An Assessment of the Effectiveness of School-based Staff Development Programmes in Secondary Schools of Lupane District of Zimbabwe

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author TT designed the study, wrote the protocol and supervised the work. Authors ACN and MTK carried out all laboratories work and performed the statistical analysis. Author TT managed the analyses of the study. Author ACN wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author MTK managed the literature searches and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Staff development is crucial as it equips workers with life long survival skills on their jobs. Staff development also bridges the gap between the teachers' available acquired skills and the new teaching skills required in the curriculum. Staff development is therefore concerned with the expansion of knowledge and skills of teachers so that they contribute to their growth in relation to their jobs and improve student learning through enhanced performance by the teachers. This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of school based staff development programmes in

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Zimbabwean secondary schools using the quantitative paradigm. The study employed the survey descriptive design. The target population comprised all schools in Lupane District using a sample of 110 teachers and heads composed of 56 females and 54 males. All the information was collected using a questionnaire which had both close-ended questions and open-ended questions. The study revealed that lack of follow up evaluation sessions to staff development programmes affect the effectiveness of staff development design and implementation. The study also revealed that time allocated to staff development programmes was not adequate resources. The study recommends that there should be adequate resources to effectively plan and implement staff development programmes and that staff development programmes must be allocated enough time for them to be effectively carried out.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an outcry on the performance of pupils in most Zimbabwean secondary schools, particularly in public examinations. Average annual pass rates at Ordinary Level rarely exceed 20 percent [1]. The major blame has been on the quality of teaching that is obtaining in the schools due to a number of factors ranging from inexperience to low qualifications held by teachers [2]. Staff development programmes are designed to improve job understanding, promote more job performance and establish future goals for career growth [3]. As [4] posits, staff development activities are designed to improve the quality of classroom instruction, enable individuals to grow professionally, introduce practitioners to the practical applications of research-validated strategies and help teachers meet their licence and salary differential. On the other hand, [5] state the staff development programmes can also be referred to as the processes, and activities through which every organisation develops, enhances and improves the skills, competencies and overall performance of its employees.

In Zimbabwe, the [6] stipulates that the officers should be trained from recruitment and induction to planned service related to curriculum developments with which the teacher is concerned. School based training is pivotal to the improvement of quality of education. The strategy of bringing about quality education has to focus on the quality of the teacher, and the success of any attempt to improve the effectiveness of efficiency of teachers depends on a properly planned and executed staff development programme [7]. The need to continuously staff develop teachers needs not be under-stated. Thus, this study assessed the effectiveness of staff development programmes as implemented by secondary schools.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Staff development is crucial as it equips teachers with the wherewithals for professional survival on their jobs. School-based staff development programmes are therefore designed and implemented to improve the quality of education. Teachers have to be staff developed to meet the new realities of their working environment because any teacher who remains conservative will become irrelevant and redundant in the ever changing school educational environment. Prior to 1990, the Zimbabwean Government used to offer centralised staff development programmes to teachers through In-service courses at selected teachers' colleges. Teachers underwent these staff development sessions during the school holidays for three years. After 1990, the introduction of cost recovery measures meant that the government was no longer able to centralise staff development programmes. It became the responsibility of schools to organise staff development workshops for their teachers, although teachers were no longer certificated.

1.2 Research Questions

1. To what extent do staff development programmes promote the effectiveness of teachers in their day-to-day performance in the classroom?
2. What is the frequency of staff development programmes in the secondary schools?
3. What are teachers' attitudes towards staff development programmes conducted in their schools?
4. Are teachers involved during the needs identification for staff development programmes?

1.3 Literature Review

Staff development programmes that are purposefully, well structured ascertain teacher effectiveness. [2] posits, that the initial training offered in teachers' colleges and universities is no longer seen as adequate. Teachers have to be staff developed more frequently to meet the realities of their work environment [2]. Those teachers from universities are joining schools with content on their subject areas only. They lack professional experience and knowledge on how to handle instructional issues, and it is only through staff development that they can be effectively integrated into the school system for the achievement of overall school objectives [8]. Teachers have to be staff developed therefore, to meet the realities of their new working environment.

Billings [9] states that as new ideas, methods, innovations are introduced into the education system, there is need for staff development to come into play and keep teachers in touch with the changing working environment because any teacher who remains conservative will eventually have no place in the changing school educational environment. The intention of staff development programmes is to ensure that each staff member is or becomes fully competent and responsible teacher of his or her subjects and becomes capable of doing his / her job effectively in his / her present role [10].

