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# FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MWENEZI DISTRICT OF ZIMBABWE

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## ABSTRACT

Change is a process that is inevitable in human life and in organisations, including schools. It comes in different forms and ways. In human organisations such as schools, change is necessary in order to ensure that the mission for setting up the school is realized. The concept has taken increased importance with the current emphasis on the need for schools to be more effective, efficient and accountable to the societies and communities they serve. Schools can experience an impetus for planned or unplanned change in response to the internal and or external pressures exerted upon them. The sources of these pressures are varied and come from both inside and outside the schools and the education system. In Zimbabwe for example, legislation resulted in the compulsory teaching of Shona and Ndebele (1987), introduction of teacher incentives (2009), two-pathway system in secondary schools (2006) and many other new developments. This study therefore, sought to investigate the change forces affecting the implementation of any introduced changes in the Zimbabwean school system using the quantitative paradigm.

The study adopted the survey descriptive design. The target population comprised all schools in Mwenesi District using a sample of 220 teachers and heads made up of 124 females and 96 males. All the information was collected through a questionnaire which had both closed and open-ended questions. The study revealed that school heads faced structural and individual problems that inhibited smooth implementation of school changes. The study recommends that school heads should create conducive environments to remove structural and individual challenges that inhibit change implementation.

**Key Words:** Implementation, Changes, Factors, Secondary Schools & District.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of education in Zimbabwe is characterized by changes and innovations. The existence of underprivileged and deprived children in the country, the decline in government ability to fund schools, the need to improve the quality of education, introduction of new curricula, for example, can bring about change in our schools (Bowora and Mpofu, 2005). Many good innovations have failed to take off and to be successfully implemented for various reasons. Our schools are required to undergo change and development from time to time (Fullan, 2009). The head should be able to formulate policy for change. He / she should develop a policy for the improvement to take place from the outset. This development should be seen as continuous and this requires a united approach by all in the school (Walton, 2005). In developing countries like Zimbabwe, it is not only lack of adequate human and material resources but



also poor policy-making and planning practices that hinder educational reform and change implementation (Thompson, 1981). According to Fullan (2009) one of the basic reasons why planning fails is that planners or decision –makers of change are unaware of or simply ignore situations which potential implementers are facing. Imposed and prescribed decisions and armchair plans given as directives usually fail. This study therefore, set out to evaluate the change forces that affect the implementation of changes in Zimbabwean schools.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisations can experience an impetus for planned or unplanned change in response to the internal and / or external pressures exerted upon them. As Marsee (2002) states, the sources of these pressures are varied and come from both inside and outside the schools and the education system, social, economic and political pressure. Internal pressures may be brought about by new policies, different leadership practices, lack of discipline, dissatisfaction with examination results, attitudes and behaviour. Internal changes take place when a head, for example, decides to adopt a new syllabus (Bowora and Mpofu, 2009). External forces could be legislative requirements, pressure from interest groups, different social values, philosophies and practices, requirements from employers or technological innovations (Mpofu, 2010).

Change may come about either because it is imposed on us by natural events or deliberate reform, or because we voluntarily participate in or even initiate change when we find dissatisfaction, inconsistency, or intolerability in our current situation (Fullan, 2009). While there is a difference between voluntary and imposed change, (Marris, 2005), failure to recognise this phenomenon as natural and inevitable has meant that we tend to ignore important aspects of change and misinterpret others (Marris, 2005). Once the anxieties of loss were understood, both the tenacity of conservation and the ambivalence of transitional institutions became clearer (Fullan, 2009). Whatever the source of change, the head's policy for change should guide him / her in setting appropriate priorities and a necessary framework within which to attain the objectives of the change (Bennis, et.al. 2010).

The head should be able to formulate policy for change and he/she should develop a policy for the improvement to take place from the outset. As Watson (2008) observes, the head should remember that change does not take place in a hostile atmosphere. It is the head's duty to cultivate and provide what has been termed the right equation, or climate or culture of the school, conducive to change. Before embarking on change it helps to take into account all factors which are likely to affect and assist the change (Watson, 2008). The head should also remember that a plan or policy for change envisaged by the head alone may be as useless as rain that remains in the clouds (Bassey, 2009). It benefits no one until it becomes a reality.

