

Motivation Reinforcement Strategies to Improve Teachers' Performance in High Schools: A Perspective of Amathole East District of South African

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KEYWORDS Motivation. Reinforcement. Teacher Motivation. Teacher Performance

ABSTRACT Teacher job-related stress, high turnover, poor educational quality, and a lack of interest in work have all resulted from the rising prevalence of low teacher motivation for work. The goal of this research is to look at incentive reinforcement tactics for teachers to increase their performance. This study took a qualitative approach and used a case study research methodology. Focus group and one-on-one interviews were used to collect data from participants, while purposive and convenient sampling techniques were employed to select ten participants. These entailed eight teachers from two schools and two district education officials. Data were analysed through thematic and comparative analyses. Many strategies to improve motivation and teacher performance emerged from data, were analysed, and presented. The study recommended school leaders to address factors leading to demotivation of teachers. A further recommendation was making use of content knowledge and professional development to deal with teacher content gap.

INTRODUCTION

It is crucial to keep teachers motivated because many schools, especially in rural areas lack basic amenities to facilitate teaching and learning. This paper is intended to probe into motivation reinforcement strategies necessary to improve teacher performance in high schools. It is imperative to keep teacher morale high for quality performance. Pourtousi et al. (2018) indicate that support of teachers from education leaders lead to motivation and obedience of teachers, good working relationship and professional behaviour. It is important for education leaders to facilitate teachers' motivational needs such as leaves, bonuses, and many incentives to enable them to enjoy their work.

Remijan (2013) posits that highly motivated and satisfied teachers cause no conflict at work and show very high-performance levels. It should be noted that motivation by provisioning of important teaching amenities might attract new teachers and reduce the number of teachers resigning from work. According to Roohani and Khadijeh (2019), a supportive work atmosphere is vital for teachers to manage their many duties while also resulting in decreased attrition rates. This section has introduced motivation towards

improving teacher performance. The next section interrogates the background of teacher motivation and motivation strategies.

The Objective of the Study

The goal of this study was to look at motivation reinforcement tactics used in high schools to increase teacher performance.

The Theoretical Foundation

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was used in this research. This theory explains mechanisms that drive teachers to focus on work, to have more love for work, and increase performance levels. Maslow's theory structures the desired hierarchy of needs for all employees, including teachers. Self-actualisation, esteem needs, safety needs, physiological requirements, and social needs are all included in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Retna 2015). Bantwini and Letseka (2018) explains that employees always strive to achieve five motivation needs, which Maslow highlighted as physiological, safety, love, respect, and self-actualisation. Emanating from this is an additional satisfaction of needs separated into two distinguishable groups, namely, low-level needs such

as physiological, safety and love, and higher-order needs such as self-esteem and self-actualisation (Semelani-Meke 2013). It must be understood that low-order needs are deficiency needs, and if left unsatisfied, can lead to deprivation and teacher demotivation. It must be understood that teachers who are self-actualised and motivated are able to stimulate creative thinking among their learners and can provide healthy learning environments in their schools (Bantwini and Letseka 2018).

Even though Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can be effective towards motivation of teachers from an intuitive perspective, it should be noted that, it cannot stand on its own to influence teacher motivation in educational perspectives and requires a complementary theory.

Literature Review to Study

Teacher motivation is one of the most debated issues in the education arena across the globe. It is the responsibility of leaders for education at all levels to ensure that teachers in schools are motivated (Bantwini and Letseka 2018). The ever-decreasing morale of teachers towards work is currently affecting and compromising the quality of teacher performance in developed and developing countries (Seebaluck and Seegum 2013). It must be understood that people choose to take a career path in education for a variety of reasons, such as generating personal income, having a better standard of living, intellectual development and accord social status. Semelani-Meke (2013) revealed teacher motivation is primarily driven from the teacher's love to work with children and spirit to help others. Based on previous studies, this paper establishes that teachers join the teaching profession when they are highly motivated to change lives and make the world a better place. However, the environment that teachers must work in greatly frustrates their efforts and motivation.

