

## Perceptions of Secondary School Teachers towards School-based Promotion Procedures

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**ABSTRACT** The new dispensation in educational leadership calls for shared decision-making by all critical stakeholders. The study therefore investigated the perceptions of teachers towards school-based promotions in their respective schools. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative research methodology and a case study research design. A purposive convenient sample of 5 school heads and 20 secondary school teachers formed the study. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, documentary analysis and observation of two staff meetings per school. The study established that teachers had negative perceptions towards the school-based promotions. Heads made unilateral appointments without consulting teachers. It was brought to the fore that teachers experienced the manipulation of the process as it was tailor-made to favour certain individuals who are in good books with their administrators. The study therefore concludes that teachers were not promoted solely on the strength of their expertise but that those promoted succeed because of their inability to question the decisions taken by their heads.

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher participation calls for teachers to assume leadership roles in schools and it requires that principals encourage such leadership from teachers (Wagner 1999). Principals cannot manage schools alone nor take the burden of motivating others to achieve objectives and complete tasks without support from their colleagues, they must actively involve them (Bell 1999). Lewis et al. (2000:120) have pointed to a number of assumptions on which the notion of participation and devolution of powers to schools is based namely:

- ♦ Participation is divorced from politics. It is assumed that communities are united as well as are homogenous, and therefore participation is an all inclusive process and not any elicited one.
- ♦ Decision-making regarding school governance is conceptual and not contentious
- ♦ Participation is a positive intervention that will improve schools. Such an assumption that greater local participation will improve the relevance, quality and accountability of schools is held worldwide; schools, parents and other community members are receptive to taking on new responsibilities. Everyone is committed to the national modernisation project.
- ♦ Schools personnel will welcome greater autonomy and new decision-making roles

- ♦ Participation is a rationale and morally correct act.

This study concurs with the above assumptions on the strength that teachers who are encouraged to participate democratically in decision making process are reported to be more positive and committed to the school as an organisation (Manga 1996). All stakeholders should be given a chance to have a say in the running of the school. Zimbabwe, like other African and developing countries, implemented such changes in education when it gained independence in 1980. In order to redress past imbalances and inequities, the government declared education a basic human right and committed itself to universal and equal educational opportunity for all as proclaimed by UNESCO (2001). It was within this broad framework that the Government, buttressed by the progressive Bill of Rights in the Independence Constitution of Zimbabwe, reorganised, democratised and expanded its education system (UNESCO 2001).

These changes enhanced the amendment of the 1987 Act as detailed below: The abolition of all forms of racial discrimination in the provision of education; creation of a unitary national education system, thus the pre-independence dual education system was abolished; abolition of primary school tuition fees as well as a way of introducing free and compulsory primary education; provisions for all children who complete the primary school cycle to proceed to second-

ary education; provision of state support for non-formal, adult and literacy programmes; decentralisation of the management and administration of the education system to promote efficiency and equity in the development of regions; expansion of teacher education so as to release more trained teachers into the school system and reduce the use of untrained and often under-trained teachers and expatriates (UNESCO: 2001:46). In 1990 the EFA (Education For All) programme was faced with real challenges that had not been anticipated before. Some of these challenges required a redefinition of strategies and policies to suit the new order. A number of these emanated from the socio-economic milieu. The fall of communism in 1989 meant that Zimbabwe had to change look and give up socialism for a western type democracy, which was characterised by an open market economy (UNESCO 2001).

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) was adopted as a strategy for economic recovery. ESAP intended to reform and adjust the economy in order to create more jobs and goods for the people in Zimbabwe (UNESCO 2005). It was a move towards a capitalist market economy in which the role of the state was to be reduced to a minimum (Juru 2002). The economy is freed from government control and left to the market. Cost recovery measures introduced under ESAP were a direct threat to free primary education (UNESCO 2005). In 1992, tuition fees were re-introduced in urban areas causing untold suffering among urban poor and those who had lost their jobs by reason of ESAP. The Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) was adopted in 1996 as a continuation of ESAP. Economic recovery remained an elusive mirage for Zimbabwe. In 1997, the Zimbabwe dollar lost ground against major currencies. Both inflation and high interest rates continued to sour to unprecedented levels. Unfortunately, ESAP coincided with the 1991/1992 drought (Matunhu 1997:78).

The government of Zimbabwe in line with the above mentioned objectives of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) adopted the policy of decentralisation as a means of: improving the delivery of services to the nation and ensuring equitable distribution of national resources; pro-

moting democracy, public participation and civic responsibility in the development process; increasing efficiency and effectiveness in government and therefore enhancing service delivery and reducing the direct role of central government in the delivery of services (UNESCO 2001:62).

