

Teacher Quality in the Zimbabwean Education System: Perceptions and expectations of School Administrators

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to find out the perceptions and expectations of school administrators of a high quality teacher in their schools. The study was guided by the social constructivist theory which asserts that knowledge mentally constructed and is related to the action and experiences of individuals involved in the activity. The population of 30 participants were considered for this study from ten urban primary schools in Bindura District. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the subjects 10 school heads and 10 deputy school heads. Data were gathered through open-ended questionnaires where 8 School Heads responded to questionnaires and two were interviewed and 10 Deputy Heads responded to questionnaires. Data were qualitatively and quantitatively using frequencies and bar graph to illustrate responses and qualitatively analysed using interpretive analysis to analyse the data where the researchers interpreted the texts from the open-ended guided responses. The study found out that a high quality of teacher is good in scheming and planning as well as lesson delivery and good relations with both fellow teachers and administrators. The study discovered that other crucial characteristics of a high-quality teacher in the schools were effective communication skills, timeliness, positive relationships, class delivery, and record keeping. Having the ability to employ technology within the teaching and learning process and serving as a role model. The study recommended staff development of teachers suggested teachers pursue professional development related to the integration of technology into instruction. This study also revealed that the Teacher curriculum has to be reviewed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in collaboration with Teacher's colleges.

Keywords: High Quality, Administrators, School Head, Deputy School Head, Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality can be defined in terms of academic qualification, academic knowledge pedagogical knowledge, classroom practices and teacher characteristics (Shulman 1987, Darling-Hammond 2000, Cockrain –Smith 2003). Teacher quality is considered as a critical factor in educational quality and pupil achievement (Darling-Hammond 2000, Cockran-Smith 2003). Teacher quality is not easy to define since a number of variables come into play when you try and define it. According to Ingverson and Rowe (2007) many researchers have conceptualised teacher quality in diverse ways. The focus has been on teacher characteristics, teacher behaviour, teacher knowledge and teacher knowledge of teaching. According to Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) teacher quality has two dimensions what teachers should held accountable for in terms of student achievement and what opportunities of leaning teachers establish in their classroom. Hence a quality teacher should be the one with knowledge and ability to create opportunities for student learning.

Teacher qualifications are considered as a critical factor in determining teacher quality. A high quality

teacher will possess a certificate, diploma or degree. Rice (2003) found out that teacher qualifications were positively correlated to student achievement although the results were not consistent across grades and subjects. In the area of mathematics a masters degree contributed more to student achievement than undergraduate degree. Different countries have different qualifications requirements for a high quality teacher. The No Child Left Behind NCLB (2001) law in the US specifies that high quality teachers in other countries and questioned the use of qualifications as a measure of quality majority of the researchers fear that teacher qualification is a key variable of teacher quality. In Zimbabwe teachers will acquire a diploma in education obtained from Teachers colleges, technical colleges and universities as well as a degree in education from universities.

An extra standard by which instructors might be judged is the academic knowledge teachers possess. A competent teacher's topic expertise is one of the most essential attributes. Shulman, (1987) & Ingersoll, (2003) confirm in their researches that subject matter knowledge is positively correlated to student achievement. Goldhaber and Brewer (1997) found out that students gain more from a teacher with subject content in mathematics than a teacher who is not a specialist. Proficiency in academic subject is a critical determinant of teacher quality.

Shulman (1987) identified pedagogical knowledge as a critical element of teacher quality A competent teacher is able to deliver the subject in a way that makes sense to the students. Due to the complexity of the teaching and learning processes, there have not been many studies in this area. Wilson et.al. (2001) state that it can be challenging to separate and assess the relative contributions of different teaching knowledge facets, such as psychology, sociology, and learning theories, and to quantify how these elements affect teaching and learning. On the other hand, Wilson et al. (2001)'s research revealed that pupils taught by certified maths teachers outperformed those taught by non-certified teachers on standardised examinations. Classroom actions are considered as important indicators of teacher quality. A research by Looney (2005) found out those middle class teachers practices impacted positively to student achievement. Other researches by Schater & Thin (2000) and Robyn (2001) confirmed that teacher classroom practices contributed positively to student achievement. Teacher characteristics are an indicator of teacher quality. Ali (2009) asserts that important indicators of teacher quality are the traits which educators possess. There is no evidence of a comprehensive research done on Zimbabwe yet.

