CHALLENGES FACED BY ZIMBABWE’S SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN MANAGING SCHOOLS: A CASE OF GWERU DISTRICT

SANDRA CECILIA MAVURA¹, Dr.SUPARMAN S.Pd, M.Pd, Bi², ERI SOFIATRY, S.S M.Sc.³

¹Fakultas Teknologi Pertanian Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa
²Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa
³Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Politik Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa
*Corresponding Author email: sandramav42@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Child development in a school environment lays a strong foundation for a child's life. The personality formed in a child at school is very permanent. Juniel and Williams (2017) found that the effectiveness of school management maps schools to achieving their goals. Achieving goals can be hampered by problems faced by managers, which can prevent teachers, non-teacher staff, and students from achieving their goals. The impact of failure of school administrators to fulfill their responsibilities will be felt not only by school administrators, but across the country. Therefore, failure to identify problems and provide solutions to those problems will cause serious problems for the nation. Citing Gondo et al. (2019) and Nzirimasanga (1999), he hinted at the need to make education and training a collective responsibility of the state. The Commission also recommended a solution that constantly investigates whether the general environment and systems still enable proper learning.

This paper identifies the main problems faced by school administrators in managing schools. This knowledge helps current and future administrators to recognize such issues. This helps design solutions that are beneficial to them and their learners. This assumes that research on the common problems faced by school leaders is still very limited. This research also shows how the problem relates to the existing theories of normal administration and school administration. A theoretical solution that is particularly applicable to Zimbabwe and the Midlands is presented. Such empirical solutions are used to guide people towards a career in school management. This paper will contribute to the strategic development of school governance at various levels of the educational community. The community is educated about how their behavior is causing problems at school. It also makes it easier for the legislature to align its contributions to education with the actual reality of the school. This research will also provide governments with policy recommendations to guide future actions.

Finally, this paper provides empirical insights into school management. The body of knowledge has since been enriched with new knowledge brought to Zimbabwe today, showing new phenomena not seen in recent years. These include coronavirus pandemics, dollarization, and the threat of Mashurugwi. Such knowledge will be of great help in addressing current issues in the field of education management.

This research focused on the state of Midlands in Zimbabwe. However, due to limited resources, the survey was be conducted in one district of Gweru. Midland is one of Zimbabwe’s 10 administrative states. It is the only state in Zimbabwe that does not border Zimbabwe. The state is made up of rural and urban settlements. State schools are both rural and urban. The state capital is Gweru. Gweru's choice is justified by the fact that it...
is a district of the state capital. This allows the results to be generalized to the entire state. Like the whole province, Gweru district has both formal and non-formal schools. The choice is based on the belief that administration of school is the same for both formal and non-formal. Informal schools that are not registered have been left out. This is because they do not have defined structures. Their running is already a problem, hence investigating problems from problem schools is a futile attempt.

THEORY BASIS

Literature review outside and inside Zimbabwe

Sahin and Ak (2018) found out new problems facing administrators schools were simply a mutation or manifestation of the old problems before the turn of the millennium. However, they went further to identify that the problems required innovative solutions. By this they brought in important aspects that problems faced by the administrators are constantly changing and also that they might differ significantly by countries. Bayar (2016) focused on Turkey and the challenges Principals face at their schools, Sahin and Ak (2018) also focused on Turkey but concentrating on School Management and Student Related Risk. Not only that, studies in Zimbabwe for example Nyoni and Bonga 2017 they wrote about factors affecting Students Performance in Midlands Province and Gondo 2018 focused on Issues surrounding the new curriculum in Mashonaland Hurungwe.

Surveys from other parts of the world such as Turkey, Kenya, South Africa and India have shown a variety of problems. Common problems are violence and poverty. However, the differences in the issues showed that school management issues were not only country-specific, but also time-specific. Differences in challenges like Turkey had immigration challenges that did not apply to Zimbabwe at all. This essentially meant that these studies did not answer the questions of Zimbabwe’s studies. These surveys conducted in Zimbabwe focused primarily on specific areas of management such as financial management, student discipline, school development committees and staff welfare. Zimbabwean researchers were far away, but did not provide a solid answer to the problems faced by school administration. The theory of problems is very important, especially for the Faculty of Education and the College of Education. This is the method used to form and reshape the curriculum. This issue may also be reflected in the ministry’s response to ensure proper school management.

