Examining Factors That Contribute Towards Low Morale Amongst Teachers in Bikita District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The aim of the present study is to assess the factors that contribute towards low morale among teachers in Bikita District. The population comprised of all the teachers in the district which has a teacher population of 1800 teachers made up of 1200 teachers in the primary sector and 600 teachers in the secondary sector. A sample of 300 teachers with 200 coming from the primary and 100 from the secondary school sector was selected using simple random sampling. The study employed the quantitative methodology and made use of the descriptive survey design. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data. The study revealed that the major factors that contributed to low teacher morale were poor salaries, heavy teaching loads above the official teacher-pupil ratio, closed climates, poor accommodation, long distances to the main roads and exclusion from policy formulation. The study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should improve the salary level of teachers and other related conditions of service towards boosting morale.
Keywords: Assessment, factors, low morale, teachers and district.

INTRODUCTION

A decline in the past ten years in the morale of teachers is identified within the Zimbabwean rural schools as the major reason for high-levels of teacher-turnover, poor results and lack of confidence in the education system [1]. Many rural schools are shunned by qualified teachers due to the difficult conditions under which teachers operate [2]. As the president of one of the teachers organizations observed, teaching is a socially responsible occupation which is highly accountable and bureaucratic, demanding intellectually, emotionally and physically and intensive and unrelenting [3]. Teachers in Zimbabwean schools are also finding it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of students with a wider range of abilities resulting from inclusion policies which have seen the number of students with disabilities in mainstream classroom [3]. As Ndlovu [2] argues, for teachers in the rural areas over and above the normal "abnormal" work overload, they have to contend with politically motivated violence and intimidation. Qualified teachers who are highly motivated are the major ingredients that have been helping the Zimbabwean education system to be regarded as one of the best systems in Africa [4]. It was necessary therefore, to assess the major factors that contribute to low morale of teachers in Zimbabwe's rural schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Blum in Coughlan [5] morale is a global concept embracing the individuals work attitudes and job satisfaction, but not reducible to either of them. According to Blum therefore, work attitudes contribute to job satisfaction, and job satisfaction to morale. Coughlan [5] defines morale as the extent to which the individual's needs are satisfied and the extent to which the individual perceives that satisfaction. According to Mackenzie [6] morale means the feelings of enthusiasm and loyalty that a person or group has about a task or job. Strasser [7] on the other hand, argues that morale is the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence or loyalty) of an individual or group to the function or task at hand. From the above conceptualizations of morale, it becomes very apparent that no worker can achieve any meaningful level of production if their levels of morale are low.

The prevalence of low morale among teachers is experienced internationally. In the United States of America for example as Stephens [8] states, the average length of teaching career is eleven years. One quarter of beginning teachers leaving teaching within four years and they all cite frustration with the job. In Europe, as Krynacou and Sutciffe [9] posit, low teacher morale is caused by role expectations as well as unreasonable time demands on the part of the teacher. In Africa and Asia there is a wide range of views about causes of low teacher morale. As Benell *et al* [10] propound, teachers

working in low income countries are poorly motivated due to a combination of low morale and job satisfaction.

In Zimbabwe a major factor that led to low morale amongst teachers emanated from the government's education for all policy which declared education as a fundamental right for every citizen of the country [26]. As a result of this pronunciation, schools have high teacher-pupil ratios. Nkomo [11] argues that due to this expansion, teacher-pupil ratio increased from 1:30 to 1:45 in secondary schools and from 1:35 to 1:60 in primary schools. This implies overloading teachers with work. Added to this problem of overload is multigrade teaching in the primary schools and multi-script system in the secondary school where one teacher teaches in two sessions in the morning and afternoon [11].

Another important dimension to teacher morale is availability of accommodation. As Madziyire [12] posits, most of the newly qualified teachers from colleges in Zimbabwe look for schools with decent accommodation. Conditions in the workplace including physical facilities like teacher accomodation, classrooms and toilets among others influence teacher morale. These constitute physiological needs in Maslow's theory of needs [12]. These are the basic physiological needs which must be availed by the school leadership. As Hoyle [13] states a poor working environment causes low morale amongst teachers. There is need therefore for heads to provide good buildings to make their schools attractive to teachers and pupils [12].

According to Sachs [14], teachers work in a socially responsible occupation which is highly accountable and bureaucratic, demanding intellectually, emotionally and physically and seems to get more unrelenting year after year as they are expected to complete a huge variety of tasks over and above face to face teaching. These extra duties include a range of teaching and pedagogy related tasks but in addition, there is an expectation for teachers to participate in school planning, community relations, workplace health and safety, student welfare, extra-curricula activities; and to cater for the needs of students with a wide range of abilities and disabilities [6].