Ndethiu (2019) identifies communication is a very important component of the teaching profession and a powerful enabling instrument for actual learning in the classroom. Teachers utilise communication as a learning technique primarily for education and classroom management. To put it briefly, an effective teacher has to be a skilled communicator. Authentic thinking is concerned about reality which does not take place in ivory, but only in communication. Similar to this, for any relationship based on a school to be successful, communication must be effective. Gertmeir et.al. (2016) posits that the teacher's ability to communicate effectively is essentially resource to a strong partnership between the school and the family."

According to Archana and Archana (2020), interpersonal skills are those required to positively impact others in a social setting. It follows that having these social skills establishes a solid basis for consistent and effective communication, which is a crucial metric for evaluating a teacher's effectiveness. In the opinion of Hogie (1997), the core of social life is interpersonal competence. In this instance, possessing strong interpersonal skills demonstrates the kind of excellent teaching that the public demands. Teachers, who are motivated, according to Niemlec & Ryan (2009), are more committed to their work. Positive relationships and an optimistic outlook are inherently triggered by motivation. Building strong relationships is a vital component required to guarantee education. In conclusion, a positive outlook is a certain sign of a superior instructor.

Mayers et. Al. (2019) states that more specifically teacher empathy is the degree to which instructors work deeply to understand students personal and social situations, feel caring and concerns in response to students

positive and negative emotions and communicate their understanding and caring to children through their behaviour”. The true purpose of empathy in teaching and learning is to foster a positive relationship between the instructor and the students, which will eventually result in the students respecting and trusting the teacher because they know that they are aware of and sensitive to the sentiments of the students. We argue that instructors provide better education when they empathise with their students “Mercer et al (2016:p117). In summary, it is accurate to say that empathy is a strong sign of a good teacher According to Reeves (2016) in Mayer I et al (2019: p116) teachers with high degree of empathy reduces unnecessary challenges. Empathy ensures teachers understand their children with a high degree of tolerance. Thus tolerance is a essential element of a high quality teacher.

According Pannavaikko (2012) teachers should be the role models. During the school life school children spent most of their time at the school. In this regard schools should have best teachers with the ability to teach, love teaching and built moral qualities. In a nut shell, teachers are called to be role models in order for them to be classified as quality.

Jussuf and Gorontalo (2005: p33), states “to produce human resources with high quality we need education with high quality too}. According to Heller (2008), there should be a number of program improvements made in schools. Teachers colleges ought to review their curricula in this situation. In the opinion of Fwu and Wang (2002), enhancing teacher quality is crucial since teachers are the foundation of every educational change. In actuality, teacher education curricula should receive greater attention since they should serve as a strong foundation for lifetime learning.

According to Gradler (2002), creating and putting into practice techniques to build the abilities and knowledge required for teachers to effectively use technology as instructional tools is becoming a bigger problem in education. One important contextual component that reflects the competence of teachers is the degree to which they are equipped to integrate technology into their courses and instruction. Regarding the same subject, Schrum (2002) said that teachers have a plethora of opportunities for continuing their education through the use of technology, but first they need to feel at ease with it. Teachers Colleges and universities ensure students are equipped with theory and they also go for micro teaching and teaching practice to equip them with classroom practice.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

The quality of teachers in Zimbabwe has been identified as a threat to quality of education(Nziramasaanga (1999). School administrators in Zimbabwe include School Heads and Deputy School Heads these are responsible for maintaining quality in schools. There are no agreed indicators to determine teacher quality. The goal of the study was to identify the indicators that school administrators use to the quality of the teacher.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What indicators are used by school administrators identify quality teacher among their staff?

METHODS

This research used the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research involves the researcher studying the participant in their natural setting. The researcher visited the schools interviewed administrators and used an open-ended unguided questionnaire for administrators to fill in.

Research Design

A multiple case study design was used in this study to focus on the schools as research sites. The case study design was preferred because it allowed the researcher to focus on key players in administration of schools and examine the schools social units with a specific context to be able to understand it better. The researcher sought to find indicators administrators used to identify a high quality teacher among their staff.