The benefits listed below entail the importance of participation in decision making in education: Participation enables teachers to become active participants in school management process. As a result of this, teachers will have a wider and greater ownership of the school, its vision and priorities. Teachers will then be motivated to carry out the tasks; participation leads to a higher level of meaningful involvement by teachers and teacher teams in the decision making process. This implies that teachers will be determined to carry out the tasks. Participation accords teachers opportunities for professional development in decision making skills (Shedd and Bacharach 1991; Dimmock 1993; Technikon 1998; Kumar and Scuderi 2000).

However, there are also problems that are likely to be encountered by schools in their move to change into participatory institutions. There is denial of space for teachers by principals to participate in making certain decisions that critically affect them. This is likely caused by the type of leadership model the head employs in making decisions. With formal leadership models, there is insignificant teacher involvement in decision-making. There is also the problem of role ambiguity where principals play the role of coordinator as demanded of them but remain the system's most senior official in the school. It may be difficult at times for school heads to adjust since at one point they are supposed to be supervisors and disciplinarians and when it comes to the process of decision-making, they are required to be colleagues. Principals do not like the idea of consulting with junior teachers and being expected to implement decisions determined by groups and not themselves in certain issues (Bray 1999; Brouillette 1997).

Although the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe has devolved power and authority to schools, the extent of teacher participation in decision-making is not properly known as some of them seem to have mixed/different views on their involvement in the process. The problem of non-participation of teachers in decision-making seems to be of great concern to them, be-

cause they feel that it discourages initiative and genuine commitment to their work. They also feel that their useful ideas are likely to be stifled or ignored if they are not fully involved in decision-making. The above views coupled with some of the teachers' complaints and concerns have prompted this study which sought to establish the nature of teacher involvement in school-based promotions.

### METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative interpretive research methodology was adopted. It concentrated on the qualitative form since this research aimed at elucidating what the participants had to say with regard to decision-making in their natural settings. In this regard, it was imperative that a methodological perspective be adopted to allow the findings to develop "from the data itself rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeon-hole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed" (Creswell 2002:36). The problem identified in this study demanded that the participants themselves be allowed to freely express their feelings, views and opinions. To this end, Sherman and Webb (in Ely 1991:78) provide the following definition "...qualitative implies a direct concern with feelings, experiences and views as lived or felt or undergone..." This study adopted a case-study research design. A case study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001). Purposive convenience sampling was adopted in the selection of participants for this study

### RESULTS

Generally, all the responding teachers affirmed that school-based promotions were decided upon by the head and the deputy head. School-based promotions are those teacher elevations that are effected at the school level. Such promotions could be to the level of HOD, senior master and senior woman. These posts are not substantive in that they are not recognized by the Public Service Commission. However, these same posts are indicators of who is likely to be

promoted to substantive posts should opportunities arise. School-based promotions are supposed to be based on merit. Holders of these posts enjoy certain privileges like being involved in most of the school level decision making areas. Holders of these posts also have supervisory roles. They also enjoy the benefit of having lesser teaching loads as compared to ordinary teachers.

Thus, these posts are relatively powerful at the school level. However, people holding these positions are appointed by the school head and they remain in those positions as long as the school head is contented with their services. Under normal circumstances, the head of school should consider seniority, professional qualifications, maturity and expertise before making an undertaking on who to promote. However, it emerged in this study that some of the participating school heads did not follow the laid down procedure and this is the reason why school teachers are disgruntled. They feel that it is an area where there should be more involvement of teachers in decision-making.

Some of the teachers hold the view that school heads may make such decisions unilaterally. A summary of the responses given by some of the teachers (T) is provided below:

- T1 *It is the headmaster and the deputy who make such decisions. This is done by the administrators and we only hear that someone has been promoted and we are never consulted at all*
- T4 *School-based promotion, the headmaster and the deputy; I may say the headmaster in consultation with the deputy head. There is no set down criteria but I feel that people are just handpicked and obviously those who play according to the administrators' tune are rewarded accordingly*
- T8 *Obviously, it is the school head that makes such decisions and impose them on the deputy head. The deputy head then announces these appointments to the rest of the staff members. We don't even know the criteria which they use because at times you find out that a junior is promoted when there are seasoned educators.*

The picture one gets from the above comments is that the majority of teachers in all the five schools were not consulted on the issue of

school- based promotions. Some teachers believed that school- based promotions are done by the school heads alone while others felt that the deputy heads are actively involved. All the teachers expressed concern about how these people are elevated. Heads of schools as indicated earlier on should consider one's teaching experience, maturity and competence when making appointments. However, it has emerged in this study there was a lot of politics involved and that the case is different as school heads look at other things. According to teachers only the less qualified and the less experienced teachers were promoted most of the time in some of the schools. To them, such teachers were promoted on their inability to question the decisions taken by the school heads. Thus, a weakness is being converted into a merit. Teachers believed that school heads strategically promote their favourites so that they can better manipulate teachers through such people. Other teachers argued that there was a lot of nepotism, regionalism and corruption that is practiced in these promotions.

