

Critical Reflections on the Impact(s) of the So-Called ‘Teacher Incentive’ on Zimbabwe’s Public Education

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Abstract

For some decades, Zimbabwe’s public education has been ranked one of the best in Southern Africa, Africa and the world-over. This was chiefly a result of high quality teachers, high quality supervision of examinations adopted from its colonial master (Britain), and good working conditions for education practitioners, among other reasons. This reality, however, has turned the otherwise since the turn of the new millennium and especially in the recent years due to economic meltdown in the country and mass exodus of qualified teachers to ‘greener pastures’. Confronted with its deepening and crippling economic levels, the government of Zimbabwe has clearly indicated that it is unable to provide conducive conditions for the practitioners in public education, a situation that resulted in a series of strikes by practitioners which threatened to paralyse all the teaching-learning activities in the country. It is out of this background that the system of incentives to teachers was introduced to augment the meagre salaries earned by teachers so that public education in the country would not face liquidation or total paralysis. Yet, while the introduction of incentives in public education seems to have boosted morale of some teachers, it has deflated that of the majority of the practitioners in the profession. This paper examines the problems and/or impact of teacher incentives on education quality and stakeholders, that is, students, teachers, parents/guardians and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, public education, stakeholders, quality, incentives, impact, teachers.

1. Introduction

The colonial period in Zimbabwe saw a number of black educated professionals migrating to the western countries like Britain and the United States of America. At independence in 1980, there was an overwhelming majority of the Zimbabwean exiles and professionals from these countries and all parts of the globe enthusiastically coming home to celebrate independence and rebuild the country.

Given that the Zimbabwean economy in the early postcolonial days was sturdy, there was insignificant number of Zimbabwean professionals leaving the country in search of employment. The exception to this common trend was the Matabeleland region, where the conflict of the 1980s and state massacres of Ndebele civilians - *gukurahundi* - caused an exodus,

the legacies of which were a profound sense of exclusion from the state and nation (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000).

However, the outflow of professionals leaving the country in search of 'greener pastures' grew significantly through the 1990s reversing the situation that had prevailed at the dawn of independence through early days of the postcolonial period. The professionals were mainly from health and teaching fraternities, among many others. With the deepening socio-economic and political crises in Zimbabwe from the late 1990s and especially at the turn of the new millennium which witnessed the country's worst politico-economic downfall, many skilled laborers in the medical and teaching fraternities migrated to the developed world and neighboring countries in search of greener pastures. For purposes of this research, the paper focuses on the teaching fraternity.

While the professional motilities of education practitioners (as those of practitioners in other fields) have helped to improve both the professionals' lives and those of their families back home, they have had drastic impacts on the general quality of education delivery in Zimbabwe. For instance, the highly skilled education practitioners were replaced by unqualified fresh Ordinary and Advanced level graduates who in reality were students themselves. This situation, in no doubt, created a conundrum in the entire system of education causing some students to drop out of school as they now lacked confidence in the 'new' caliber of teachers in their custody. This did not only result in continued deepening and crippling down of the quality of education in Zimbabwe's public education, but also in heated moral debates about professional mobility both in the receiving countries and the sending country (Zimbabwe). As rightly noted by scholars such as Deeming (2004) and Buchan et al (2005), the recent high profile public debate about skilled migration to Britain has raised two key concerns. The first concern has been about the effects of the brain drain on the public services of sending countries, and related debate about the ethics of recruitment and state regulatory policies. The other concern has been the growing anxiety that international recruitment fails to address the poor conditions for the migrant professionals.