Population

The population of the study consisted of 30 School administrators and 15 were School Heads and 15 were Deputy School Heads.

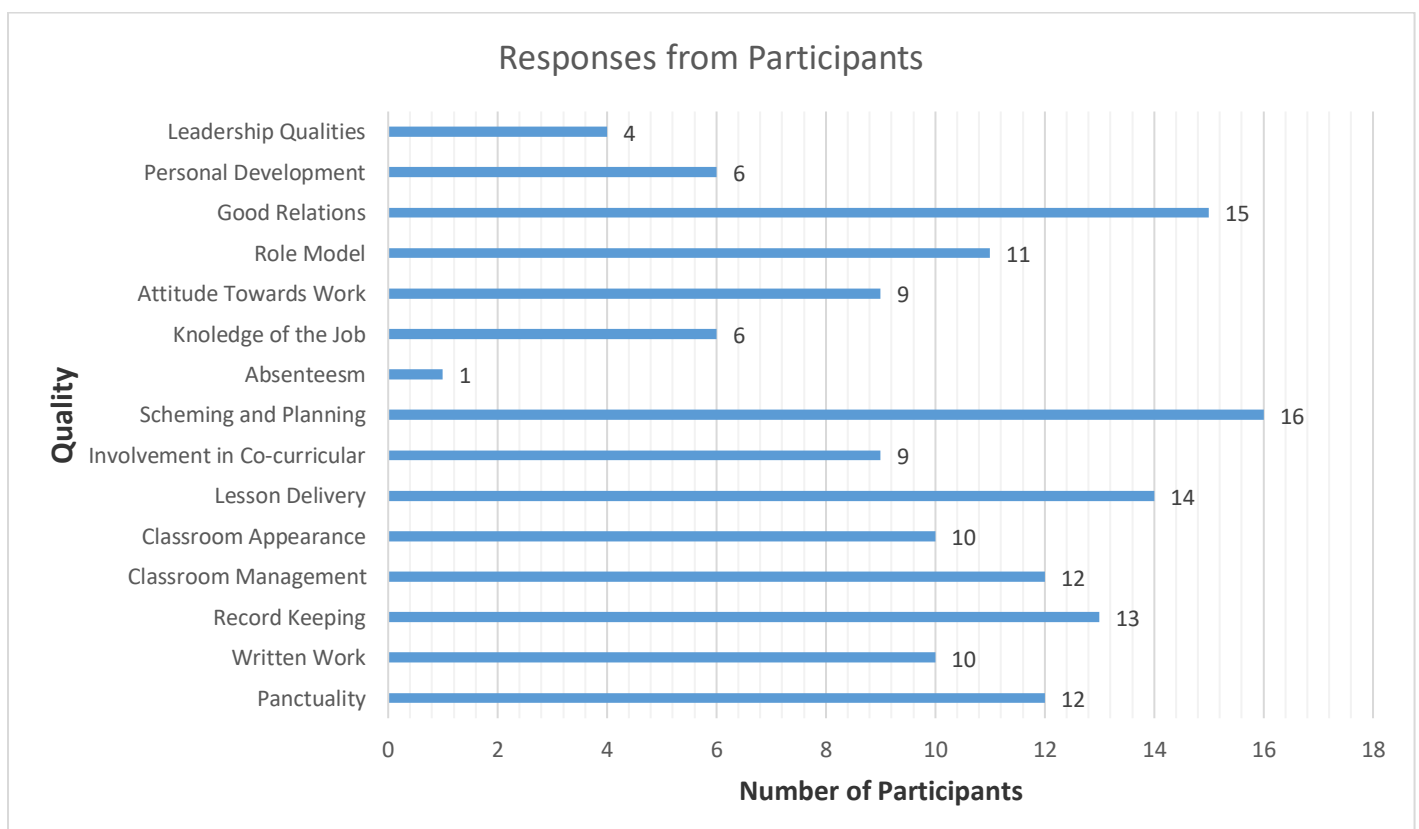
Sampling

To purposive sampling techniques was used to identify the participants to this study. The participants included 10 school heads and 10 deputy heads and responded to questionnaires and two school heads were interviewed. The purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to pick individuals with the relevant and important information to the study.