As [11] postulates, rapid socio-economic changes as well as emergent needs within the technological field have made curriculum complex and as a result, management of education systems demands sophisticated skills that would enable the managers to steer the system effectively. This would come about through staff development programmes. Thus, according to [12] staff development goals have to be deliberately selected to bring about staff improvement and the school head should carefully design and implement staff development programmes in order to improve the teacher's performance during their course of work. On the other hand, [13] contends that in-service training courses produce long-term effects in teacher effectiveness and therefore calls for heads of schools to design and implement staff development programmes to provide teachers with up to date skills that are relevant to their experiences in the teaching / learning process.

Resources are essential to get work done in a school or organisation. As [14] states, material, human, financial and time resources are important in having the staff development programmes succeed. The provision of libraries, laboratories, textbooks and other resources enables the staff development programmes to be carried out easily and effectively. Another dimension to successful implementation of staff development programmes is what [15] defines as needs identification. [15] argues that needs of teachers are found to be of paramount importance when planning and designing staff development programmes. According to [15] staff development programmes should be based on careful assessment of needs of staff so that resources are not put to waste. As [16] argues, the importance of shared task in identifying needs between those responsible for managing staff development in schools and those who will benefit from the staff development programme cannot be overemphasized. Needs identification should take into account the needs of individuals, groups, the whole school and those arising from national and regional educational policies [17].

McLaughlin [17] states that the school head is the hub of both teaching and administrative processes, and viewed this way the head of school plays a pivotal role on all staff development activities. The school head plans, coordinates, leads, controls, directs and delegates the staff development activities in his / her school and the head's role is very important in creating the right kind of climate for effective staff development programmes [18]. [17] postulates that the head plays a leading role in maintaining and improving educational standards as well as professional guidance to the staff and uses his / her authority to establish a staff development committee. According to [19] the staff development committees will liase with teachers in identifying the needs of teachers. The school head can use the partnership model in an attempt to meet the needs of staff and the school without creating conflict [9]. Staff development therefore, as [20] postulates is a product of interaction between staff and the head who supervises the whole programme.

However, as [3] discovered, staff development in schools was mainly informal and adhoc in nature. It became evident that school heads usually with the help of deputy heads or teachers-in-charge or head of department, identified a topic of concern and selected teachers to facilitate the presentation of the staff development session. In

other words, needs identification was done at the top [21]. Generally, teachers find staff development sessions unnecessary and time wasting [22]. It was therefore the objective of this study to assess the effectiveness of school based staff development programmes.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative paradigm and made use of a survey research design. As [23] posit, the descriptive survey method looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The population comprised of all the secondary schools in Lupane District and the simple random sample was used to come up with a sample of 110 respondents. Lupane District has 30 secondary schools. The researchers used ten secondary schools as the sample. From the sampled schools, a school head and any ten teachers were sampled using simple random sampling. The instrument for this study was a questionnaire. It had three sections. The first section had three questions seeking respondents bio-data regarding aspects of category, sex and work experience. The second section comprised five closed-ended questions derived from the research questions. The third section consisted of two-open ended questions. The bio-data enabled the researchers to know the nature of the study's respondents. The closed-ended questions enabled the researchers to present and discuss factual data. The open-ended questions allowed respondents to bring out their general opinions on the subject under study. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for gathering data because as [24] argues, it increases reliability as an instrument of gathering data because of its greater impersonality. However, as [25] postulates, the questionnaire has a low response rate and is inflexible in that it does not allow ideas or comments to be explored in-depth and many questions may remain unanswered. The researchers personally distributed and collected the questionnaires to mitigate the challenge of low response rate. The questionnaires were sent to the respondents through the heads and were collected within two weeks during the month of March 2014. The researchers applied for permission to carry out the study from the Permanent Secretary of Primary and Secondary Education in February 2014. The teachers filled in the informed consent form to ensure that they did not take part in the

study through compulsion. The data were analysed manually using the calculator on the computer to come up with frequencies of the respondents' responses that enabled researchers to discuss the results.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to assess the effectiveness of school-based staff development programmes in Zimbabwean secondary schools. This section is presented in two parts; namely, presentation of data and discussion.

3.1 Presentation of Data

Table 1 above shows that the bulk of the respondents in this study were teachers (91%) and heads constituted (9%).

Table 1. Category of respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Heads	10	9
Teachers	100	91
Totals	110	100

There were more female respondents than male ones as shown in Table 2 (56% female and 54% male respectively). The datum was significant to the extent that it confirmed that most secondary schools in Zimbabwe had more female teachers than male ones [14].

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by sex

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	54	49
Female	56	51
Totals	110	100

Table 3 shows that the majority of heads (90%) were above 16 years of age and 58% of the teachers were 10 years and below.

Table 4 above shows that 40% of the heads stated that their schools held staff development sessions once per term, 30% said they held the sessions twice, 20% indicated that they held them four times per term and 10% said they held these thrice per term. The situation was totally different with teachers' responses. 89% of the teachers indicated that their schools did not hold a single staff development session per term, 8% said they held these sessions once per term and 6% stated that they held them twice per term.

