

Work Relationships Between School Development Committees And School Heads In The Performance Of Their Duties In Selected Zimbabwean Primary Schools

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Abstract: Highly successful primary schools are usually defined by harmonious work relationships that obtain between school development committees and school heads. This is the ideal situation craved by many schools yet it does not happen that way. This led to this study which examined the degree to which work relationships between School Development Committees (SDCs) and school heads influence the performance of their duties in Goromonzi district in Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. The qualitative research approach was employed in this study and the multi-case research design was used. Three primary schools were purposively selected, and from each of these schools the head, deputy head, SDC chairperson and the vice chairperson were selected to be the participants in this study. Semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis were used to generate data. The responses by participants were audio-recorded then transcribed verbatim. These became the main data for analysis. The findings showed that school heads inducted SDC members on their functions at school following the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture Statutory Instrument 87 [1] of 1992. It was found out that some SDC members come into office with preconceived ideas that could be detrimental to schools. Conflicts occur in schools and school heads dealt with these amicably to avoid disturbing the development of schools. Though differences in opinions occurred in schools between SDC chairpersons and school heads, it was found out that SDCs were crucial in the welfare of schools as they formed a crucial link between parents and schools. The study recommends ongoing training for SDC members on how to handle school issues. School heads also need training on conflict management.

Key Words: School Development Committee, work relationships, conflict, conflict management.

Introduction

Schools that produce high learner academic outcomes are the focus of all people. To help develop schools, parents elect members who represent their voices in School Development Committees (SDCs). When school development committee (SDC) members are elected to office they have some authority and are accountable to the public who elect them. Kindiki (2009) [2] advocates that SDCs are external managers of schools who need to constantly get in touch with the school community. School heads and teachers on the other hand are internal managers whose focus is the internal management of schools since they are always in touch with learners. An understanding of the operations of SDCs and its relationship to the school head, teachers and parents is important in enhancing school performance. An important crucial question to ask is whether the SDC members are acquainted to education issues and have the capacity to effectively assist in the operations and development of schools. When elected to office, SDC chairpersons would have their own views and opinions of how they can develop the schools. These can be different to those of the school head. Such differences of opinions and poor communication between individuals and or groups can result in conflict (Salleh & Adulpakdee, 2012). [3] When roles and responsibilities are not properly defined conflict can arise among individuals or groups in the same organisation. If excessive, conflicts can be detrimental to work performance and employee satisfaction. School heads must learn how to manage the conflict for meaningful work to take place. When SDCs and school heads recognise the effects that conflict has on work

relations and performance, they must manage it for effective school development.

Definitions of conflict

Conflict occurs when there are disagreements between individuals and or groups in social settings over varied issues such as failure to agree on certain fundamentals in an organisation. Afful-Broni (2012, p. 67) [4] defined conflict as "... a disagreement or incompatibility in wants, values and aspirations of two or more persons or groups." They are also the differences in the opinions, beliefs, and priorities of people. Thus, as people have different opinions and approaches to doing things when in organisations, conflict is likely to occur.

Nature of conflict

Conflicts exist in schools as organisations in different intensities and they are also embedded in the minds of people. They only become visible when there are arguments. When managed effectively conflicts can be useful in strengthening group cohesiveness (Afful-Broni, 2012 [4]; Mapolisa & Mawere, 2012 [5]). If not, they can be damaging. It is thus important in schools that the work relations between SDC members and the school head be cordial to avoid destructive conflicts. As schools grow, they become more and more complex, thus demanding the cooperation of various groups. This amplified demand for the interdependence of groups tend to result in conflict. When conflict is dysfunctional it becomes unhealthy resulting in the shift of focus by people from the work to be done to the conflict. This becomes a hindrance towards organisational development.