Muhammad et. al (2013) state that majority of teachers desire for and encourage change. However, their capability to do so is influenced by several factors such as the political, economic and administrative styles of the school head (Muhammad et. al. 2013). Taylor (1987) argues that it is useless to initiate change in an organisation without providing financial support. The school should, therefore, provide enough funds for fostering growth (change) by making available money to accomplish change. As Hall (2004) posits, funds should be set aside not only for the development of projects, but also for the personal growth of teachers. The politics of the school system is also a crucial factor. As McLaughlin (2008) postulates, the inner workings of the power structure in the school may assist or hinder development. How do teachers view the school politics? Do they support the goals of the school? What is the nature of the reward system like and do teachers have a say in it? Hord (2006) argues that a rigid and highly centralized power structure usually works for maintaining the status quo. The head should examine his / her power structure and ensure that the central purpose of the school, namely, the effective education of the pupils and the growth of the teachers is centrally focused (Miles, et. al 2006).

According to Hall (2004), change by its nature is threatening. It is the head's role, therefore, to create an interpersonal climate which encourages change. This occurs when the threats of failure, condemnation and negative judgement are removed and replaced by a challenging and stimulating environment (Marsee, 2002). As Bassey (2009) states, a challenging environment for teachers can be one in which new ideas, materials, practices, programmes and other innovations are brought to their awareness. These should be discussed and made available to the curious and daring staff members to try. Teachers need to see new and working alternatives to what they are used to if they are going to change (Eleanor, 2011). They must be convinced about the superiority of these innovations before they abandon their well tried practices (Wayne, et. al. 2012). The head can supply those alternatives in the form of stimulation through planning for and guiding the teachers toward awareness of new alternatives (Linda, 2010). The head can use consultants, speakers,



workshops, curriculum meetings, staff displays, materials and other professional meetings to accomplish this (Miles, et. al. 2006). Hord (2006) emphasizes that the knowledge about, and enthusiasm for new practices on the part of the head is probably the single greatest factor in the environment.

As Douglas (2009) states, teachers are willing and always desire to change for the better and they bloom and take risks when they do not feel threatened. They may feel threatened by fear and / or staff disapproval for attempting something new. The threat of evaluation, judgement of worth or merit and the threat of the unknown are all unsettling to our teachers (Basse, 2009). The threat of evaluation, judgement of worth or merit and the threat of the unknown are all unsettling to our teachers. These threats are reduced by a supportive and positive surrounding climate generated by their colleagues, peers and leadership in order to change (Marsee, 2002). Once teachers are convinced that their heads (and those above) are seriously behind them, authentically and not artificially, they are bound to change in their practices.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Changes in educational settings like schools are inevitable. The process of change is complex and on-going. There are many factors that affect adoption and implementation. This study sought to evaluate the change forces that affect the implementation of changes in secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

### **4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study sought to establish heads and teachers' perceptions on the change forces they thought affected the implementation of changes in secondary schools in order to come up with practical suggestions to minimize the impact of these forces for successful implementation of changes in schools.

### **5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- a) What are teachers' attitudes towards changes introduced in their schools?
- b) What problems are encountered by teachers in the implementation of change?
- c) How best can heads of schools be assisted to help teachers effectively implement changes introduced in the schools?

### **6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study's importance is premised on the assumption that the identification of those forces that affect the implementation of change in schools would enable all key stakeholders to help come up with practical solutions to mitigate the impacts of these change forces.

### **7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is limited to evaluation of the change forces that affect the implementation of changes in secondary schools using the descriptive method, which according to Ary and Razaviah (2010), lacks predictive power since the research may discover and describe "what is" and unable to predict "what would be". The study also used a small sample which made generalization quite difficult.

### **8. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was delimited to change factors that affect the implementation of changes in secondary schools in Zimbabwe using a sample of 220 respondents made up of 124 females and 96 males. Views from other stakeholders like Ministry of Education officials, parents and local leadership were outside the purview of this study.



## 9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data because as Anderson (2011) argues, it increases reliability as an instrument of gathering data because of its greater impersonality.

## 10. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire made up of both close-ended and open-ended questions. All the respondents were given the questionnaires by the researchers in their schools. The researchers also collected the questionnaires personally in order to increase on the rate of return of the instrument. As a result, all the questionnaires were returned and there were no non-returns. According to Phillips and Pugh (2011), non-returns introduce a bias in as much as they are likely to be different from respondents in many ways thereby adversely affecting reliability and validity of the findings.

## 11. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part is presented in two parts; namely, actual findings and discussion.

### 11.1. Findings

**Table 1: Category of respondents (N=220)**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Heads	20	9
Teachers	200	91
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents (91%) were teachers since they constitute the bulk of educators in the school set-up. Heads constituted 9% of the sample.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by sex (N=220)**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	96	44
Female	124	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100</b>

There were more female respondents than male ones as shown on table 2 above. The datum was considered statistically significant to the extent that it confirmed that most schools in Zimbabwe had more female teachers than male ones (Makoni, 2007).