Table 3. Composition of respondents by work experience

Experience in years	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0 – 2	0	0	2	2	2	2
3 – 5	0	0	4	4	4	4
6 – 10	0	0	52	52	52	47
11 – 15	1	10	30	30	31	28
16 – 20	7	70	10	10	17	15
20 and above	2	20	2	2	4	4
Totals	10	100	100	100	110	100

Table 4. Responses to the question: "How many times does your school hold staff development sessions per term?"

Staff development sessions per term	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0	0	0	89	89	89	81
1	4	40	8	8	12	11
2	3	30	3	6	6	5
3	1	10	0	0	1	1
4	2	20	0	0	2	4
Totals	10	100	100	100	110	100

The table above shows that 85% of the teachers stated that they were not involved in needs identification and designing of staff development programmes, and only 10% said they were involved (3% to a greater extent and 7% to a lesser extent). On the other hand, 50% of the heads said teachers were involved to a greater extent and an equal number (50%) said they were involved to a lesser extent.

Table 6 above shows that all the heads (100%) stated that staff development sessions held at their schools promoted teachers' effectiveness and yet 89% of the teachers indicated that they did not benefit from the school based staff development sessions.

Table 7 above shows that both heads and teachers were in agreement that resources to carry out staff development sessions at their schools were not adequate (90%: heads; 94%: teachers). Only 10% of the heads indicated that resources were adequate to a lesser extent.

The information above on Table 8 shows that 70% of the heads and 93% of the teachers indicated that there was no time allocated to staff development sessions in their schools' time-tables.

The questionnaire had two open-ended questions which bolstered data from the close-ended questions. The first question wanted to find out from the respondents what they thought

was the major reason for failure to hold regular staff development sessions. The majority of respondents stated that there was no clear cut policy on staff development programmes in their schools. This explains why the sessions were sporadic and poorly planned for.

The second question sought to find out from the respondents the way forward regarding staff development programmes in their schools. The most common responses included the following:

- Heads should involve teachers during the need analysis process (80%).
- School heads should encourage good open communication among stakeholders to conscientise them about school based staff development programmes (72%).
- There must be constant follow-up evaluation sessions on staff development programmes to make sure it is done to specifications or recommendations (63%).

3.2 Discussion

Information from the study reveal that most schools did not hold staff development sessions at all; while those that held them, did so only once per term. The importance of staff development programmes can not be overemphasized as they are concerned with the expansion of knowledge and skills of teachers so that they continuously become relevant to their

jobs. As [4] posits, staff development activities are carried out to improve the quality of classroom instruction, enable individuals to grow professionally, introduce practitioners to the practical applications of research-validated strategies to help teachers in their classroom performance.

Data from the study in Table 5 also shows that teachers were not involved during the needs identification and designing of staff development activities in their schools. This means that heads of schools came up with topics they felt would best cater for the developmental needs of the teachers. This is in spite of the fact that most of the teachers are relatively experienced in the education system since they have served for over five years as teachers. It is imperative therefore, to ask teachers about areas they wish to be staff developed on as they naturally know their weaknesses better than any other person. As [1] argues, the importance of shared task in identifying needs between those responsible for managing staff development in schools and those who will benefit from the activities cannot be overemphasized. The needs identification process should therefore, involve the individuals and groups that will be part of the implementation process of the staff development programme.

Table 5. Responses to the statement: "Teachers are involved in needs identification and designing of staff development programmes?"

Teachers involvement in needs identification	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
To a greater extent	5	50	3	3	8	7
To a lesser extent	5	50	17	7	12	11
Not at all	0	0	85	85	85	77
Not sure	0	0	5	5	5	5
Totals	10	100	100	100	110	100

Table 6. Responses to the statement: "Staff development sessions held at your school help to promote teachers' effectiveness as classroom practitioners?"

Promotion of effectiveness	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
To a greater extent	10	100	3	3	13	12
To a lesser extent	0	0	86	6	6	5
Not at all	0	0	89	89	89	81
Not sure	0	0	2	2	2	2
Totals	10	100	100	100	110	100

Table 7. Responses to the statement: "Resources to carry out staff development sessions at my school are adequate?"

Category of responses	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
To a greater extent	0	0	0	0	0	0
To a lesser extent	1	10	2	2	3	3
Not at all	9	90	94	94	103	94
Not sure	0	0	4	4	4	3
Totals	10	100	100	100	110	100

Table 8. Responses to the statement: "Time was allocated to staff development issues?"