Despite the huge pressure on teachers to do more and more, the status of the profession has not improved [6]. According to Hoyle [13] it is currently lower than that of other major professions and the reason for this seems to be a lack of understanding of what teachers actually do. There is a perception that because everyone has been to school they know what teachers do when, in fact, how teachers are portrayed in the media and on film and the constant, often uninformed, commentary on 'failing schools' replaces reality with an inaccurate picture [15].

Lack of status is also exacerbated by the problem of teacher remuneration [6]. While there are many calls to raise awareness of the valuable work teachers do Hoyle [13] in Mackenzie [6] points out the cost of large increases to a workforce that exceeds all other professions in size and is paid from the public purse presents difficulties. Add to this the myths that 'anyone can teach'; 'teaching is women's work'; and teachers have too many holidays; and it is not hard to see why teachers struggle to be valued and why morale is low [16, 17].

Another aspect that affect the level of morale among workers in general and teachers in particular is the quality of leadership in organization [12]. Recent research continues to emphasize the importance of the principal as the key to improved learning and teaching environments [18]. As Houchard [19] argues, although morale is ultimately something one provides for oneself, it can be enhanced and nurtured by school leaders. Those principals who positively reinforce their teaching staff as well as handle the many contingencies in the work environment are behind improving the morale and self-esteem of their teachers [19]. Clifford Campbell's study of leadership behaviours that contributed to high teacher morale [19] included: showing interest in teachers' work and offering assistance, supporting the actions and decisions of staff members, allowing self-direction in work and showing confidence in the ability of teachers, and allowing the staff to participate in the decision making process. Principals must realize that promoting high teacher morale does not just happen in the course of daily events, it must be cultivated, developed and nurtured by creative, receptive principals and requires much time, effort and planning [19]. Whitaker *et al* [20] state that administrators must understand the existence and importance of the dynamics and relationships that exist is a working environment as they are essential elements to improvement and morale.

Effective principals are servants to the teachers; they serve as guardians of instructional time, help teachers with discipline matters, empower the teachers to develop discipline procedures and codes, and then support teachers as they enforce the policies they developed [19]. Recognition, achievement, responsibility, interesting work, and advancement all lead to a more positive attitude toward a job. As Houchard [19] advises, it is imperative that school administrators lead for high teacher morale and frequently check and monitor the morale of teachers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teachers constitute one of the most critical variables for quality education to take place in the schools. Where teachers' morale is low, the likelihood of poor performance by pupils is very high, and yet most teachers are frustrated by a number of things at their places of work. Teacher morale is therefore a critical phenomenon that needs to be understood in order to help schools keep their best teachers and produce good results.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the major drivers of low morale amongst teachers in rural areas?
2. How can teachers' low morale be improved?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to expose the major factors that contribute to low morale among teachers in rural schools and come up with practical work able measures to ameliorate the situation. The researchers hope that the findings will conscientise the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, heads of schools, school development committees/ association and other stakeholders about the importance of a happy teacher and his / her contribution to the success of their children.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study employed the descriptive survey method which according to Ary and Razaviah [21] lacks predictive power since the research may discover and describe "what is" and unable to predict "what would be". In view of small size of the sample used, the findings of the study would have limited generalisability. It has to be pointed out also that attitudes about a phenomenon (like morale) are essentially subjective and cannot be measured accurately. In other words, attitudes have no universally acceptable scales of measurement; and measures that were used in this study cannot be considered to be very accurate.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The researchers delimited the investigation to assessment of those factors that contribute to low morale amongst teachers in Bikita District using a sample of 200 primary school teachers and 100 secondary school teachers. Perceptions of heads of schools, school development committee members and district education officers were not solicited for.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. According to Leedy [23], the descriptive survey method looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. It is also relatively easy to compile data onto a chart or graph because of the numbers that are made available. The questionnaire was the only instrument used for collecting data. As Kumar [22] argues, the questionnaire increases reliability as an instrument of gathering data because of its greater impersonality. Random sampling was employed to select a sample of 200 primary school teachers and 100 secondary school teachers. The researcher first sought permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and was granted before the questionnaires were distributed. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, all the questionnaires were completely anonymous and collected in self-addressed envelopes that were provided.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to investigate the factors that contribute towards low morale amongst teachers in Bikita District schools.