The issue of teacher motivation deserves attention because the role of teachers is paramount both in the lives of individual students and in society. Teachers are regarded as being in influential positions laden with high expectations, but often, the conditions of the teaching profession do not encourage novice teachers and those already in service to remain in the career until retirement age (Semelani-Meke 2013). This has neg-

atively affected their motivation and creativity to meet expected high standards. Therefore, some teachers' hard work lies on simply the need to achieve a very basic lifestyle, which is food, shelter, and other basic needs.

Bantwini and Letseka (2018) revealed that there is a consensus that teachers with feelings of resentment and exhaustion may have low morale and productivity levels. The challenge of population explosion in developing countries, specifically in Asia and Africa, subjected teachers to very high workloads and extra working hours. Robbins and Judge (2015) established that this is a result of the increasing demand for education in developing countries. In countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, it has been revealed that lack of teacher motivation greatly affects teacher performance and literacy levels. Akyeampong (2017) established that students' academic achievement in a particular field is driven by the teacher's motivation and dedication. This explains why different teachers in the same school have different performance levels. Duflo et al. (2012) posits that high levels of job dissatisfaction, stress and burnout negatively affect motivation and ability to produce quality results among their students.

The current state of education has become greatly impacted by COVID-19. Teachers have to risk their lives to work in overcrowded schools in poor working environments with no motivation in terms of reward benefits. Based on literature reviewed, it is considered wise to implement incentive strategies to stimulate a positive attitude for teachers. Robbins and Judge (2015) revealed that teachers who are highly motivated to work are more likely to be high performers than those who are forced to do their jobs. Thomson and Turner (2013) argue that school management teams must develop a highly motivated team of teachers to build a culture of teamwork, creativity and hard work.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

This study employed an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist paradigm enables the researchers to go in-depth to find rich and extensive data on a particular topic. Based on that no-

tion, it was appropriate for the researchers to use semi-structured interviews to gather information from the participants. Subjectivity and various realities are central to the interpretivist paradigm, and interpretivists tend to examine topics from a group or personal experience standpoint. Creswell (2013) established that data gathered from interpretivists are often not generalisable to entire populations but are rather specific to situations and circumstances. Interpretivists collect qualitative data that leads to multiple interpretations (Robbins and Judge 2015). Just like positivists, the researchers first identifies a topic, reviews literature, designs the research, gathers qualitative data, analyses data, elaborates on the underlying concepts and theories, and finally, reports the findings. Interpretivists also collect data through observations, analysis of documents and narratives, interviews, case studies and audio-visual materials (Creswell 2014).

Research Approach

The Qualitative Research Approach was employed for this study to understand, interpret and establish a relationship between motivation and performance. According to Lichtman (2013), qualitative research provides researchers to gather, synthesise, and derive information from participants in their everyday or common situations through interviews and/or observations. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on testing hypotheses with statistical tools, qualitative research is investigating and comprehending a social problem from the perspective of a person in a natural situation.

Research Design

For this study, the researchers employed a case study approach to collect varied and rich kinds of data from many individuals to gain a more in-depth knowledge of the occurrence in the context of teacher motivation and performance.

Sampling for Research

Geographically, the sample came from the Amathole East Education District in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, where two high schools were chosen. The population sample were

all high school teachers in Amathole East Education District comprising two district education officials, two school management team members (one from each school) and six post-level 1 teachers (three from each school).

Data Collection Procedures

Data was gathered through focus groups and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Every one of the selected individuals was interviewed for at least 20 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded with participants' agreement to guarantee that both the researchers and the participants remembered exactly what was said and why. During interviews, participants were reminded of their rights such as freedom to answer or not to answer questions, freedom to take part in the interview and freedom to pull themselves out of the interviews at any time they wish.

Data Trustworthiness

Data in a qualitative study must possess four characteristics, that is, dependability, confirmability, verifiability, and transferability (Creswell 2013). For data trustworthiness, this study employed triangulation data collection methods such as recording of all interviews, data verification with sources, cross-checking of data with secondary data from transcripts and citing all the secondary sources where information was extracted in the text. The term "trustworthiness" refers to how qualitative data is stable, predictable, dependable, consistent, and reliable in the future, resulting in the same findings or outcomes as in the past.