Therefore, it is clear that existing and empirical literature has not exhausted this area of the challenges faced by school managers when running a school. Thus, it is clear that there is a knowledge gap in the area of school management issues, as existing studies in Zimbabwe could not completely fill the gap. In addition, empirical results were expected to help Zimbabwean stakeholders respond to behavioral changes. Therefore, this study will fill the research gap. This paper discusses the school management theory that underlies school management. This study was based on a set of theories of education management and leadership.

These are the four principles: Agency theory, Stewardship theory, Social behavior theory, and Bandura’s social learning theory.

The concept of management has long been the focus of research, as management is an unavoidable task. (Kotler, 2017). Management begins at the micro level of the individual who needs to optimize personal resources such as time and income. (Sahin and Ak, 2018). At the family level, the ability to manage resources has brought different levels of wealth and discipline to the family. In this way, this management concept is inherited by organizational management. Organizational management has been studied by many great scholars following Stoner, Drucker, Porter and Taylor (Porter, 2009) to achieve school goals. Management also includes the ability to lead in such a way that results are achieved by employees. Problems continued to arise from the school administration, which operates the school in accordance with the management philosophy. The problem lies in the operation of the institution. Problems arise when administrators perform planning, organizing, teaching, and management functions. As a result, there are many problems that school managers face when managing their schools. These issues can be categorized into micro, macro-environment, and management issues.

Micro Environment refers to the factors that are in direct contact with the business organization. These factors can affect the performance of the business. The factors include suppliers, competitors, customers, workers, management and learners in the case of a school. School grades are highly dependent on the general macro environment. The environment includes political, economic, social, technical, environmental and legal (PESTEL) factors that affect the operation of the school as a company and thus affect the operation of the school.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Mixed Method Approach

Following the footsteps of Jokonya (2016), the research adopted the mixed methods approach (MMA). This is when the researcher combines the qualitative paradigm and quantitative paradigm. The combination has benefits of being able to utilize the benefits of both paradigms. This was found to be
very suitable in the existing case. The qualitative study would be able to reveal and explain some issues to do with values and feelings. On the other hand numbers were also very critical given the diversity of the population. Values of just one individual might not be sufficient to make generalizations. Therefore, it was considered prudent to get both the social issues given that education itself lies in the social fraternity. The aspects of frequency a problem is encountered and explained by different and varied school administrators gave the temptation to combine both qualitative and quantitative statistics.

Cooper et al (2019) supported the use of a mixed method approach while Kaur and Nagaich (2016) warned that there are shortcomings of combining both figures and feelings. Some of the problems are that it might be difficult to strike a balance between figures and feelings. Other shortcomings also lay in deciding the sample size given that both angles advocate for opposite sample sizes (Oxfam, 2019). Qualitative research works well with smaller sample size in order to gather much details, whilst quantitative research requires large samples for valid statistical inferences. After weighing both sides it was judged that the mixed approach benefits outweighed its weaknesses hence it was adopted.

The researcher was also guided by the main intention of this survey which was to ensure that a clear conclusion regarding what the problem was, what factors were corroborating the problems and how the problems could be mitigated. Furthermore, the results of the research were intended to fill gaps in literature in this area of school administration in a volatile micro environment and macro environment. The results were also intended to give empirical literature on which would be used to equip new school administrators and staff to develop existing administrators. During the literature review it was noted there were limited studies and research that were done on this aspect in Zimbabwe hence a scientific methodology was expected to give valid and reliable conclusions as well as recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Harrison, Henderson and Quigley (2019) define survey response rate as the number of responses received and accepted for data cleansing compared to the sample size to which the survey tool was applied. After all responses were accepted during the data cleansing phase, the final and effective overall response rate was 64%. This response rate was considered high enough. That is, it was considered sufficient for researchers to generalize the results to the target population (Harrison et al, 2019). Oxfam (2018) points out that low response rates result in a bias called non-response bias. This is because the sampling frame is high to minimize this bias. If the response rate is low, valid sampling frames cannot represent the target population.