Organisational conflict in schools

Conflict cannot be eluded; it must be taken care of so that it does not affect the school system. Salleh and Adulpakdee (2016: 16) [3] point out two main factors that cause conflict, "...structural factors, which relate to the nature of the organization and the way in which work is organized; and personal factors, which relate to differences between organizational or school members." Some structural aspects that can cause conflict are differences in goals and the knowledge of one's roles. Conflict arises in schools when SDCs have their own priority goals and school heads have their own priority goals, resulting in incompatibility of priorities. This normally crops up when these two groups perceive issues at school from different perspectives. Rahim (2001) [6] posits that perception is one of the personal factors associated with organisational conflict. This is a result of the SDC chairperson having different perceptions to those of the school head on school situations. Heads of schools, as people involved in the day to day running of schools may want to improve working conditions for teachers to avoid frequent transfers from the school and to improve pass rates whereas the SDC chairperson might be focusing on increasing enrolments to please the parents who elected them to office. A school head may see the need to increase levies whereas the SDC may have different opinions about that. Effective schools need both a powerful SDC and a powerful school head with a clear distinction of responsibilities between these two to uphold stability and distinction. Ranson et al. (2005) [7] argue that through assisting in improving working situations at schools the school development committees make the teaching and learning environments conducive thus raising the levels of education attainment at schools. They further advocate that good governance generates improved results. In SDC school head relations, school heads play a pivotal role in inducting committee members most of whom would lack explicit experience in school dynamics. In their management of day-to-day operations of schools, heads ensure effective classroom management and implementation of the curriculum takes place. School heads thus shoulders the overall duty of ensuring curricular and academic implementation (Ranson et al., 2005). [7] It is thus important for SDCs to develop and maintain rapport with diverse community members of the school. If SDCs are to remain relevant and effective in doing their duty of assisting in the operations and development of schools, they must be accountable and transparent. Much of research studies conducted in Zimbabwe about SDCs focus on financial matters and very few if any focuses on work relationships between SDCs and the school head. This is a crucial area because lack of compatibility in carrying out their tasks between the school head and the SDC chairperson representing the SDC committee results in stunted development in schools. Schools need good management and governance if high educational outcomes are to be realised. This study explores the work relationships between the SDC chairpersons and school heads in primary schools in Goromonzi district of Zimbabwe to find its effect on school performance. It highlights possible conflicts that exist between school heads and school development committees as they carry out their mandates. The information obtained will assist in conflict awareness and

reduction and ensure school improvement. It is also believed that the findings of this study will enhance people's understanding of the need for cordial work relationships between SDCs and school heads. According to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture Statutory Instrument 87 [1] of 1992, non-government schools are required to form School Development Committees (SDC) to provide and assist in the operations and development of schools. The SDCs also have the responsibility of advancing the moral, cultural, physical, and intellectual wellbeing of learners. They also promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of parents, teachers, and learners. Thus, a positive work relationship between SDC members and the school head is crucial as it has long term benefits for the school, they enable the achievement of the school vision and mission. Salleh and Adulpakdee (2012) [3] believe that a strong working relationship between school heads and the SDCs would remove the "us" versus "them" divergence. This takes place when roles are clearly defined and when there are agreements on what is to be achieved (Mestry, 2006) [8]. When there is no clear layout of how these should operate in relationship to each other there might crop up a crisscross on working territories resulting in conflict which affect the development of schools.

Research Questions

Given the background above, the study sought to answer the questions listed below:

1. What is the level of understanding by school development committees of their school roles?
2. How effective are the working relationships between school development committees and school heads in schools?
3. How does the relationship between school development committees and school heads affect the performance of learners?

Research Methodology

The interpretivist paradigm and the qualitative research methodology were used in this study. A multi-case study design was employed in the study. These were employed as they offered the participants opportunities to recall their lived work experiences. The multi-case study research design allowed the researcher to study specific cases (Yin, 2003) [9]. Three primary schools were purposively selected. The school heads, deputy heads, SDC chairpersons and vice chairpersons were participants to this study. These were purposively selected as the researcher believed that they had the information the researcher was looking for. Semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis were used to generate qualitative data which was later qualitatively analysed basing on emerging themes.

The population and sample

Three primary schools were purposively selected as research sites from a cluster of ten primary schools in Goromonzi district, Mashonaland East province in Zimbabwe. The participants were composed of the heads, deputy heads, SDC chairpersons and vice chairpersons of the three schools. Purposive sampling was used to select participants that could give adequate information to the researcher (Klenke, 2016) [10].