Data Analysis

Data were transcribed and analysed using themes and sub-themes to make the text easy for the reader to read. Audio recordings were regularly listened to in order to form a strong bond with the data. Written transcripts were created, and first-hand input from participants aided the researchers in interpreting the data and writing the paper.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The previous section data analysis of this paper. This section presents a discussion of the findings. Below are the main research questions:

1. How does inspirational leadership and support affect teacher motivation?
2. How does full involvement in decision-making impact teacher motivation and performance?
3. How does flexibility in budgets affect teacher motivation and performance?
4. What are the prospects of workload allocation among staff to teacher motivation and performance?

Coded Information about Participants

Ten samples were purposively selected comprising two district education officials, two school management team members and six post level 1 teachers. Themes were developed from the four research questions following interviews with the participants.

Theme 1: Inspirational Leadership and Support

Inspiration leadership works hand-in-hand with support, and through such leadership, educational leaders inspire teachers to enhance high performance. Leaders oversee allocating resources and establishing clear objectives. Inspirational leaders also ensure that appropriate resources are available for successful teaching and learning. Through inspiration leadership and support, the teachers' working conditions become favourable leading to teachers' and learners' improved performance. Participants highlighted that education leadership must ensure availability of resources. Below is a discussion of sub-theme 1 emanating from established themes.

Sub-theme 1.1: Types of Resources Needed for Teacher Motivation

When asked about the types of resources available for their motivation, Participant B, a teacher of school A mentioned resources such as textbooks, photocopying machines, and stationery. This participant, however, complained about lack of financial motivation for extra working hours, saying if teachers are compensated for extra time, motivation will be high.

"We do have textbooks," Participant A, a member of school A's administrative team, confirmed Participant B's remark. "We do not have any shortages, as far as I am concerned. The school principal is concerned and ensures that all in-

structors have access to instructional materials. This gives me a lot of energy."

These participants agree that their principals borrow extra resources from neighbouring schools to assure resource availability. This is critical because it promotes collaboration and coexistence.

"The principal's industrious demeanour constantly pushes me to go the additional mile," said Participant 2, a teacher at School B. "The school principal is usually with us at school after normal working hours. My school administrator constantly appreciates the effort I put in, which makes me extremely happy. I always strive to provide my best."

The above statements show that teachers are motivated towards high performance if teamwork exists between the staff and school management team, so education leaders must use inspiration leadership by being exemplar leaders all the time.

Sub-theme 1.2: Relevance of Clear School Vision Statement Towards Teacher Motivation and Performance

Participant 2 from the school management team of School B said, "Teachers' performance is motivated by a clear school vision statement. Teachers must be aware of what the school stands for. All staff must be aware of and understand the school's vision, purpose, and motto. Teachers should be encouraged to think about what they need to accomplish in terms of their vision statement. School administration teams must assist teachers in understanding the importance of the vision statement and the role it plays in assisting the school in achieving high performance."

"Teachers must be aware of the school's long-term aims and objectives," said Participant 1, a teacher at School A. "Teachers' performance is linked to the school's vision statement, motivating them to think about how to achieve the school's goals."

"During planning, the schools' management aims must complement the vision and purpose," said Participant 3, a teacher from School A. "This will assist the leaders in determining what they should do."

Participants disclosed that since their schools have a clear vision statement, the school's matric

results increased to a one hundred percent pass rate in 2020.

Participant 1, a teacher from school B gave a contradicting view by saying, *"Our school has a clear mission statement, which stipulates long term goals and short-term objectives. It is sad to say that some staff and school management members are in comfort zone."*

This participant continued by explaining that the school is lacking role model leadership. School management team members in most cases lead by negative example. Such double standards cause demotivation among the staff members and obviously pull down teachers' effort towards work.

Participant 3, a teacher from school A reacted by spreading hands and said, *"There is nothing inspiring to learn from our lazy leaders."*

When asked to explain more, it was established that their school principal is always delegating people to do every task including the subjects allocated to him. The school principal is always frustrating teachers and ordering them carry out his own tasks, thus demotivating them.