Table 1: Composition of sample by category (N=300)

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Primary teachers	200	67
Secondary teachers	100	33
Totals	**300**	**100**

Both sectors were adequately represented in the sample as there are more primary teachers in the district than their secondary counterparts.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by sex (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Male	104	52	53	53	157	52
Female	96	48	47	47	143	48
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

The information on Table 2 above shows that there were slightly more male teachers in the sample than female ones (male: 52%; female: 48%) respectively. Male primary teachers were 52% and male secondary teachers were 53%.

Table 3: Composition of respondents by professional qualifications (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Untrained	24	12	15	15	39	13
Certificate in Education	22	11	1	1	23	8
Diploma in Education	138	69	40	40	178	59
Certified Graduates	10	5	10	10	20	6
Uncertified Graduates	6	3	26	26	32	11
Others	0	0	8	8	0	3
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

Data on Table 3 reveals that more primary than secondary teachers are in possession of professional qualifications (primary teachers: 85%; secondary: 51%) respectively. Secondary schools have more unqualified teachers than the primary schools (secondary teachers: 49%; primary teachers: 15%).

Table 4: Composition of respondents by teaching experience in years (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0 – 5	48	24	31	31	79	27
6 – 10	96	48	49	49	45	48
11 – 15	30	15	15	15	45	15
16 – 20	18	9	4	4	22	7
21 and above	8	4	1	1	9	3
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

The majority of the teachers from both sectors were relatively new in the education system since they had served for less that ten years (primary school teachers: 72%; and secondary school teachers: 80%) respectively. On average 75% of the teachers have been with the system for less than ten years.

Table 5: Respondents' class sizes (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
25 – 30	0	0	0	0	0	0
31 – 40	0	0	42	42	42	14
41 – 50	60	30	48	48	108	36
51 – 60	114	57	10	10	124	41
Above 60	26	13	0	0	26	9
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

The information above shows that both primary and secondary classes were way above the official class sizes of 40 pupils in the primary school and 30 in the secondary school. The average class size in the primary school in this study is 55 pupils and in the secondary schools it is about 45 pupils.

Table 6: responses to the statement: "I am comfortable with the accommodation allocated to me at this school" (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	26	13	92	92	118	39
No	174	87	8	8	182	61
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

The majority of the respondents (61%) were not comfortable with the type of accommodation that was allocated to them by their schools. However, there appears to be some discrepancy on the responses between the primary and secondary school respondents.

Those who were not happy with their accommodation from the primary sector constituted 87% of the respondents and yet from the secondary school respondents only 8% were not comfortable.

Table 7: responses to the statement: "The head consults teachers before making decisions on policies that affect them" (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	34	17	26	26	60	20
No	166	8	74	74	240	80
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

There is congruence in the responses of primary and secondary teachers on this item as 83% of the respondents from the primary school indicated that they were not consulted before came up with decisions that affected them and 74% from the secondary school sector concurred with them. Only 17% and 26% from primary schools and 26% from secondary respectively, indicated that they were consulted.

Table 8: Responses to the statement: "Parents of my pupils provide the necessary support l need to teach their children" (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	154	77	15	15	169	56
No	46	23	85	85	131	44
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

The majority of respondents from the primary school sector (77%) were happy with the support they got from parents of their pupils, and yet 85% of the secondary schools teachers indicated that they were not getting the necessary support from parents of their pupils.

Table 9: Responses to the statement: "Given an opportunity, I would transfer to a better district" (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	144	72	88	88	232	77
No	56	28	12	12	68	23
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

Both respondents from the primary school sector and secondary school sector indicated that if an opportunity availed itself, they would transfer to some other district (primary teachers: 72%; secondary teachers: 88%) respectively.

Table 10: Responses to the statement: "I would like to leave teaching for greener pastures" (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	22	11	75	75	97	32
No	178	89	25	25	203	68
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

Most respondents from the primary sector stated that they did not want to leave teaching as a profession altogether (89%) and yet 75% of the respondents from the secondary sector would want to leave the teaching profession.

Table 11: Responses to the statement: "My head provides both professional and social support to me as I do my work" (N=300)

Category of Responses	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		Totals	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	92	46	41	41	133	41
No	108	54	59	59	167	59
Totals	**200**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**300**	**100**

Most respondents highlighted that heads of their schools were not providing both professional and social support to them as they did their jobs (primary teachers: 54%; secondary teachers: 59%). Those who were satisfied with the support they received from their heads constituted an average of 41% form both sectors.