Data generation and analysis

Semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis were used to collect data. These methods were used to enable the triangulation of the data, thus improving the validity of the findings. An interview guide was used during the semi-structured interviews. These were audio-recorded with each of the participants. The use of interviews was to enable the participants to explain the understanding of work relationships that existed at the school between the SDC chairpersons and the school heads. The interviews enabled me to gain insights into their feelings and outlooks towards their relations at the schools.

Observation

Observations were made of how meetings were conducted by the SDCs and the school members and how they related to each other outside the meetings. The aim was to have a deep understanding of the work relations between the SDC chairpersons and principals. The researcher observed facial expressions, gestures made, and the tone of voices used as they interacted.

Document analysis

In this study the school documents analysed included records of minutes of meetings of SDCs with the school members and minutes of meetings with parents and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 [1]. The minute books provided evidence of how people interacted and their work relations, they contained information (Have, 2010) [11]. Through document analysis the results of discussions held in meetings could be noted, any disagreements could also be noted and the causes for the disagreements.

Observations and documentary analysis enabled me to verify the data that I had collected through interviews. When I started data gathering, I also started data interpretation and analysis to reveal outstanding trends, themes, and classification of the data. I went through all the transcribed data and assigned codes. Cohen et al. (2018:668) [12] say, "Coding is the ascription of a category label to a piece of data, decided in advance or in response to the data that have been collected. I thus coded similar data with similar codes. The process of analysing data involved different stages that included interpreting, organising, and arranging it to understand the varied data that would have been collected. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) [13] views data analysis as working with data through breaking it, organising it, searching for patterns and deciding what to what to tell others.

Findings and Discussion

This study sought to examine the effectiveness of work relations between SDC members and school heads in Zimbabwean primary schools. The demographic data was presented both as a table and in narrative form and the findings were presented as a detailed narrative after the demographic data.

Demographic characteristics of participants

Table 1: Participants by sex

| Sex | Head | Deputy head | Chairpersons | Vice Chairpersons |
|--------|------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Female | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Male | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

The school members were composed of both males and females and when it came to SDC members all chairpersons were males. All the school heads were aged above fifty and the deputy heads were in the forty-six to fifty age group. All the SDC members were in the forty-six to fifty age group. This shows that all the participants were mature people.

Actual findings

People elected to SDC positions often do not have a clear understanding of the education system unless those elected were once in the education system, which in most cases is not so. Some of those elected to SDC positions were elected because they were well known in the community or were vocal in meetings. It is therefore the task of school heads to explain the roles of SDC members to them basing on the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 [1]. When asked about the effectiveness of immersing new SDC members into leading school activities from nowhere the school heads indicated that they inducted the SDC members before they started enacting their roles at the schools. All the school heads indicated that they arranged induction programmes for the new members elected to office since they lacked a deep understanding of their roles at the schools. When documents were analysed, there was evidence of induction programmes that were conducted. This was an important practice in the schools as it brought the SDC members into picture of what was expected of them in the schools. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 [1] was used in inducting the SDC members. This government document outlines the roles of the SDC members. When the SDC chairpersons were asked about their understanding of their duties as SDC chairpersons, they indicated that they knew their roles. One of the chairpersons said, "I understood my roles after having been inducted by the school head. As new members of the SDC we were all inducted and each member knows his/her roles." Vice chairpersons indicated the same that they knew their roles after having been inducted by the school head when they were elected to office. When asked about the effectiveness of the induction workshops, the chairpersons and the vice chairpersons indicated that the induction workshops were very effective and informative. The responses by the participants showed that school heads played an important role in making sure that SDCs were well informed about their roles. Salfi (2011) [14] advocates that the heads of effective schools involve parents and the community in the improvement of schools. In a capacity assessment of SDCs conducted by Boonstoppel (2010) [15] in Manicaland province in Zimbabwe, it was found out that many SDCs were not fully cognisant of their roles and responsibilities, thus the need for induction. A lack of a full understanding of their roles is likely to affect learners'

academic performance negatively. To improve knowledge of their roles and responsibilities school heads inducted all the elected SDC members. Thus, training SDCs helped both in solving managerial issues and in improving school-community relations (Boonstoppel, 2010) [15]. This also reduced conflicts of roles that are likely to crop up when the SDC members are not fully cognisant of their roles. Both school heads and the SDC members agreed to the important role by heads of inducting them on their roles and responsibilities at school.