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents by age (N=220)**

Age in Years	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	2	1
20-29	14	6
30-39	80	37
40-49	112	51
50 and above	12	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>



The information on table 2 above reveals that the majority of the respondents are within the 30-49 age range (88%). Those below 30 years constituted 7% of the respondents and those above 50 were 5% of the respondents.

**Table 4: Composition of respondents by professional qualifications (N=220)**

Professional Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate in Education	28	13
Diploma in Education	108	49
Bachelors Degree	64	29
Masters Degree	20	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

The information in table 4 above shows that the majority of respondents (49%) were holders of the Diploma in Education qualification, followed by holders of the Bachelor's Degree (29%), and the Certificate in Education and Masters Degree respectively were 14% and 9%.

**Table 5: Responses to the question: "Would you welcome changes introduced in your school?" (N=220)**

Category of Responses	Heads (N=10)		Teachers N=100		Totals (N=110)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	14	70	130	65	144	65
No	6	30	60	30	66	30
Not Sure	0	0	10	5	10	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

The information on table 5 shows that the majority of teachers and heads indicated that they would welcome changes introduced in their schools (65% teachers and 70% heads respectively). An identical 30% of both teachers and heads indicated that they would not welcome change in their schools and 5% of the teachers were not sure about this question.

**Table 6: Responses to the question: "How are changes introduced in your school?" (N=220)**

Category of Responses	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Imposed from above	14	70	164	82	178	81
Head introduces	4	20	36	18	40	18
After consultations	2	10	0	0	2	1
Teachers initiate changes	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 reveals that the majority of heads and teachers thought that changes in their schools were imposed from above (heads 70%; teachers 82%). Of the heads in the study, 20% of them indicated that they themselves introduced the changes, whilst 18% of the teachers indicated that changes in their schools were introduced by heads. Only 10% of the heads indicated that changes in their schools were introduced after consultations with stakeholders in the school. All teachers and heads were agreed that teachers did not initiate changes in their schools.



**Table 7: response to the question: “What are the major challenges that you face during the implementation of change in your school?” (N=220)**

Challenges	Heads		Teachers		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Uncertainty about the causes and effects of change	2	10	50	25	52	24
Unwillingness to give up existing beliefs and practices	2	10	8	4	10	45
Previous negative experiences	4	20	46	24	52	24
Reasons of change not clearly communicated	2	10	50	25	52	24
Feel left out when important decisions are made about a new policy	4	20	20	10	24	11
Work overload	6	30	24	12	30	13
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

The information on table 7 above shows that the major challenges faced by heads in order of hierarchy during the implementation of change in their schools include work overload (30%), feeling left out when important decisions are made about new policies (20%), previous negative experiences with change (20%), only 10% of the heads mentioned the other remaining challenges. On the other hand, teachers mentioned uncertainty about the causes and effects of change (25%) as well as the reasons of the change not clearly communicated (25%) as their top challenges with change. These were closely followed by previous experiences with change (24%) and work overload (12%).

The questionnaire had two open-ended questions which bolstered information from the close-ended questions. The first question wanted to find out from both heads and teachers how best changes could be introduced in schools. The majority of the respondents suggested that there should be good communication and education campaigns about a planned change, they also mentioned that there should be participation of the individuals or groups affected by the change. Respondents also felt that there should be negotiations for possible agreement before implementation is undertaken.

The second question sought to find out from the respondents how heads should handle change in their schools. The most common responses included the following:

- The head should be able to formulate policy for change.
- The head should remember that change does not take place in a hostile atmosphere.
- The head should involve teachers in the planning of the implementation of the change.
- He/she should provide leadership and motivation.
- He/she should provide resources and time for effective implementation of change.

## 11.2. Discussion

Data from the study revealed that the majority of the respondents were female. This information was considered statistically significant to the extent that it confirmed that most schools in Zimbabwe had more female teachers than male. The implications of this finding is that schools are likely to find it more difficult to implement changes since as Makoni (2009) argues, most women are generally conservative and feel threatened by change.

The information from the study also shows that the majority of respondents fall within the above 30 years age groups. These are generally teachers and heads who are mature in terms of both chronological age and work experience. This is an age group that is very particular about stability and security in the workplace. As Eleanor (2011) postulates, teachers who have stayed long in the system are



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contented by the status quo. They feel that they should be left to do what they have learnt over the years during their professional practice.

