) certificate holders whose teaching experience ranges between 1 and 2 years. Out of 44 DPE holders, 29 of them are young teachers whose age ranges between 23 and 34 years. Six DPE holders whose teaching experience is between 2 and 7 did not indicate their age, but given their short experience in the teaching profession, 1 would conclude that they are young and inexperienced teachers. According to the Training Policy for Educational Professionals in Botswana (1995) for school based workshop to become a reality, school managers and teachers need to work together to identify ways of improving the learning environment in their school. Most of the teachers gave Performance Management Systems (PMS)/Performance Based Reward System (PBRs) as the most common area (s) of in-service need in their school-based training programmes. Almost equally important in school-based staff development programmes are such teaching and management methodologies as Breakthrough, Project Method, Botswana Teaching Competency Instruments (BTCI) and Criterion Referenced Testing (CRT). Subject workshops also emerged as significant areas in which teachers received training. Other areas of training mentioned include workshops on school intervention teams, interactive teaching, curriculum, remedial teaching, life skills teaching, HIV/AIDS and Environmental and Health awareness.

Only 39 (31.2%) respondents suggested that there were other in-service training activities undertaken besides school-based workshops. However, a significant

number of teachers 86 (68.8%) indicated that there were no other in-service activities undertaken besides school-based ones. Performance Management System (PMS) and other innovations like Breakthrough and interactive teaching emerged as significant areas in which training outside school was undertaken during the same period from January 2004-2005.

The overall impression is that most schools are actively involved in in-service training of their own staff. This trend seems to fulfil 1 of the intentions of the PSMDP which is development and sustenance of school based workshop interpreted as action research. It is through in-service workshops that teachers combine efforts to create an accommodating environment for their individual and team development (Blandford, 1998). The Revised National Policy on Education made a recommendation that school heads, deputies and senior teachers should take major responsibility for in-service training of teachers within their schools (Republic of Botswana, 1994). Virtually most of the teachers participated in in-service workshops and the activities focused mainly on areas that reformers emphasized such as Performance Management System.

Teacher work environment: Work environment consists of the employer's premises and other locations where employees are engaged in work-related activities or are present as a condition of their employment. The work environment includes not only physical locations, but also the equipment or materials used by the employee during the course of his or her work. Conducive teacher work environment contributes to teacher quality. Teachers do face numerous problems within their work environment including relationships with colleagues, administrators and student (Roehrig *et al.*, 2002).

There were quite a number of significant areas in which a high number of teachers (ranging between 60% and 78%) expressed a great deal of satisfaction with their work environment. For instance, as high as 78% of the respondents indicated that there was proper record-keeping of items issued such as exercise books and textbooks. A further 76% agreed that staff meetings were being held at least 3 times a year, while 74% were satisfied with their involvement in the selection of materials being ordered for the schools. The involvement of teachers in running the school through committees, as well as school-based workshops being perceived as addressing their needs were both rated at 72%. Other issues rated highly included among others, satisfaction with involvement in the development of school action plans, opportunities given to chair meetings and the fact that SMTs observe teachers' classes on regular basis. All these are indicators of positive perceptions of well managed schools.

There were several other indicators of good management which were rated at 50% or above which include among others, the extent to which teachers supported each other, cordial relationships between SMT and teachers, consultation in decision making, teachers' involvement in drawing up staff meeting agendas, as well as feedback SMT gave to teachers after assessment. Although these are in the majority, the greatest concern was the significant minority who were in most cases above 40% who expressed concern over these important indicators of management. For instance up to 46% felt that teachers did not support each other with their work, while 48% were of the view that SMT did not lead by example.

Teacher's management: The way teachers perceive how they are managed can be used as a reflection of the extent to which managers understand the best management practices as indicated by the PSMDP. Teachers made several observations concerning the way they are managed by SMTs in their respective schools. Day Harris and Hadfield believes that followers look and admire leaders who are honest, forward looking, inspiring and competent. There is a positive relationship between the teachers' assessment of their environment presented in the previous section and the general comments they made about the way they are being managed. Whilst they expressed a general satisfaction with the way they are managed, they make further observations about areas of concern that need to be addressed such as technology, induction, mentoring of new teachers.