School Development Committee members had varied agendas when elected to office. The deputy heads pointed out that some of the SDC chairpersons came into office thinking that they would be better at developing the school than their predecessors only to discover that it was not that easy. Nyandoro et al. (2013) [16] pointed out that the improper use of school funds by school heads and School Development Committees was a problem experienced in the decentralisation of the education system in Zimbabwe. This belief made some SDC members come into office with preconceived ideas that there was misuse of funds at the school and that their aim was to curb that. The deputy heads also pointed out that the attitudes of some of the SDC chairpersons were that they could handle finance issues better than their predecessors. Decentralisation of the education system is a noble idea as it means a transfer of powers from above to varied subordinate officials (Yousuf et al., 2010) [17]. When properly handled it leads to greater public participation in the administration of schools thus leading to improved performance of schools. School heads pointed out that those SDC members who were elected to office with preconceived ideas later discovered that what they thought was on the ground was not it, the country's poor economy affected school projects negatively. A lack of funds had been a challenge their predecessors faced. Rhim (2013) [18] acknowledges that the lack of resources is a challenge in public schools and is further compounded by a country's economic downturn. The school development chairpersons and the school heads concurred that the inflows of cash from parents was very erratic so much that it was very difficult to fund school projects. In addition to this the value of the school funds were eroded by inflation. This led to the failure by schools to achieve their developmental targets. One of the heads argued saying, "With the failing economy of the country, we then asked the SDC members whether there was abuse of funds or there were inadequate funds." This mistrust that lingers in people's minds causes conflict. Both the school heads and the SDC members showed ongoing concern about the lack of inadequate resources in relation to school expectations as this affected the delivery of quality education.

An important observation noted during interviews with school heads was that some decisions made by SDC chairpersons were done to please their electorate at the expense of quality education. One of the heads queried the decisions made by the SDC chairperson at their school. The head said, "The working environment at this school was good before the introduction of hot sitting. Now with this hot sitting issue, I am not sure whether we will maintain our high pass rates." Hot sitting is the practice in schools where classes share classrooms because of lack of

classrooms and because of big enrolments. When probed further, the head pointed out that the previous SDC committee had called for the introduction of sessions at the school. This was against the interest of the head because it affected the pass rate of the school. When the deputy head at the school was asked about the effects of hot sitting at the school, he pointed out that resources were stretched to cater for the large numbers of learners in the school and that teachers had to share classrooms resulting in teachers having fewer hours in the classroom with their learners as another class would have to use the same class. He also pointed out that this affected the morale of teachers who were used to be in classrooms with their learners all day long. When asked about the benefits of introducing sessions in the school the SDC chairperson cited high enrolments which meant more funds for school projects from the fees that parents would have paid. He also explained that this was meant to cater for all children who needed primary education from the surrounding community. Different perceptions were noted here. Whereas the head considered maintaining the school's high pass rate, the SDC chairperson focused on accommodating large numbers at the school. This showed a conflict of interest which in turn affected learners' academic outcomes since part of their learning time was spent learning while outside classrooms and the other half in classrooms. Rhim (2013) [18] further advocates that even if the SDC functions well, the work relationship between SDC chairpersons and the head usually has inherent tensions. The head has the educational knowledge, experience, aptitude, and administrative skills (Okendu, 2012) [19] which might not be found in the SDC chairpersons. Despite the school heads having educational and administrative qualities, parents expect the SDCs as their representatives to have a watchful eye over the performance of the heads. It appeared accountability issues to their local constituents made SDC chairpersons make some decisions that did not in sync with those of the school heads.

