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CONDITIONS OF SERVICE FOR TEACHERS AND AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically looks at conditions of service for teachers and points out areas that need improvement. It shall be maintained that sending teachers to schools that have no accommodation for teachers gives the wrong impression that teaching is not important. The paper also looks at whether or not teaching is regarded as a profession, like other professions we find in health and Law.

An attempt will be made to evaluate the application, in Zimbabwe, of the recommendations concerning the status of Teaching Personnel, as outlined in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO): (ILO UNESCO: 1966 and 1997).

Keyword: Service for teacher, environment for teacher

1. INTRODUCTION

From whatever angle we look at condition of service of teachers it will be noted that a lot needs to be done. After their initial training, teachers are sent to, in most cases, unknown destinations. 'Unknown' in the sense that those who deploy them do know that a teacher is required at some school but they have no knowledge of the habit that teacher going to. That would not be the case in some occupations. That sends wrong signals to the teacher. He / she will start to judge how society regards teaching as an occupation (Thompson, 1984).

Such sentiments are worsened by what happens during pre-service training when the training institutions shunned some of the schools to which the potential recruits would be deployed. During teaching practice, students would be deployed to selected schools and never to others. The logical explanation is inaccessibility or lack of resources to cover longer distances. The end result is that is the would-be teachers get their training in an environment that is totally different from that they will operate in. Some end up refusing to go to those 'remote' schools. Others go reluctantly and wait for an opportunity to transfer, on cleverly crafted reasons (Wyatt, 1998).

Most of the schools lack adequate learning and teaching resources yet teachers are expected to 'produce quality results'. Even the enthusiastic teacher ends up resigning himself / herself to the inadequacies of the system and stops to take any initiative.



The Quality Control Division in the Ministry of Education worsens the situation by not visiting those 'remote' schools regularly. Reasons of lack of resources and inaccessibility are also cited.

As Zvobgo (1986) argues, if the Teacher Trainers and the overseers of quality openly accept that there are areas that are remote and inaccessible, who will be willing to go and work in such conditions. We need to demand that the infrastructure should be developed – accommodation and access roads – so that it will be regarded as reasonable to expect teachers to be trained in those schools.

Training institutions and teacher supervisors should join hands in demanding that conditions be made tenable in all schools. The trainees should be exposed and be acclimatized to the reality of the situation they will face in real world of teaching.

When recruiting teacher trainees, it should be made clear that they will be required to teach in given areas with the greatest shortage of teachers, because that is where the consumer ministry is going to send them to. Such information will be available at the time of recruitment.

It needs to be made a serious requirement that schools that intend to engage teachers should have appropriate accommodation ready for those teachers. Anything short of that will not only impact negatively on the motivation of teachers, but also send the wrong message that teaching is not important.

2. REMUNERATION

Teachers have seen their remuneration packages decline over the years. That appears inevitable in the context of declining economic performance. An improvement in teachers' remuneration was realized in 2003, following the job evaluation exercise. The exercise resulted in a situation where teachers were getting the same salaries with their counterparts with comparable qualifications in other ministries (Nhundu, 1999).

The salaries have since been eroded to the extent that it is unlikely that teachers will earn salaries that are comfortably above the poverty datum line, given the inflationary economic environment we find ourselves in. With the incessant drought and other challenges facing the nation, it may take time to meaningfully improve the remuneration of teachers.

An attempt by government to cushion the salary levels of civil servants through non-taxable allowances should be appreciated. The allowances have been made part of pensionable income.

It is common knowledge that government is seriously considering other non-monetary incentives for teachers and other civil servants. It is in such non-salary incentives that the answer for the motivation of teachers may be found.

3. CAREER PATH FOR TEACHERS NOT CLEAR ENOUGH TO MOTIVATE

What should be a clear and motivating career path for teachers seems to be negated by practice on the ground. While one would expect a competent teacher to advance from teacher grade to senior teacher grades and then to promotion in a reasonably short time, it is rarely the case.

There are several instances of practicing teachers who are not even aware of their status on the career path. Such teachers will find limited reasons to aspire for higher performance. Likewise there are instances of officers who qualify for promotion to posts in which they have been acting for several years. Why those officers are not appointed substantively will remain a mystery.