That said, this paper is an attempt to show how Zimbabwean professionals, in particular teachers' decisions with regard to the future of their children back home morally impact on the notions of values and identity of the Zimbabweans as a people. It goes further to examine the problems that have haunted the teaching profession since the turn of the new millennium. In particular, the paper meticulously examines the impact of the so-called 'incentives' - a response to the teachers' plight - on the general quality of education in the country as well as on education stakeholders such as education practitioners, students, parents/guardians and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. To identify the problems, a research was carried out in Masvingo province. Questionnaire comprising closed and open items was used as a data collection tool. Data was analyzed quantitatively using frequency tables and analyzed qualitatively using evaluative descriptions. It revealed that the introduction of incentives in public education has compromised the general quality of education in the country's public institutions. While the government through its Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture agreed that teachers be given 10 % of the fees paid by students at their stations, disparities in

the amount paid to teachers at different stations has become a cause of serious concern. From the foregoing, the paper offers a number of recommendations that if adopted can effectively help ameliorating and restore dignity and the modicum of respect that the teaching profession in the country has always had.

2. Background to Zimbabwe's public education: A brief taxonomy

Zimbabwe's political and economic systems are some of the systems in Southern Africa that are too complex to characterize with precision. The complexity of Zimbabwe's systems is predicated on the country's long tumultuous history and unprecedented circumstances since independence in 1980. The circumstances include crippling poverty levels, rising levels of unemployment, escalating inflation levels/economic challenges, lack of adequate training and limited deployment of public personnel to underserved communities, and poor remuneration of civil workers, in particular of teachers. The complexities of Zimbabwe's systems are not only visible in the country's economic and political systems, but in social landscapes such as education. In view of education, an almost similar taxonomy to that developed by Mario (2002) in relation to Mozambique's literacy development trajectory can be forged though with notable differences owing to different historical circumstances of the two countries. Following the landmark political and socio-economic developments that have impacted Zimbabwean education sector since national independence in 1980, the taxonomy for Zimbabwe can be characterized as one comprising four periods/phases namely:

2.1 National Reconstruction Phase (1980 to Mid 1980s)

This period was marked by the growth of literacy levels nationally with national reconstruction projects through government and non-governmental organizations as well as education campaigns the country over.

2.2 Enlightenment Phase (Mid 1980s to End 1990s)

This phase is characterized with the rise of literacy level and construction of national training and tertiary institutions. Education during this phase thus emphasized education for all citizens, young and old, men and women.

2.3 Destabilization Phase (End 1990s-2008)

This phase is characterized with the destruction of education infrastructure, deterioration of education quality, disbanding and relocation of professional educators due to internal instability heightened by socio-economic as well as political deterioration. The more general brain drain out of the country accelerated from the mid to end 1990s, as the effects of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies were felt, exacerbated by corruption and economic mismanagement (Gaidzanwa 1999; Tevera and Crush 2003). The crisis that has unfolded since the year 2000 has produced a new "migration order" (Van Hear, 1998). Bond and Manyanya (2003) and Raftopoulos (2004) assert that at the end of the decade, economic decline was

transformed dramatically into economic plunge and political crisis, as an embattled ruling party resorted to a violent and exclusive brand of populist nationalism to try to bolster support in the face of challenges from a new political opposition. This is confirmed by Chikanda (2005: 19), who reports that a survey of nurses in Zimbabwe conducted in 2002 showed that 71% were considering leaving the country in the near future: their reasons included better earnings abroad, the need to save quickly for later use at home, pessimism about Zimbabwe's future, fear of crime and violence, the impossibility of making ends meet on public sector salaries, the need to ensure children's future, the demanding nature of their work, lack of opportunities for professional advancement, and fear of contracting Aids at work, due to the absence of basic equipment such as gloves (Chikanda 2005: 2, 19). This period was therefore marked by emigration of education practitioners to neighboring and western countries. As noted by Chikanda (2005), the UK was by far the most popular destination, followed by South Africa, Botswana, Australia, the USA, New Zealand and Canada, for health professionals.