The teachers thought that schools may not succeed as long as unqualified teachers are elevated to positions of authority. In their view, such promotions should be democratically done. Most of the teachers said that they would be happier with situations in which teachers were asked to vote each other into such positions of authority. They all felt that they knew each other's competences very well and that they would not make a mistake if asked to select their leaders just as much as they were trusted when it comes to the selection of their political leaders. The study holds the opinion that teachers knew each other very well perhaps more than school heads do. It is normal for peers to know each other's strengths and weaknesses more than superiors do. It is the researcher's experience that in the presence of superiors, subordinates tend to behave in a manner that seeks to impress the leader. If such is the case, then school heads may have pseudo knowledge of their teachers and such knowledge may mislead them when they consider their teachers for school based promotion. However what may be applicable is a situation where there will be a promotions committee which will be responsible for promotions. It is also the study's opinion that if teachers were given the platform to contribute, they would also vote for friends and those that would favour them. This is why the researcher is

advocating the need to have mechanisms like promotions committees in place to ensure quality people are appointed.

An inquiry on school heads' position on this matter was made, it was observed that all the responding heads (H) concurred with the views of their teachers. H4 made the following comments;" *School based promotion is done in the office of the head and the deputy head.*" In an attempt to justify the practice, H2 stated the following:

*These are our teachers. We supervise them formally and informally, almost on daily basis. Thus, we know their weaknesses and strengths and we are by all logic strategically placed to decide who to promote in the interest of the school."*

Leaving the burden of decision making squarely on the shoulders of the school heads may create tension amongst staff members as school heads may be tempted to promote teachers on other grounds which are not meritocratic. It appears that all the five schools are not involving teachers in school- based promotions. This is an area which is considered very important by teachers as they have a stake in it. The aspect of school based promotions was on the agenda of one school. The head of the school announced that Mr. X (not real name) who was the senior master was relocating to another province to join his family and as a result, Mr. B (not real name) was appointed by the school management team to take over the position left vacant by Mr. X. This was an indication that school-based promotion in this school was a prerogative of the administration. This confirms what emerged from the interviews that teachers were not consulted on issues of school- based promotions. The records that were inspected by the researcher also revealed that in most cases heads of schools announced new appointments in staff meetings. Members of staff would then be encouraged to corporate with the new office bearers. However, one should bear in mind the fact that some staffing matters are administrative and therefore need to be handled by school managers for accountability purposes. At the same time, school heads could involve teachers at consultation level in such issues.

## DISCUSSION

The study observed that all teachers were not involved in school- based promotions. What

is happening in these schools confirms Davies in Riley's (1984) findings that the teacher's influence in education matters diminished further when the relevance of such matters was removed from pedagogical issues. However, of concern is the fact that there is always a discrepancy between the level of decision-making desired by teachers and that which they are offered. The current study's findings that all teachers in the five schools were not involved in school-based promotion is refuted by Chivore's (1995) study which established that teachers wanted to be involved in planning their activities, promotions to posts of HODs and that their heads should consider their ideas when coming up with such decisions. In support, Biyela (2009) asserts that the sound human relations are important for the proper functioning of the school. The positions and the manner in which the school conducts promotions contribute to the deterioration of the human relations and the policies of the department discourage the approach, which depicts the policies of the school as an organisation with people who have been working. He further posits that the educators feel that human relations are strained when there has been a competition and the principal is always linked with favouritism because he or she is the only representative of the department who also determines the needs of the curriculum of a particular school.

All participating school heads acknowledged that decisions on school-based promotions were reached unilaterally for various reasons. They granted that the very nature of their appointments entitled them to be the principal decision-makers in their schools. They further argued that some of the suggestions from teachers could radically run opposite state or ministry regulations. Therefore the school heads argued that they were responsible for the overall school decisions as well as being accountable to the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, most teachers wanted to be consulted in critical issues such as school-based promotions. They further wanted their views to be heard and acknowledged by the school system. They were also working hard in order to be promoted one day. The hope of getting promotion motivated them to improve their performances. The study however established that the promotion procedures in schools left a lot to be desired and some of the teachers were contemplating leaving the profession. This confirms what emerged from

Biyela's (2009) study that educators who are affected by injustices in promotions and seem to have no career in the education may be relegated easily to the industries, even for lower salaries. Biyela (2009) citing Bater (1994) maintains that there must be some form of keeping the high fliers. According to Biyela, talented people always like to lead. People who cannot handle them properly block them and they find themselves diffused into the private organizations.