The appraisal system in place remains judgmental rather than formative or developmental, despite official claims that it is supposed to be both. The main reason for that situation is that there is no systematic training that emanates from the training needs identified through the appraisal process. The rubric of our performance management system will show that all that is in place.

There is need therefore, to have in place a staff development programme that deliberately addresses genuine training needs identified by educational leaders and other researchers.

Kenneth, A. Leithwood (1990) identified three dimensions of teacher development that the system, especially school leadership, could deliberately influence or manipulate to improve teacher motivation, competence and ultimately the quality of education. These are: -



4 Autonomous / interdependent, principled, integrated	6 Participating in broad range of educational decisions at all levels	5 Preparing for retiring: Focusing
3 Conscientious, moral conditional dependence	5 Contributing to the growth of colleagues’ instructional expertise	4 Reaching a professional plateau
2 Conformist, moral, negative, independence	4 Acquiring instructional Expertise	3 New challenges and concerns
1 Self-protective,	3 Expanding one’s instructional flexibility	2 Stabilizing: developing

Lithwood’s three dimensions of Teacher Development

These dimensions could be targeted for deliberate development in carefully designed and regular training programmes at the appropriate vintage point in the career path of a teacher. The system can then make justifiable demands or expectations on the part of an individual. That way teaching may be seen to have a clearer, more challenging and motivating career path. Skills and expertise would be identified, developed and appropriately deployed.

All these matters should be taken account off when designing teacher appraisal systems and teacher development programmes.

Teachers should act in posts for minimum periods before they are appointed substantively. Deliberate training programmes need to be put in place to ensure that teacher do acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that befit their station on the career path. Teachers should also be encouraged to continuously improve their qualifications and be prepared to take on more senior challenging positions in education as a way of improving both their status and remuneration.

4. IS TEACHING A PROFESSION?

4.1 Two Contrasting Views of the Status of Teaching

The way teaching has been viewed and treated by various stakeholders in our society in general and the education system in particular, shows a progressive movement from a position of regarding teachers as semi-skilled workers towards a position that regards teaching as a profession. It can be demonstrated that in the earlier days, the “unskilled worker” view of the teacher was dominant. Later on, we had a balanced mixture of the ‘unskilled worker’ view and the ‘skilled’ worker view. Supporting practices and beliefs tended to back each of those contrasting views. The existence of the two views tended to slow down the movement towards professionalization of teaching (Chivore, 2005).

4.2 ‘Unskilled Worker’ View of Teaching

In the early stages of the development of our education system, there was a view of teaching that some scholars have described as ‘assembly line’ view. According to this view, as summarized by a renowned American educationist, Linda Darling-Hammond (1988):

Learners are like raw materials to be processed by schools according to specifications defined by schedules, programmes, courses and curriculums and exit examinations. Teachers administer the procedures to the students assigned to them using the tools they are given: textbooks, curriculum guidelines lists of objectives, course syllabi. Administrators translate policies and procedures made at the top of the system into rules and procedures that maximize efficiency.



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This view puts emphasis on rules and regulations, close guidance, inspections and reporting systems. One is reminded of the detailed teachers' guides that teachers were expected to follow right to the end of the lesson. Omitting one of the laid down steps would result in serious criticism from the supervisor.

There is little room for individual initiative. Conformity is the order of the day. Rigorous training of teachers is not seen as a necessity as there will be little use of professional knowledge and judgment. This is the view many people have and is backed by our continued use of unqualified teachers and a somehow relaxed approach to the selection of those who are trained as teachers. We also have not had any serious remonstrations from education stakeholders.

The practice and thinking encapsulated in this view seems to have left its legacy among teachers – the notion that decisions will be made and initiative taken, elsewhere, by those who know better.

4.3 'Skilled Worker' View of Teaching

The 'skilled worker' view of teaching is based on the notion that learners are not the same and teaching cannot be routine. The art of teaching makes certain demands on practitioners. The practitioners themselves require rigorous preparation and training to be able to deliver in the job. Darling-Hammond (2003) also notes that: -

This view acknowledges that teaching techniques deemed effective will vary for students with different learning styles, at different stages of cognitive and psychological development, for different subject areas, and for different instructional goals. It posits that, far from following standardized instructional packages, teachers must base their judgements upon knowledge of learning theory and pedagogy, child development and cognition, curriculum and assessment; they must then connect this knowledge to the understandings, dispositions, and conceptions that individual students bring to the classroom.