2.4 Restoration Phase (2009 to the Present)

This phase is characterized with restoration of sanity, dignity and re-emergency or rediscovery of education system that emphasizes sustainable development and gender equity (education for all) in under the leadership of Government of National Unity (GNU). But given that the Zimbabwean Government of National Unity openly pronounced through the Minister of Finance that it doesn't have enough money to pay remunerations for civil servants, the system of teacher incentive was adopted in public education to augment teachers' meager salaries and boost the morale of the teachers who were threatening to put their tools down. The government thus allowed public schools to pay their teachers an extra 10% paid by every student school fees, meaning that teachers would receive their [meager] salaries and an extra 10 % from the sum total paid by students as school fees. Education in this phase thus emphasizes social and economic development with a focus on the use of education as a vehicle for poverty eradication, national unity, and provider of moral values and socio-political empowerment.

3. Research Question and Methodological Issues

This study seeks to address the following two questions: "What is the impact(s) of the so-called 'teacher incentive' on Zimbabwe's public education?, and could results from a critical examination of the educational problems that Zimbabwe has faced since the wake of independence in 1980 impact a positive change on the country's educational policies and socio-economic situation?"

While there are a number of Zimbabwean scholars and researchers writing on educational issues on Zimbabwe, the researcher has realized that most of them (Nhundu, 1999; McGregor, 2006; Chireshe & Shumba, 2011) have paid insignificant attention to the current, highly controversial issue of teacher incentive. Yet the issue of teacher incentive has dramatically impacted the lives of many Zimbabweans especially teachers, students and guardians/parents. Besides, it is through constant reflection on daily experiences of both teachers and students of

this troubled and newly introduced subject that problems are identified and solutions sought. The researcher registers therefore that the Zimbabwean history of education makes a sorry reading with its failure to document, by default or otherwise, the pressing and mounting problems being faced by important education stakeholders such as teachers, students and guardians/parents.

The people participated in the study were from different societal classes, ranging from students, public school teachers and parents/guardians. The participants were drawn from different societal classes or rather different education stakeholders with the hope of obtaining a balanced comprehensible research result that could be representative of all the parties that are directly affected and involved by the so-called teacher incentive. Participants in this study were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were asked not to identify themselves by names. Also, participants ranged from the ages of 10 to 60 years. This age group was considered appropriate for the study given that most of the people involved in the teaching and learning activities and who are capable giving an opinion on they see as the impacts teacher incentive on education. Equal number of women and men were sampled to ensure gender balance, in terms of representation given that the 'policy' equally affects both men and women.

The current study being a social science research, it relied mainly on observations, questionnaires and in-depth interviews (formal and informal) as part of research design. The research was carried out on 20 schools (10 secondary schools and 10 primary schools) in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe between January and June 2012. During the study, the sampling population consist education stakeholders, that is, students, teachers and parents/guardians in the study area. The study involved a selected sample of 100 people (50 teachers, 30 students and 20 parents/guardians). The study is located within Masvingo province, in particular, using students, educators/teachers and parents/guardians affected in that region as representative of other public schools in Zimbabwe having similar educational challenges and predicaments.

As pointed out earlier in the preceding paragraphs, unstructured interviews were among the data collection techniques used in carrying out this research. Both individual and group interviews were used in interviewing voluntary participants. The aim of interviews was to complement and substantiate data collected from questionnaires and observations. Technically, interviews entail presenting questions to the informant orally and recording the responses either in written notes in pocket books or on an audio-recording for later transcription and analysis (see Mawere, 2012). Interviews can be carried out with any informant that is capable of comprehending and providing answers to questions presented to him/her by a researcher. Wray and Bloomer (2006) captured this aptly when they assert that any subjects can be used provided they are able to understand the questions and provide responses.

Since question framing for in-depth interviews should not be framed in a harp hazard manner, the research was guided by the works of Erik Hofstee. According to Hofstee (2006: 135),

“background type questions are important when carrying out in-depth interviews and it is also important to keep the interviewee to the topic being discussed, but it can also pay not to be too rigid”. Although in-depth interviews have many advantages, the major one is that in in-depth interviews, the interviewees in most cases give you more than what you will have bargained for. However, as Hofstee (2006: 136) observed, “if not carefully administered, interviews can produce misleading responses, thereby affecting results”. To avoid this problem, the researcher asked the participants simple questions, most of which required one word answers. At this juncture, it must be emphasized that a wealth and elaborate explanation of respondents’ views and opinions on the comprehensible impact of teacher incentive on publication can best be acquired through a combination of all the methods mentioned above (interviews, observations and questionnaires).