School heads had mixed feelings about their work relationships with SDCs. Whereas they regarded them as the conduits between the community and the school, they saw them harbouring some opinions that were not in line to those of the school heads thus negatively affecting high learner academic performance. When asked whether the SDCs were necessary in schools both heads and deputy heads indicated that they were necessary. The heads indicated that the SDCs became very handy when talking to parents on fees payment and on developmental projects. This is supported by Dzvimbo et al. (2020) [20] who advocate that despite the unpopular decisions SDC chairpersons sometimes make, they play a critical role in developing schools. Baral et al. (2019) [21] add on saying improved quality in public education needs co-ordinated efforts by all people. This therefore supports the idea of having SDCs in schools. Thus, SDCs work with parents and the community for the development of schools. That is an important role played by SDC chairpersons and their team which school heads and their deputies acknowledged. Baral et al. (2019: 59) [21] further advocates that SDCs "... form an essential bridge between the community and the school..." When asked about how effective their work relationships were with school heads

the chairpersons indicated that they may have had different opinions to those of school heads but were quite eager to work with the heads for the development of the schools. The chairpersons acknowledged that school heads were the professional people who were involved in running schools daily, thus they were more knowledgeable about the schools than them. They pointed out that blending the heads' ideas and those from the SDCs who represented parents, contributed to the development of the schools. Though differences in perception were experienced in schools between SDC chairpersons and the school heads, the school heads always found amicable ways of solving the differences to avoid negative effects on the performance of the schools, particularly the learners. This is because they acknowledged the importance SDCs, and parents were to the development of schools. Without the involvement of parents in the development of schools and in the learning of their children, this would affect the development of the schools. The SDCs and the parents are an important element in the well-functioning of schools that must not be missed. Yousuf et al. (2010) [17] argues that "... improvement in education is not possible until parents and community are involved in school management affairs." This therefore shows how important harmonious work relations between SDC members, and the school members are for improved school development and the performance of learners. If parents withdraw their children from schools or refuse to pay fees the performance of schools and their development activities will be negatively affected. School heads therefore must ensure that any conflict that crops up in the school is professionally solved. Schools need effective work relationships between the SDC chairpersons, their committee members, school heads and teachers. Such relationships are healthy for the school community and learners. The school heads pointed out that they always built consensus and avoided conflicts with the SDC chairpersons when differences in opinion arose (Afful-Broni, 2012) [4]. They would sit down with the SDC members and ironed out issues amicably with the aim of improving the conduciveness of the school for both learners and teachers.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the study by the researcher:

- School heads conducted induction programmes for newly elected SDC members since these members were oblivious of their roles as SDC members.
- A legislation that governs the operations of SDCs exist in schools. However, the committees still encountered challenges as they do their work.
- Failure to amicably resolve conflicts between the SDC chairpersons and school heads negatively affect school operations.
- The role of SDCs is to focus on developmental issues of the schools, attempts to engage themselves in administrative issues will complicate issues in schools.
- The effectiveness of SDCs is affected by them being elected to school committees with preconceived ideas.

- SDCs contribute to the development of schools. They also serve as the link between schools and communities.
- Conflicts exist in schools between SDCs and school heads because of different opinions. School heads ensure that these do not affect the operations of the school through solving them amicably.

Recommendations

Basing on findings and conclusions listed above the researcher made the following recommendations.

- School heads should periodically hold training programmes for SDC members in addition to the induction programme. It would be more beneficial if different facilitators are used for the training programmes besides using the school head and to have exchange visits with other schools to learn how other SDCs work.
- School heads should be appointed to lead schools because of their experiences and knowledge. SDC members should work with school heads and their teams.
- SDC chairpersons and their members should come to schools with the agenda of developing schools and not as fault finders.
- Conflicts that may arise between SDC chairpersons and school heads should be solved amicably to avoid dampening the spirits of the school community.
- School heads should learn about conflict management to lead effectively lead their schools.
- School heads should make good use of the knowledge, skills, and experiences in SDC members for the benefit of the school.
- SDCs link with the community, thus school heads should make use of this connection to improve relations with the community and thus gain their support of the schools.

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