Indeed, as pointed out earlier on, teachers may not take delight in cases where decisions on issues of school based promotions are made on their behalf. They wanted to engage their decision-making faculties at their organisational levels. They want to demonstrate to their superiors that they command both pedagogical and administrative skills which can be harnessed for the benefit of the organisation. This is true if one considers that there are several leaders within the school who may not be managers. Such informal leaders may have a great audience than the school head. Failure to acknowledge and commit such potentials in decision-making may see such leaders working against the school head and the entire system may collapse. In agreement, Smylie et al. (1992), study found that teachers appear substantially more willing to participate in all areas of decision making if they perceive their relationships with their principals as more open, collaborative, facilitative and supportive. They were much less willing to participate in any area of decision-making if they characterise their relationships with their principals as closed, exclusionary and controlling, they fight to make sure that nothing succeeds in that school (Smylie et al. 1992).

Biyela (2009) also asserts that educators who were not promoted or are not happy with the promotion procedure withdraw from extra responsibilities and the school may experience a high rate of absenteeism. According to Biyela, the incumbent of a certain position then has to push people to do work and late submissions are inevitable. Educators may suffer stress and burnout as a result of promotional injustices. In his study, Biyela (2009) found that educators expect to be rewarded during the course of their careers and that promotion is one of the rewards that the committed educators would want to achieve. His study also established that if promotions are retarded by factors not associated with merit, then the aggrieved feels that there is

no career. In support, Lemons and Jones (2001) argue that people who work in organisations where procedures are unfair become dissatisfied and may leave the institution in preference for other working environment.

School- based management is all about empowerment of teachers to make decisions about how the school should operate. Therefore teachers must be delegated the authority to participate in school based decision making processes (Mosoge and Van der Westhuizen 1998:80). In support, Young (1989:163), quoting Friesen and Carson (1978), articulates that "it is generally felt that since teachers possess professional knowledge, they should be involved to a considerable extent in educational decision- making in order to practice their expertise as well as protect their professional interests" Also in a research conducted by Davies, cited by Bush (1986), results showed that teachers desired a higher level of involvement in decision making and that their contributions should be put into consideration by the administrators. According to Fielding (1997), by tapping the unique qualities of group members, it is possible that the group can generate a greater number of alternatives that are of a higher quality than the individual. If a greater number of higher quality alternatives are generated, then it is likely that the group will eventually reach a superior problem solution than the individual. However, it appears that school heads just hand picked their lieutenants without following laid down procedures. The net effect is that unjust promotion procedures yield to the decline of organisational commitment (Tam and Cheng 1999). Boyle and Boyle (2002) in Biyela (2009) draw attention to the fact that performance in the organisation is determined by factors connected to the system, of which promotion is one. In support Zembylas (2004) cites the lack of professional autonomy as the cause of job dissatisfaction among teachers. He further postulates that promotions in schools have been influenced by the stressful factors, not only regard to applicants but also to the school principals.

### CONCLUSION

The study established that teachers were not consulted in critical decisions that were made by their administrators. However, they desired more involvement in critical issues. They wanted to be consulted before a decision has been taken.

Teachers were completely left out in decisions such as school based promotions. This is a critical decision- making area. They were keen to be involved or rather consulted before appointments of deputy head, senior woman, senior master and HOD were made. The study therefore concluded that the higher the complexity of the issue, the more the decisions are concentrated in the hands of the inner most core while the lesser the significance of the decision the more it is likely to be thrown into the hands of the majority of the staff members in all the schools under study.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends teacher empowerment in decision- making. This implies that teachers need the opportunity and space to participate in decision- making at a level that is beyond the classroom. Such involvement provides fora through which teachers' creativity contribute to the running of their schools. Allowing teachers access to meaningful decision- making in major school issues may provide a fertile ground for them to look through themselves with respect and dignity. School based promotions need to be based on merit and experience of the teachers. The selection instrument should therefore be impartial. Teachers are likely to regard this climate with esteem and trust. Furthermore they may feel respected if their interests and expertise are recognized in the decision making processes. Perhaps more importantly, this recognition is likely to unlock vast levels of cooperation, dedication and commitment which are essential ingredients for the success of the school.

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