In this study, questionnaires consisted of limited open-ended (free response) questions and closed-ended (fixed alternative) questions were used. A “questionnaire is an instrument with open or closed questions or statements to which a respondent must react” (White, 2005: 126). The way questionnaires were used was in agreement with the CACC Module (1989) which states that “practically a good questionnaire should contain both open-ended and closed-ended questions so that the responses from the two forms can be checked and compared” (p.103). Open questionnaire was used for the reason that it enables the respondent to reply as s/he likes and does not confine the latter to a single alternative (Behr, 1988). This means that open-ended or free response questions have the merit that they give a respondent an opportunity to answer sufficiently, giving all the details necessary to clarify the answers. The merit of open-ended questionnaires was rightly given by White (2005: 131) when he says: “open-ended questions probe deeper than the closed question and evoke fuller and deeper responses”. Open-ended questionnaires evoke a fuller and richer response as they go beyond statistical data into hidden motivations that lie behind attitudes, interests, preferences and decisions. Yet, if not carefully done, open-ended questionnaires may lead to collection of worthless and irrelevant information. With this in mind, the researcher avoided being gullible of everything by selecting only the data he thought were relevant to this research.

Besides, closed form of questionnaire was used together with open-ended questionnaire to facilitate answering of the questions posed and to make it easier for the researcher to code and classify responses especially in this case where a large number of questionnaires were dealt with. This was in agreement with White (2005: 130) who echoed: “closed form of questionnaire is suitable for large number of questions and they do not allow any chances for irrelevant answers”. However, closed-ended questions should be posed with caution as they may have the effect of forcing the respondent to think along certain lines which he might not have done had he been left to make up his own responses. It is in view of this understanding that both questionnaires were used in this study. Behr (1988) suggests, in practice, a good questionnaire should contain open and closed forms of questions so that responses from the two forms can be checked and compared; this guided the research method used in this study.

The other method used in collecting data for this study was observation. The researcher observed the behavior of teachers at different stations in the province towards the so-called

teacher incentive. This was done with the hope to obtain information on the feelings and impacts of teacher incentive on teacher motivation. Data collected from interviews, questionnaires and observations were tabulated to show frequencies before being subjected to evaluative analysis. Tables 1 and 2 contain details of the people who participated in the study and the data that was gathered during the study:

Table 1: Details of the people who participated in the study

Occupation/Status	Age range	Gender	
		Male	Female
Teachers	19-60	25	25
Parents/guardians	30-60	10	10
Students	10-21	15	15

Table 2: Responses to closed questionnaire items on perceived impacts of the so-called 'teacher incentive' in Zimbabwe's public education

ITEMS	RESPONSES		
	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Uncertain
1. Teacher incentive has failed to motivate and boost morale of teachers in Zimbabwe's public education.	15	83	2
2. Teachers in all public education though get the same percentage of fees paid by their students, they don't get similar amounts.	100	0	0
3. Teacher incentive is demoralizing teachers in public education.	83	16	1
4. Due to the current system of teacher incentive, teachers teach extra lessons to their students.	30	70	0
5. The government made the right decision when it introduced teacher incentive in public education.	29	70	1
6. Teacher incentive is helping to arrest migration of qualified teachers and reduce the number of temporary teachers in public education.	50	50	0
7. Teacher incentive is the only way to augment teachers' meager salaries.	10	90	0
8. Teacher incentive gives an extra burden to poor parents.	60	38	2
9. The government has the obligation to fully remunerate its workers and not anyone else.	100	0	0

10. The system of teacher incentive is causing divisions among teachers in public educations.	80	18	2
11. The system of teacher incentive is unfair/unjust and therefore should be immediately stopped.	70	30	0
12. If the system of teacher incentive is to be allowed to stay, then all teachers in public education should get the same amount not percentage of fees paid by students in their stations.	70	30	0
13. The system of teacher incentive should continue forever.	30	70	0

4. Discussion Based On Research Results

The findings presented in this research are based on the data that were collected from participants in Masvingo province over a period of six months. The research results in Table 2 above show different perceptions on impact of the so-called teacher incentive on public education in Zimbabwe.