Participant 4, a teacher from high school B consolidated this view by saying, *"School principals do not bother to inspire teachers even in the basic form. The school management team uses a lot of negativity and embarrassment when giving instruction to teachers. This is unprofessional and demoralises teachers."*

The study established that the school management team are unprofessional when giving instructions to teachers. Some school principals were reported as embarrassing their teachers in front of other people.

Theme 2: Teachers' Full Involvement in Decision-making

The study established that the school management team blocks teachers from partaking in many of the school's decision-making processes. Teachers complained of their views not being considered in many important decisions taken in their schools. Below is a discussion of sub-themes emanating from Theme 2.

Sub-theme 2: Teachers' Opinion in Schools Decision-making

Participant 2, School Management Team from School F disclosed, *"Teachers' opinions matter whenever a decision must be made. Unless the is-*

sue being discussed is not directly affecting teachers, that's when their participation is limited."

Participant 1, a teacher from School A, disagreed with the view of the School Management Team member above and had this to say, *"Teachers have limited input in important debates at management and leadership levels. When planning and making decisions at different levels, teachers are mainly tasked with the implementation role. Teachers in most cases have no room to challenge decisions taken by top leadership."*

Participant 3, a teacher from School B added, *"Any decision and planning in the education system is directly or indirectly affecting our conditions. It must be taken as a responsibility for teachers to take part in all planning and decisions taken in the education system. All stakeholders, including teachers, must be consulted to give their views on some important issues."*

The participant established the need of more teacher presentation and involvement in planning and decision-making at the school level, district and provincial (national) level. The study established the relevance of shifting from the top to bottom flow of decision making to the bottom-up system. This system would empower teachers to determine their destiny in the employment field.

Participant 5, a teacher from School A commented, *"As teachers, in many instances we would like to take part in decision-making on different matters but unfortunately, our leaders turn a blind eye. Teachers need a strong voice in structuring and implementing educational policies and strategies."*

Even though participants expressed dissatisfaction with their lack of a strong voice and involvement in the design and revision of education policies, the study's findings reveal that the Department of Basic Education has a constitutional obligation to do so.

After drafted policies are sent to Provincial Education Departments for deliberations for and amendments, the amended policies from the Provincial Education Department are forwarded to District Education Offices for more consultation. Following careful review from the District Education Offices, consultation on the structured policy is then passed down to the school level in collaboration with the School Management Team and School Governing Board committees.

Theme 3: Flexibility in Budgetary and Education Funding

The study found that the education system suffers from many immediate problems such as shortage of teaching staff, COVID-19 outbreak, overcrowding, and poor sanitation, among many others. There was also input that education leaders must include teacher motivation when structuring education policies and planning.

Sub-theme 3: Allocation of Funds to Meet Education Needs

Participant 1, Education Development Officer, commented, *"Finance is a major challenge for implementation of education programs such as teacher motivation. Allocation of income is fixed mostly to resourcing activities, which directly affect education of children. Teacher motivation is not on the top of the list."*

Participant 6, a teacher at school B, highlighted, *"There is a need to allocate more funding in the budget for teacher professional development and support. Professional development programmes empower new teachers and may sharpen skill of those teachers who might have stayed long enough at service, as teachers lack confidence in the offering of subject matter."*

Participant 3, School Management Team in high school B added, *"A lot is needed to change for the better on the side of teacher motivation. It is worth spending because motivation of children to learn flows from being taught by a motivated teacher. Money allocated to schools must provide compensation of long working hours, extra workload, entertainment, teacher feeding scheme, transport, among many other benefits."*

The participants disclosed that there is need to balance allocation of funding in the budget. All components towards facilitating of learning are equally important. The study established that educational components are dependent on each other, and there would be no effective learning if the teaching and learning environment are not balanced in terms of resourcing.

Theme 4: Balancing Workload Allocation among the Staff

The findings from the study discovered a great concern for teacher motivation and work allocation. The study indicated that a huge allocation

of work on teachers especially in the rural schools is affecting their motivation. There is a need to fully implement this act in terms of recruitment of more teachers to relieve huge workload burden on rural teacher. The implementation of this act should consider a wide range of employment-related matters affecting teacher motivation and performance. Employment issues like appointment of new teachers in vacant posts, promotions and transfer, requires agent attention.