Their observations are classified under the following sub-themes; working relations, leadership, motivation, communication, confidentiality and teacher welfare.

Working relations: Teachers' comments on working relationships differed with some expressing satisfaction to dissatisfaction with the way SMTs related with them. For those who experienced positive relationship with their SMT, they acknowledged that they were treated fairly and involved in decision-making processes. The SMT were commended for the promotion of team work amongst staff. On the other hand a minority expressed concern that in some cases SMTs imposed their decisions on staff and that SMT members themselves failed to work harmoniously as a team, thus retarding any meaningful process in the institution. Leaders must believe without question that people are the most important assets of the organization and that teachers prefer managers who are honest, communicative, participatory and supportive (Hargreaves, 2000). Blasé and Blasé (2002) believe that mistreatment of teachers could lead to adverse effects that include early and long term psychological and emotional problems, physical and physiological problems or ultimately resignation/desertion.

Leadership: While the majority (74%) of respondents expressed the existence of good leaderships in some schools, there was still perception of poor leadership skills (36%). Some school managers failed to be exemplary in their leadership some of the SMT members encourage staff division, there are instances of individualism amongst SMTs. Some SMTs do bring their personal problems to the school, a situation that adversely affect their leadership. We feel that our problems and concerns are not appreciated by some SMTs. SMTs are domineering and autocratic.

Motivation: Several comments were made about SMTs who made an effort to motivate their teachers. Some SMTs were commended by the majority (84%) of respondents for rewarding teachers for good performance. Such rewards were reflected in the manner in which SMTs recommended deserving teachers for promotion, or gave feedback on good performance.

There was however a minority (16%) who felt they never got any promotion or any form of recognition for jobs well done. Instead they felt de-motivated as they observed less deserving teachers being rewarded.

Communication: Communication is seen as the bedrock in any institution that purported to practice effective school management. A majority (93%) of teachers expressed satisfaction with effective communication in their schools.

However, there were 7% of those who experienced poor communication in matters relating to the general management of schools. In such schools teachers expressed their view such as: we are never consulted and there is lack of transparency in this school.

Teacher welfare: A desire for the improvement of teachers' welfare articulated by the majority (80%) of teachers emphasised an urgent need for all schools to put in place orientation programmes for new staff members. Formal induction programs, particularly for new teachers, are the first feature of teachers' work environment. They argued that while it is imperative that SMTs should be concerned about teaching and learning in the classroom, teachers' welfare should also be top on the priority list of any manager. Often, new teachers are hired at the last minute, isolated in their classrooms and provided with little assistance with their often overwhelming duties. Comprehensive induction programs emphasize instructional support in the form of skills, knowledge and strategies for effective classroom teaching and psychological support in the form of encouraging confidence building. These initial experiences exert a powerful influence in anchoring new teachers' feelings and perceptions about their capabilities and future careers.

The extent to which transfers were being carried out was found to be wanting.

Both teachers and SMTs overstay in 1 particular school. This was seen as counter productive as it denied schools the opportunity to benefit from new ideas and experiences of those coming from elsewhere

CONCLUSION

It is deduced from this study that a majority of teachers are satisfied with their work environment as reflected from the findings. They indicated that management of schools to a larger extent is democratic which had hitherto been authoritative. The teachers are involved in decision making processes and communication has improved greatly particularly through participation in planning, committees, staff meetings and other fora that have come into existence as a result of the Primary School Management Development Program PSMDP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers made a number of suggestions regarding the improvement of management of their schools.

- The intensification of workshops and seminars to train and equip SMTs with management skills, especially those who did not benefit directly from the PSMDP. These include skills in the effective use of technology, supervision, assessment and monitoring, as well as team building skills. These skills, according to teachers, would help SMTs deal effectively with issues relating to teachers' professional and social matters, consultation, communication and how to become transparent.
- Implementation of outcomes from workshops;
- The involvement of teachers in decision-making processes to be made part of the school culture.
- The need to mentor and induct inexperienced teachers.
- Nomination of teachers attending workshops based on merit and capability.
- Providing feedback from workshops be made mandatory.
- Implementation of the transfer policy to reduce overstay and redundancy of both teachers.

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