From the research results obtained, it was evident that teacher incentive is impacting seriously on public education in Zimbabwe though the degree at which different stakeholders are affected varies. According to majority of the participants (83 %), the system of teacher incentive has failed to motivate and boost the morale of teachers in public education as it has some element of injustice. The main reason given for the failure of the system was that although all teachers in public education get the same percentage of incentive (10 % of the total fee paid by every student per term), the amount received was never the same. As confirmed by all respondents (100 %), teachers in public schools though get as incentive the same percentage; the actual amounts they receive depend on the station they are working. Reasons for the differences were many, the major one being that students in boarding schools pay a higher fee than those in rural council schools. A case in point is that of two high schools, Silveira Mission and Machirara (in Bikita district), which are only 5km apart yet their students, pay US\$450 and US\$45 respectively. Other good examples are: Nemauko primary and St Anthons Mission schools (in Zaka district) and Mutero and Chadzamira High Schools (in Gutu district) where teachers get US\$ 200 per month and US\$28 per term and US\$ 200 per month and US\$ 80 per term respectively. Such big differences entail enormous disparities in the amounts earned as incentives by teachers at the two stations regardless of them having similar qualifications and doing the same type of work. In view of this situation, it is no doubt that those teachers at Silveira and St Mission schools feel motivated and their morale boosted as they get more money as compared to those in council schools where school fees are generally low. On the contrary, those teachers at Nemauko primary, Machirara and Chadzamira high schools feel demotivated and de-moralized given that they get far less than their counterparts at the Silveira, St Anthons and Mutero Mission schools regardless of the fact that they do the same type of work, may have trained at similar institutions or hold similar qualifications with them. One of

the respondents bitterly expressed his discontentment with the system of teacher incentive when he said:

‘Fungai kuti zvinorwadza sei kuti unoshandira hurumende imwe chete nemunhu wakadzidza zvakangofanana newe kana kuti wawakatodrika asi iye achitokutambirisa nepamusaka pekuti akaita rombo rakanaka akadzidzisa paMishoni?’ (Imagine how painful it is to notice that you work for the same government with someone who holds the same qualification as you have or who is even less qualified/educated than you are, yet he/she gets far more money than you get simply because he/she teaches at a Mission school?).

In this case, students in rural council schools where teacher incentives are low suffer most as the de-motivated teachers lack commitment and morale to execute their pedagogical duties. This is confirmed by Mulkeen (2005) who observed that rural and outlying areas often have less access to educator development and support services than their urban counterparts, and fewer opportunities to attend in-service courses, which lead to lower quality education provision.

The impact discussed above was one among many reasons why majority of the respondents (70 %) were of the view that the government made a wrong decision when it introduced the system of teacher incentive in public education. Those who thought the government made the right decision by introducing teacher incentive (30 %) were perhaps members of the communities who directly benefit from the system, for instance, teachers at Mission or Boarding schools in the province. Yet these respondents proved themselves wrong when they joined others to all (100 %) agree that the government has the sole obligation to fully remunerate its workers. They also proved themselves wrong when majority (90 %) agreed that teacher incentive through parents’ money is not the only way to motivate and boost the morale of teachers in public education. As articulated by one respondent:

‘Hurumende ngaisaita zvekutamba nemari dzavabereki ichtibata kumeso sezvinonzi mainisendivhi ndiyo chete nzira yokugutsa vashandi vayo. Ko zvino vashandi vayo vasingashandidzani nevabereki voita sei? Handizvo here zvinokonzeresa huwori munyika izvi? Kune nzira dzakawanda chose idzo inokwanisa kushandisa kuti mushandi wose agutsikane nezvaanoshandira, kwete zve mainisendivhi izvi’. (Our government should not play around with parents’ money as if teacher incentives are the only way to motivate its workers. What then should those government workers who do not work directly with parents should do? Doesn’t this promote corruption in the country? There are many ways other than incentives that the government can employ to ensure that all its workers are contented).