The questionnaire had one open-ended question which complemented responses from the close-ended questions. The question wanted the respondents to list down those things they wanted to see happening in order to raise their morale. The most common issues mentioned were captured and recorded in order of their popularity as shown below:

Provide rural allowance	-100%
Improve teachers accommodation	-74%
Involve teachers in decision making	-90%
Provide resources for teaching	-85%
Make transferring easy	-82%
Closed school climate	-79%

DISCUSSION

There were slightly more male teachers than female ones. Most primary school teachers hold relevant professional qualifications. In the secondary sector a significant number of teachers are holders on non-teaching degrees. In terms of teaching experience, teachers from both sectors were relatively new in the system. Most of them had less than ten years in the field of teaching. What is apparent from this information is that both primary and secondary schools are staffed by teachers who possess the content for the pupils, although those in the secondary school who have no professional training may face challenges sharing that content with pupils. This finding (about teachers qualifications) confirms Ngara's [4] observations that teachers are the major ingredient that have helped Zimbabwe to attain high standards of literacy in spite of the economic challenge that country is experiencing.

The class sizes in both the primary and secondary schools were way above the official government teacher-pupil ratios. As Nkomo [11] argues, due to the government's education for all policy, which declared education as a fundamental right for every child, teacher-pupil ratio increased from 1:30 to 1:45 in the secondary schools and from 1:35 to 1:60 in the primary schools; thereby overloading teachers with work.

The majority of primary school teachers were not happy with the quality of accommodation that their schools allocated them and yet those in the secondary schools were quite satisfied. This therefore means that primary schools do not have the value of their teachers' private life. In some primary schools teachers were sharing rooms, which is a violation of their right to privacy. As Madziyire [12] states, conditions in the workplace including physical facilities like teacher accommodation, classrooms and toilets, among others, influence teacher morale immenrsely. These are the basic by the school leadership. As Hoyle [13] posits, poor accommodation causes low morale amongst teachers and thus schools should provide teachers with accommodation which they deserve as adults.

Heads were largely excluding teachers from decision-making on school policies that affected the teachers' work. In other words, heads of schools did not treat teachers as important stakeholders in the formulation of school policies. This tallies with observations by Canaya [24] who states that, secondary school teachers in Zambaoga were complaining about the management styles practiced by their principals. They claimed that they did not participate in the decision making and their voices were not heard and this affected their morale. Not only is decision-making important because information circulates around the system; individual members also feel more empowered and satisfied, knowing they have a hand at decision making [24]. As Anderson [25] emphasizes, in the context of educational institutions, teachers who feel that they have a hand at decision making, find a sense of purpose in a school, and thus work further towards its success.

Primary school teachers were happy with the support they were receiving from parents of their pupils and yet those from the secondary schools were quite dissatisfied. This could be attributable to the fact that parents of primary school children are in more closer contact with teachers because of their age. As Madziyire [12] argues, the closeness between primary school teachers and parents may be due to the three

reasons; first is the age of the pupils, secondly, the closeness of the primary school to most homesteads, and thirdly the familiarity of the primary school curriculum to most parents. All these three dimensions, were not equally applying to the secondary school system. Mackenzie [6] argues that support from parents motivate teachers to work harder for school children and even stay longer at those schools.

Heads of schools were not providing adequate professional and social support to their teachers. Teachers need that constant professional and social support in order to be assured that they are doing the right things and to be guided when they face professional or social challenges. As Houchard [19] emphasize, those principals who positively reinforce their teaching staff as well as handle the many contingencies in the work environment are behind improving the morale and self-esteem of their teachers. Whitaker *et al* [20] state that administrators must understand the existence and importance of the dynamics and relationships that exist in a working environment as they are essential elements to morale boosting and improvement of working capacity.

CONCLUSION
A multiplicity of factors contributes towards low teacher morale among teachers in Bikita District. Large class sizes, poor accommodation, excluding teachers during decision-making, lack of support by heads of schools and the lack of incentives for working in rural area, also contribute to low teacher morale. Teacher morale should be improved in order to make sure that teachers perform to their maximum for the benefit of pupils. If teacher morale is low, teachers are likely to spend a lot of time planning to transfer from their current schools at the expense of concentrating on their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations:
- Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should allocate more funds for the construction of teachers' cottages particularly in the primary schools to improve on teachers' accommodation.
- Schools should stick to official teacher-pupil ratios as large class sizes overload teachers with work thus reducing their morale.
- Heads of schools should be staff developed on how best to professionally and socially guide teachers who work under them in the schools so that they provide the necessary guidance to keep their morale high.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should improve salaries and conditions of teachers particularly in rural areas.

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