The results from interviews showed that the recent amendment to the Education Act (Chap 25.04) influenced the running of your schools and affected how administrators run schools A serious problem arose from the revision of the education law. The revised law prohibits corporal punishment and the withdrawal of pregnant women while in school. However, managers pointed out that these areas of school discipline are on the nerves of the school. Traditionally, when managers were trained, whips were a tool to ensure that guilty learners were punished without punishing their parents. It is widely accepted by parents and other learners. The proposed new method was tedious and punished parents rather than criminals. Expulsion of students, for example, means that parents had to buy expensive uniforms at the nearest school. Therefore, new methods pose challenges in introducing discipline into schools.

Also, from the observations, administrators’ skills and competences contributed to the problems administrators faced in managing schools. About half of the respondents felt that skills and competence could affect the performance of school heads. Some stakeholders may have problems with that if it were to happen. The idea of competencies was supported by Juniel and Williams (2017). Rehmain et al (2019) even recommended that school leaders adjust their perceptions of leadership and engage in capacity development. Ngwenya and Maushe (2017) found that some heads failed in financial management because they lacked the skills required for financial management.

Furthermore from the discussions, administrators, themselves, came up with some possible mitigation measures to improve the problems they face in managing schools in the Midlands province. Adopting a stable currency would help to reduce price volatility, which would in turn reduce the effects of inflation on their financial management. They backed up their arguments with the period 2009-2016, when managing the schools was financially easier and they claimed to have developed their schools significantly. They argued that a stable currency allows them to adhere to most financial management policies, by providing staff with continual training. The study by Schulz, Mundy, Kupczynski and Jones (2016) suggests that if administrators receive training, they may be able to develop new skills that would reduce violence in schools.
The other members of the administration gave out their ideas through questionnaires. The need for this input was to ensure that problems were analyzed from all points of view, including those facing them. There was a need to mirror the problems that administrators face in order to ensure that shortcomings in their work could be assessed by those who work with them. Questionnaires were suitable for this purpose because they allowed for high levels of privacy. The researcher collected them in person to avoid any chance they would fall into the hands of the administrators who might be offended by an objective analysis.

The respondents ranked the deteriorating economic conditions as the main cause of problems in Gweru District. Poor pass rate also proved a problem according to the other members. It can be observed that there was much agreement that stakeholders place much emphasis on the pass rate. In some cases parents refuse a fees adjustments if the pass rate is low.

The issues of political interference and violence did not receive enough significant support polling 52% and 56% respectively. This means the problem might be more affecting the heads themselves but the other members rank it lowly. In seeking a solution to the problem, administrative staff emphasized the need to resolve political and economic policies that were considered the school's main problem. Participation in political and economic policies received 89% support from administrative staff. Another solution to the decline in pass rates was that the government needed to implement another program in the form of a UNICEF book donation. This was done during the National Unity Government (GNU). You could consider another method, but the management staff was more willing to donate than before.

Training of school management staff was also a problem cited as a solution to the school management problem. In a subtle way, 78% support for staff development showed some identified weaknesses in school management leadership. It can also be a positive way to resolve conflicts that may be caused by administrator issues. The management staff had the opportunity to express their open views on issues that the researchers had not considered. Management staff have added some issues due to poor management skills of some school administrators. They claimed that some of the admins had the misunderstanding that they knew everything. In some cases, especially in front of staff and learners, some managers have tried every possible means to claim their authority. These actions put other administrative staff in the back seats, putting a heavy burden on the school principal.

Some issues have arisen from an administrator working on a principal. They turned around and interfered with the principal's work. This turned out to be more common when the leader was new and the other staff were there for a long time. In some cases, the head fits tightly at first, but is called a new shoe that loosens over time. Some managers faced the challenge of adapting to technological changes that required new ways of working. A related case was cited in which school leaders refused to accept and use computer-generated work plans for lesson planning. They will prefer handwriting. Such demands have created serious challenges, especially for the younger generation.

**CLOSING**

**Conclusion**

Emanating from the above findings the research conclusions were that school administrators had the problem of low success rates, which was a very serious problem for stakeholders. Inadequate resources had a significant impact on the performance of school administrators. Some administrators faced the problem of lack of financial and human resource management skills. School refusal from students was a major problem faced by school managers in Zimbabwe. Given this information, it is recommended that the ministry and schools train staff to train school administrators so that they can acquire more skills and expertise to run the school. Also, school law, especially the law on the expulsion of teachers due to non-payment of tuition and the law on corporal punishment, must be abolished to improve school discipline.

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