The study also revealed that the majority of heads and teachers indicated that they would welcome changes introduced in their schools. This clearly demonstrates that most teachers appreciate the need for change in the way how they conduct their business in schools. This information tallies with the observation by Muhammad et.al (2013) who stated that the majority of teachers desire for and encourage change provided the change is initiated in an appropriate manner. Douglas (2009) adds that teachers are willing and always desire to change for the better and they bloom and take risks when they do not feel threatened.

Data also indicates that most respondents felt that changes introduced in the schools were imposed to the school with very little input from both heads and teachers. The changes, therefore, were largely coming from external forces. It is important to allow heads and teachers to initiate change to improve the effectiveness of their schools. As Hall (2004) states, a school or group of teachers in a school can collaboratively identify their school problem and collectively investigate the problem. They can then establish alternative ways of solving their problem and actually implement the chosen course of action to overcome the identified impediment. The likelihood of successful implementation in this situation is much higher than where the change is imposed.

The study revealed that heads' major common impediment to implementation of change included work overload, previous negative experiences with changes, being left out when important decisions are made about new policies. Amongst the major challenges faced by teachers are the following: uncertainty about the causes and effects of change, reasons of change not clearly communicated, previous negative experiences, work overload and unwillingness to give up existing beliefs and practices. The challenges experienced by heads and teachers relate to what Fullan (2009) found, that most of the principals expect or feel that they are expected to keep everyone happy by running an orderly school, and this becomes the major criterion of the principals' ability to manage – no new is good news, as long as everything is relatively quiet (Fullan, 2009). Teachers may resist change as Wayne et.al (2012) argue if they lack understanding of the rationale for the change. Consequently, members of an organisation may then worry about how their jobs can be affected by the change.

The study also shows that if reasons for the change are not shown it is likely to fail to attract implementers. As Makoni (2009) postulates, if the reasons for the change are not clearly communicated, problems usually arise when no apparent or logical basis for accepting a new system of operation are clearly seen. Furthermore, if personal relationships and power are threatened, people offer stiff resistance to change. This may be due to a feeling of interference with personally established power bases or status which might follow the changes (Makoni, 2009).

Data also reveal that heads do not provide the necessary leadership that teachers require to implement new policies. As McLaughlin (2008) postulates, in order for change to take place effectively, the head should create a conducive climate; a climate which supports the continual quest for improvement will be one in which all of the teachers will see their teaching performance as something to be continuously monitored, reflected upon individually and collectively and improved. By the same breadth Huberman (1984) have argued that large scale, change-bearing innovation lived or died by the amount and quality of assistance that their users received. As Hall (2004) posits, while it is appreciated that the responsibility of providing assistance may lie primarily with central government and the head's responsible authority, it is expected that the head should play his part especially in those areas directly under his/her responsibility such as generating commitment for the change. He/she will enhance chances of successful change, if he/she views change from the perspective of school improvement and he/she should implement the change not just to comply with the law, but to achieve the aim of improving the school.

## 12. CONCLUSIONS

Given the background of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions: -

- ❖ Both theoretical and empirical data in this study converge on the fact that new policies are not properly introduced in schools for effective implementation.
- ❖ Changes are imposed from above by higher authorities with very little buy-in from heads and teachers.
- ❖ Schools face many challenges and as a result new policies are not effectively implemented.
- ❖ Heads and teachers are usually asked to implement changes whose reasons for their introduction are not communicated.
- ❖ Heads of schools do not provide the necessary leadership that teachers require for effective implementation of new policies.
- ❖ Heads and teachers have positive attitudes towards new policies if they are properly introduced.



### 13. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations:

- ❖ The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should provide good communication and education campaigns about a planned change. The communication should be honest, sincere, legitimate and truthful.
- ❖ There is also need to ensure the participation of individuals or groups affected by the change. This may reduce potential for resistance and conflict.
- ❖ The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should facilitate retraining and staff development programmes for individuals and groups to face the effects which result from proposed changes.
- ❖ Negotiating for possible agreement before implementation of a programme should be done to avoid challenges during implementation. During the negotiations, the change agent should, democratically and in a friendly manner, solicit for the change.
- ❖ School heads should provide leadership and guidance to teachers as they attempt to understand the new policy.
- ❖ Teachers and heads should be incorporated in decision making to allow them to bring their suggestions so that they will have ownership of the new policy.
- ❖ More resources should be provided to schools by the government to support the new policies.

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