Thus due to injustice and other problems associated with the system of incentives, majority of the respondents (70 %) were of the view that the system should be immediately stopped or at least reviewed. For this majority (the 70 %), if the system were to continue the government were to make sure that all teachers in public education get the same amount of money not

percentage. Otherwise disparities in the amount of money paid as incentive compromise quality of education in general and in particular of students produced from such a system. Rambe and Mawere (2011: 46) argue “structural dysfunctions such as corrupt practices (demanding bribes from students to pass exams/tests, appointments influenced by rent seeking behavior, teacher absenteeism, poor instruction) in the education sector frustrate the delivery of quality learning outcomes”. It is therefore argued that in an education system where there is salary disparity among teachers in the same ministry, doing the same type of work and with similar qualifications compromise quality of work done as underpaid workers are always demoralized. In most cases, this results in bribes from students (especially those from middle class families) who after realizing the impossibility to master the subject with demoralized teachers they have in their schools would simply preoccupy themselves with bribing their teachers for extra lessons or with passing on to the next grade/level without concentrating on the quality of their own work. In fact where teacher wages are not typically fully responsive to local labor market conditions or to individual characteristics, many teachers receive substantial rents (Chaudhury et al., 2006) in the form of illegal private tutoring to supplement their incomes. According to Rambe & Mawere (2011), such transactions can be two-way; where a teacher corrupts a student by demanding bribe or parents offering bribes to educators to secure students’ progression to another grade or even pass an exam, thus compromising and diluting professional integrity and educational quality. In short, rent seeking behavior erodes commitment to professional instruction.

Besides that incentive system was perceived unjust in some way, the system was viewed by the majority (80 %) as the cause of division among teachers, especially when it comes to issues of bargaining for salaries or national demonstrations against the government. For the aforesaid majority, it was apparent that teacher incentive was a political gimmick by the government to ensure that teachers in public education never speak with one voice as their working conditions will always be different. This was confirmed by one of the respondents who uttered:

‘Nyaya yemainisendivhi iri kuita kuti isu maticha titarisirane pasi kunyanya vava vekumamishoni uye kuti tisawirirana kunyanya panyaya yekutaurina mihoro nehurumende uye yekuti toita sei nehurumende kana ichiramba isingadi kutiwedzera mari yemihoro’. (The issue of teacher incentives is causing serious divisions among ourselves as teachers such that some of us especially those at Mission schools look down upon others-those in council schools. It also makes it very difficult to speak with one voice on what we should do with the government if it doesn’t want to increase our salaries).

The brief background to the Zimbabwean educational landscape together with research question and discussion articulated above set the stage for my informed analysis and critique of the educators’ working conditions, teaching-learning exercise and the nation’s schooling in general. It is therefore out of such an informed analysis and critique of Zimbabwe’s public education that this study draws some recommendations.

5. Towards The Restoration Of Sanity In Zimbabwe's Public Education

From data obtained from this research, an in-depth understanding of education stakeholders' (students, teachers and parents/guardians) perceptions on the impacts of teacher incentive, it was evident that the system of teacher incentive was causing serious problems in education. Zimbabwean education system still seems to be in a dilemma as to what exactly should be done in view of the controversial teacher incentive and to generally improve the situation in public education. It is commendable that the government through the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture have made some strides towards the improvement of teachers' working conditions especially in the turn of the new millennium and with the formation of Government of National Unity in 2008. It is however argued that a lot more is still desired to be done as has been shown by research results obtained in this study. In view of the problems that have been highlighted in the preceding paragraphs, the study makes the following recommendations:

1). The government through the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture should seriously consider revising the issue of teacher incentive. In fact if the issue of teacher incentive is to continue or legislated as a reform in the way teachers are compensated, then the justification of legislating teacher incentives could bare the government's agenda of remunerating 'fairly' and 'equally' all teachers in the country vis-à-vis economic priorities and political exigencies. This is because if the government is to be 'fair' and 'just', it should make sure that all teachers in both private and public education get the same amount of monetary incentive and other working conditions. Otherwise, the government should take full responsibility to give all its workers working conditions and wages that correspond their qualifications and the work they do. Such a measure is most likely to have a positive impact on the part of all education stakeholders as high salaries will definitely boost their morale and enable them to live a life with dignity. This is in total agreement with Maslow's theory of motivation. According to Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation - hierarchical needs theory, human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs, and certain lower factors need to be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied. Maslow further argues that there are general types of needs (physiological/spiritual, survival, safety, love, and esteem, self actualization) that must be satisfied before a person can act unselfishly. For him, esteem need which is second highest before self actualization need emphasizes the urge of a person to attain a degree of importance such as accomplishment, respect, reputation and recognition. This is similar to Ramachandran et al. (2005) findings on job satisfaction in India that teachers indicated the following reasons for job dissatisfaction: a) High teacher-pupil ratio; b) Infrastructure problems; c) Erratic disbursement of salaries; d) 'Forced' to teach children of poor communities and specific social groups who are 'dirty' (reflecting class bias and social gaps between the children and teachers); and e) Irregular attendance of children (due to migration or work-related reasons) and illiterate parents. In a survey on teacher job satisfaction and motivation in Nigeria, Ololube (2006) also found out that teachers are dissatisfied with the educational policies and administration, pay and fringe benefits, material rewards and advancement. From the

foregoing, a teacher who is denied the right to decent salary is de-motivated as s/he is denied some degree of legitimate importance, fairness, respect and recognition.

2). As highlighted above and from data obtained during this research, majority (70 %) of the educators especially those in rural council schools where teacher incentives are too low, suggested that for the incentive system to be fair, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture should collect the 10 % (from all schools) of the school fees paid as teacher incentive and put it in one coffer before distributing it equally to all teachers. This can be done at district level, that is, through the District Education Offices (for each district), and separately for secondary and primary schools. Such an exercise will ensure that all teachers in public education get the same amount of teacher incentive; hence the moral and motivation of all teachers will be boosted.

3). Also, from data obtained it was apparent that in Zimbabwe teacher incentive through money paid by poor parents is not the only way to boost teachers' moral and motivation; there are better alternatives. As suggested by one of the respondents:

'Kana deno hurumende yedu yaisava isina nehuwori ichinyatsoshandisa zviwanikwa zvenyika zvakanaka vashandi vose vehurumende vangadai vachiwana mihoro inovagutsa. Somuenzaniso tine minda yemangoda emhando yepamusoro pasi rose zvokuti zvinotoshamisa dzimwe nyika chose kunzwa kuti nyika yedu ichakaromboka uye vashandi vayo vachiri kubhadharwa mari dziri pasisa kudarika vashandi venyika zhinji dziri kumaodzanyemba eAfrica'. (If our government was not corrupt and would transparently exploit our natural resources, its workers could earn what is due to them. For instance, we have one of the biggest diamond fields in the world such that it is a paradox or rather a big surprise for other countries to hear that Zimbabwe is still poor and its worker even worse than many others in southern Africa).