According to this view, teachers must be extremely knowledgeable and highly competent in their handling of learning situations. It is not just rules and regulations handed from above that will result in success. It is this view that forms the basis for asserting that teaching is, indeed a profession, like other professions we find in Medicine and Law.

Rigorous preparation, induction, certification, selection and evaluation are the hallmarks of true professions. All that rigour is intended to ensure that the knowledge base for practice is transmitted and used. Darling-Hammond (2003) further notes that: -

This is part of the bargain that all professions make with society for occupations that require discretion and judgment in meeting the unique needs of clients, the profession strives to guarantee the competence of members in exchange for the privilege of control over work structure and standards of practice. It is the profession itself that assumes collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal and enforcement of professional standards of practice and ethics.

For quite some time, teaching personnel have been clamoring for professional bodies that will regulate registration and practice. The request is yet to see light of day.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STATUS OF TEACHING PERSONNEL

5.1 Teachers

The recommendation on the Status of Teachers was adopted on 5 October 1966 at an intergovernmental conference convened by UNESCO in Paris, in cooperation with the ILO. The recommendation encompasses the rights and responsibilities of teachers and stipulates international standards for:

- Initial preparation of teachers and their further education
- Recruitment



- Employment
- Teaching and learning conditions
- Participation in educational decision making through consultation and negotiation with governments

Since its adoption, the Recommendation has been taken by many governments to be an important benchmark in the promotion of the status of teachers in the interest of quality education.

5.2 Higher Education

The General Conference of UNESCO adopted an UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Personnel in 1997 following many years of joint preparatory work by UNESCO and the ILO. The recommendation covers a set of practices for higher education teaching personnel, complementing the 1966 recommendation. The application of the recommendations on the status of teaching personnel is promoted and monitored by a joint UNESCO/ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART).

CEART examines and responds to reports and information on the application of recommendations concerning teaching personnel from:

- Governments
- National organizations representing teachers
- National organizations representing employers of teachers
- Non-governmental organizations

Its findings are communicated to ILO and UNESCO for appropriate action.

It can be safely concluded that generally, Zimbabwe applies the recommendations concerning education personnel, even if we were to broaden our criteria to include other recommendations on workers' rights such as freedom of association and right to collective job action.

6. SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN EDUCATION

There is a social dialogue in education, to the extent that all facets of the recommendation concerning teaching personnel can be discussed in bi-partite meetings involving representatives of teachers and government. The degree and level of consultation may be the issue to examine. The level of preparedness for the teaching personnel to research into issues and articulate their points of view is yet another issue for consideration.

It is generally accepted that it is teachers themselves who should rigorously pursue the agenda for professionalism and higher esteem in society. At close examination, they are ill prepared for that onerous task, with internal divisions of various sorts. The concept of freedom of association can be manipulated to produce a multiplicity of unions that, in the end, do not help to improve the situation.

It would be a positive development if teaching personnel at all levels of the education system saw themselves as one family and shared views and research findings on how they, together, can enhance the status of teaching personnel.

Many teachers in the lower echelons of our system regard teaching in institutions of higher learning as an escape route. Those who succeed in moving cut ties with former colleagues and their new expertise and experiences cease to benefit the profession in general.

It would be beneficial to the profession, if teaching personnel at all levels met periodically, to deliberate on issues of common interest to the profession.

7. CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD



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The whole spectrum of education personnel should work together to improve the status of teaching personnel; through professionalisation. Teacher organizations should devote resources to research on the status of teaching as a profession.

Government should continue to strive to improve the lot of teachers so that the best products of the education system are attracted to and retained in the education service. The demands on teaching continue to be more challenging with the ever-changing socio-economic environment. Teachers should be the first beneficiaries of information and communication technologies (ICT) so that they can be able to the best and latest knowledge to their clients. The teachers' clients are the drivers of our future national development.

Government should fully support the view that teaching is a profession and initiate the setting up of a Teaching Professions Council (TPC) that will, among other things, ensure that the right people enter the teaching profession. The country must respect teaching by ensuring that the living conditions of teachers are improved and that teachers' salaries can sustain decent livelihoods in this harsh economic environment.

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