Sub-theme 4: Issues in Appointment of New Teachers

Participant 1, an Education Development Officer, responded by blaming the Department of Basic Education for inconsistency and a lack of authority to fill vacant teaching positions in many remote schools. He added, *"Many teachers must deal with huge numbers in their classes, and many teach a multiple number of subjects."* He also complained of stress among teachers, which is directly related to pressure at work.

Findings from the quotation above indicated that teacher motivation is attainable, and educational leaders must be mindful of teachers' work-related stress and factors responsible for their stress. For example, stress caused due to teacher overload can be resolved through distribution of work and sharing responsibilities among teachers through teamwork.

Participant 6, a School Management Team member from school B views explained, *"School principals are limited by policy from devising ways of motivating their staff beyond what the policy prescribes. Principals in public schools have limited power to employ new teachers in vacant posts. It is a mandate of the Department of Education to decide when and how to employ new recruits in vacant teaching posts"*.

The findings from the study show that school principals have limited funding towards teacher motivation. It was asserted that some aspects related to teacher motivation are seemingly beyond their control. Issues such as recruitment, promotions, salary increment and bonuses, or reducing the number of teaching periods are beyond the administrative scope of the school principal, especially if money is needed to bring about teacher motivation.

Participant 3, a School Management Team member from high school B had this to add, *"The protocol of hiring new teachers is frustrating*

and causes demotivation of teachers. In many rural schools, teachers must endure teaching in overcrowded classes”.

This study revealed that stress and burnout among teachers in high schools is due to huge numbers of children per classroom. The Basic Conditions of Employment 75 of 1997 give all employees, including teachers, the right to work in a safe place that is not going to cause harm to their health. It was alleged by the participant that a class must not exceed 40 children. Participants revealed that if the number of children in the class is above 40, it becomes impossible for the teacher to implement interactive teaching and learning. It was also revealed that it is very hectic for the teacher to have control over huge numbers of children in the class. Basing on the arguments raised by the participants, it was revealed those teachers teaching above 40 children in class may decide to ignore some slow learners and concentrate on the fast and bright children in their classes.

Participant 6, a teacher from school A disclosed that teachers are emotionally distressed because of too much pressure that they must contend with throughout their entire career until retirement. This participant showed dissatisfaction because of few incentives available for such hard labour.

This study observed that delays in hiring new teachers to fill the many vacant teaching posts in schools has increased the burden for teachers who work under constant stress. The study established input that the process of hiring new teachers where there is shortage must be done fast to avoid work overload on existing teachers.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated motivation strategies for improving teacher performance. Emerging findings may add value in the way teachers commit to their work. Educational leaders and all other stakeholders, starting from parents, children, community leaders and the Department of Basic Teachers must be motivated to perform what is required of them at school, and education plays a critical part in this. It must be understood that teachers are frustrated by the ill discipline of children and lack of concern and cooperation from parents to discipline their children. Teachers are already overloaded but are required to take on extra re-

sponsibilities beyond their line of duty. A teacher must play a role of a parent, councillor, and security guard to keep children out of danger at school. The deterioration of learner discipline in schools has turned the teaching job into a risky one. Many children carry weapons, use drugs and are violent. These and many other issues negatively affect teachers' morale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends reinforcement of motivation to boost teacher performance. The strategy of reinforcement can also help management to deal with factors responsible for causing demotivation of teachers such as loss of focus and interest in work, low performance, work-related stress, depression and loss of purpose and resignation, among many others. Education leaders are recommended to deal with teachers' work-related stress and other psychological problems by interrogating a balance between work and entertainment. Music, indoor and outdoor sporting activities are encouraged as a remedy for stress. Education leaders are recommended to implement teacher motivation rewarding strategy. Financial and non-financial benefits such as company car, gifts, holiday trips, bursaries and compliments for good performance can be used to instil teacher morale and high performance. Finally, content knowledge and professional development through workshops and leadership programs can help to deal with teacher motivation and performance reinforcement.

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Paper received for publication in December, 2021
Paper accepted for publication in April, 2022