The above utterances by one of the respondent clearly represents the thinking of many other respondents (90 %) who believe that there are better alternatives other than incentives that can be used to reward civil servants such as teachers. In light of this observation, it should be pointed out that considering that this study view monetary incentive as not the sole motivator for teachers to be committed and work for the enhancement of pedagogical process, the government should also seriously consider the general working conditions for teachers in order to address the brain-drain phenomenon, the improper educational policies of the government and the perception of 'fairness' in the disposition of benefits for teachers in the public schools which adversely affect quality education. For instance, teachers in public education should be protected by the law of the country from 'political harm' by politicians especially during campaigning and/or election periods. Another alternative could be providing free education to teachers' children. This in no doubt goes a long way in lessening the burden of teachers who while teach children of those who are better positioned socially and economically struggle to have their own children send to school.

Also, there should be transparency and high degree of accountability on the part of the government in the exploitation and management of resources including educational resources directly or otherwise. That said, it appears more convincing in the context of Zimbabwe to recommend that the country sustainably manage and exploit its natural resources for common good, that is, for the benefit of all its people, civil servants included. From a critical and reflective perspective as well as drawing from my professional experience in Zimbabwe, it is a truism that transparency on the part of government yields responsibility and commitment on the part of civil servants, and poorly remunerated teachers always compromise the quality of education and in particular that of the products (students) in the country. As Khin and Fatt (2010: 2) articulate, in the reflective-practitioner approach, a researcher draws on “personal experiences, a personal story of his [sic] development as a heuristically critical reflective practitioner [and] search [es] into his past so that he can account for his values and actions in the present.” Thus the suggested recommendation draws primarily on the findings of this research and the researcher’s professional development journey, stock of practical knowledge of the educational terrain, personal reflections and experiences as a researcher and educator in Zimbabwe’s public and private schools and universities for many years (see Mawere, 2012).

4). In addition to the two recommendations given, close collaboration and mutual understanding between the government (through the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture) and all education stakeholders (students, guardian/parents and teachers) to ensure commitment, hardworking, development of self-discipline and general quality of education in the country is proposed in this study. This is because quality education that embraces ethical practices, high levels of comprehension of students and full commitment of educators in a fragile post-conflict landscape such as that of Zimbabwe can only be achieved if all stakeholders work together as a team. This will help to foster the needs of teachers and learners as well as expectations by the government and parents/guardians. Mutual understanding and collaboration between all education stakeholders as these “help teachers and students expand their reasoning capacities, seek out multiple perspectives, and become active thinkers” (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004: 52) who seek practical solutions to the problems at hand.

6. Conclusion

This study sought out to examine the impacts of the system of teacher incentive on the general quality of education in Zimbabwe. As such the arguments and recommendations put forward in this paper have been primarily drawn from data obtained during research and my professional development journey, personal reflections and experiences as a researcher and educator in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Statistics have shown that majority (83 %) of the respondents agree that the system of teacher incentive have failed to boost morale and motivation of practitioners in public education. An even larger percentage (100 %) agreed that even though teachers get the same percentage of the fees paid by students at their stations as incentive, they don’t get the same amount due to variations in school fees paid across the country. It therefore appears that revising the system of teacher incentive or finding permanent solutions to the prevailing educational problems are worth considering recommendations.

As part of the study concluding remarks, this study acknowledged that there is evidence that while there were a series of national interventions aimed at supporting the education systems, especially in terms of teachers' training to expedite pedagogical delivery, the education sector has remained poorly remunerated in almost all aspects and quality of education has deteriorated since the turn of the new millennium. Thus a lot more is still desired to be done especially to solve quality problems in public education in Zimbabwe. However, there are divergent opinions and no consensus as to what exactly should be done with the system of teacher incentive. The momentum for these divergent perceptions has to a larger extent, been predicated on Zimbabwe's unfortunate tumultuous history of political, socio-economic challenges especially since the turn of the new millennium. Yet the fact that not all respondents participated in the present study subscribed to the same view on what exactly should be done on the question of teacher incentive in Zimbabwe's public education illustrates the complexity of the issue at hand. Overall, the question of teacher incentive in Zimbabwe's public education remains an issue deserving further serious research in across the nation in order to come up with a solid, long lasting solution.

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