Category of responses	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Agree	3	30	5	5	8	7
Disagree	7	70	93	93	100	91
Not sure	0	0	2	2	2	2
Totals	10	100	100	100	110	100

Most teachers believed that staff development that the few staff development sessions did not help in promoting teachers' effectiveness as classroom practitioners. However, heads (believed that the staff development sessions conducted at their schools benefitted their teachers immensely. This is to be expected since heads were responsible for identifying the needs and also designed the activities for the staff development sessions. This, therefore, underlines the significance of consultations between heads and teachers at planning stage for the staff development sessions so that both heads and teachers have a common vision and perception about the activities planned for the staff development programmes. As [19] postulates, the school head can use the partnership model in an attempt to meet the needs of staff and the school without creating conflict. Staff development therefore, as [20] postulates, should be a product of interaction between teachers and the head to maximize on cooperation, benefitiation as well as ownership.

All the schools did not have adequate resources to carry out staff development programmes. Resources are essential to get work done in a school or organisation. As [14] states, material, human, financial and time resources are necessary in having the staff development programmes succeed. The provision of libraries, laboratories, textbooks and other resources, enables the staff development programmes to be carried out easily and effectively.

Information from the study also shows that there was no specific time allocated to staff development sessions in almost all the schools' timetables. This explains why the sessions were non-existent in most schools and where they were carried out, it was done sporadically through the whims and caprices of the heads. This is congruent with observations by [3] who discovered that staff development in schools was mainly informal and adhoc in nature and it became evident that school heads, usually with the help of deputy heads or heads of departments, identified a topic of concern and selected teachers to facilitate the presentation of topics anytime they deemed convenient. As a result of this poor timing of the staff development sessions, teachers generally find staff development sessions unnecessary and time wasting.

4. CONCLUSION

Given the background of the above findings, the researchers make the following six conclusions. The first conclusion is that both literature search and empirical data in this study converge on the fact that schools are not carrying out effective staff development programmes for the growth of teachers. Teachers' professional growth rates tend to be compromised. Under such circumstances, the net effect of compromised teachers' growth is that the quality of education suffers a great deal.

The second conclusion from the study is that most schools did not hold staff development sessions throughout the whole term or even throughout the whole year. By implication, quality education in the studied schools was presumed to be scarce. The rarity of quality education consequent upon the absence of school-based staff development is tantamount to the production of half-baked school-leavers.

The study's third conclusion is that teachers were not involved during the needs identification and designing of staff development activities. Teachers did not own whatever staff development plans and programmes that obtained in the studied schools. As a result, the teachers are never consulted on matters that concern their staff development needs, perceptions and intentions. The teachers are bound to get imposed staff development programmes, sessions and workshops which would be of little or no help to the teachers. Such sessions will be done at the expense of quality education.

The fourth conclusion in this study is that most teachers did not benefit from the few staff development activities conducted at their schools. By and large, teachers remained raw because they continuously relied on the theoretical and practical knowledge they acquired from their Teachers' Colleges. Depriving teachers of school-based staff development sessions literally kills opportunities for staff growth because inexperienced teachers will not share experiences with 'expert' and experienced teachers. Possibilities of mounting mentoring sessions are also kept at bay by the absence of school-based staff development sessions.

The fifth conclusion of the study reveals that all the schools did not have adequate resources to

conduct effective staff development sessions. The support for staff development programmes is best seen through the provision of all kinds of resources by the school heads, community and other stakeholders. In that regard, the school and its teachers do not operate in a vacuum.

The study's final conclusion is that schools did not allocate time for staff development sessions. Deprivation of time for staff development is indicative of the degree to which the studied schools unconsciously lowly-rated the efficacy of staff development in raising the quality of education. In all earnest, low opinion of school-based staff development that is held by the participants in the studied schools relegates the quality of education provided to the society to its lowest ebb.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make four recommendations. First, schools should have clear policies on staff development programmes which will make sure that the programmes are done systematically and institutionalized. Currently, staff development programs are not properly organised and fail to promote the growth of teachers, which compromises the quality of education delivery that pupils receive.

Second, heads should involve teachers during the needs identification and design process so that they feel the ownership of the programmes. Teachers can be involved through the establishment of a staff development committee which will mobilize teachers on staff development issues. Needs identification requires that teachers reveal their real shortcomings as they perform their duties so that the staff development intervention specifically addresses those shortcomings

Third, schools should mobilize and allocate adequate resources for the staff development programmes for them to be effectively done. This includes finances, human resources in the form of resource persons and material resources like stationery. There should be thorough preparatory measures put in place for any staff development programme to realise its objectives.

The study's final recommendation is that adequate time should be allocated for staff development programmes in the schools' timetables just like any other activity. In other words, teachers should not be ambushed by a staff development activity, they should be given adequate time so that the staff development programme does not interfere with teachers' own plans. Therefore, reflecting the staff development itinerary on the master school timetable and class time tables would make everybody prepared for the staff development sessions, thereby, attaching an appropriate value to the school-based staff development sessions in search of the provision of quality education.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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