Data Generation and Analysis

To generate data interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used to generate data. The researcher was able to clarify complex questions and follow up on the responses made by the participants. The data were qualitatively analysed. Themes were derived from the initial interviews and analysis involved identifying common themes and relating them to other themes. The researcher had the task of integrating the themes to generate meaning and understanding. Validity and reliability were ensured through member checking and confirmability.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION



A high quality teacher needs to ensure that he or she should always be punctual. A percentage of 67% of the participants identified punctuality as a quality indicator. One participant had this to say “*The punctuality of the teacher influences pupils’ punctuality as well*”. Another participant also said ‘*A high quality teacher needs to prepare adequately before lessons commence*’. Hence the teacher should not be someone who steals learning and teaching time by being late. A high quality teacher usually gives work over and above the minimum expectations from the Ministry of Education. The work is marked on time and homework is given regularly including morning work as well constant monitoring of corrections. The records of a high quality teacher are detailed and authentic. The teacher has full control of the class, maintaining sitting orderly arrangements and minimising noise disruptions. The classroom is neat, attractive and refreshing, eye catching. The teacher has charts and children’s’ work on the walls very colourful and has a learning corner. It should be appealing to learners. On participant said” *the classroom should have colourful and meaningful learning corner*”. Wilson et al. (2001) discovered in their research that a teacher’s qualifications also affect the quality of the teacher.

A high quality teacher delivers a lesson in an exciting and motivational manner. There is logical presentation using appropriate language, clear introduction and steps to be followed as well as clear lesson objectives, development and closure. This is well prepared and there is evidence of pupil to pupil interactions through group activities and relevant media. The teacher uses child centred methods of teaching. The schemes of work are detailed and asked on the syllabus and are in place before the term commences. The teacher is able to interpret the syllabus to suit the class and prepare the correct amount of content. Lesson plans should be derived from the scheme of work, with specific achievable objectives. The lesson plan should be detailed. This is consistent with the findings of Shulman (2019), who also found that pedagogical expertise plays a crucial role in evaluating a teacher’s competence.

A high quality teacher is an all-rounder and should participate in all school activities. The teacher should be conversant with current approaches to teaching and learning. The teacher has good habits and positive attitudes related to teaching and individual communication. Ndethin (2019) also discussed the importance of communication in determining what makes a good teacher. The teacher should be able to learn from other competent fellow teachers and be able to research and beef up his/her subject content. The teacher should have knowledge of the subject content. Additionally supporting this issue of subject matter are Goldhaber and Brewer (1997). A high quality teacher according to another participant is “*self-driven, duty consensus, cooperative*” the teacher has a positive attitude and goes the extra-mile he is committed to his work and is flexible and adapts to a changing environment.

The teacher should be exemplary in presentation and dress code to the expectations of the Ministry of Education. This is also supported by Pannaikko (2012), who also found that educators ought to serve as role models. He/she should be a role model and confident and committed to one’s duty. Punctuality and being present for work and should exhibit good behaviour are qualities of a high quality teacher. The teacher is supportive of the school administrators and has good working relationships with them.

A high quality teacher has self-discipline, is highly motivated and devoted to his or her very devotional, controls and delegates and is well versed with decision making. This is also further supported by the research done in 2009 by Niemiec and Ryan, who discovered that a quality is driven motivation. The high quality teacher is a team player and support of school administration. The teacher should have information technology skills and competences. He or she has to be knowledgeable of the policies that guide professionals and should attain high qualifications by embarking on further studies.

CONCLUSION

The researchers came to the conclusion that teachers of the highest calibre are those who consistently well

prepared for their work on a daily basis. The study found out that a high-quality teacher is someone who can both inspire students during class and is self-motivated for the teaching profession. This study also revealed that excellent teachers are those who engage in all school activities and possess strong interpersonal skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, the researchers suggest the following:

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education ought to arrange staff development programmes in schools to enable teachers have an identity and beliefs to improve their efficiency.
- Teachers should be encouraged to pursue professional development in area of effective communication.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Teacher Colleges should work together to improve the teacher education curriculum so that it meets the perceptions and excitations of school administrators of a high quality teacher.

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