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Challenges Faced by School Management in the Procurement of Teaching and Learning Materials and their Perceived Effect on Pupils' Academic Performance in Selected Secondary Schools in Chipata District, Zambia

By

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Abstract

This study sought to explore challenges faced by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials and their perceived effect on pupils' academic performance in selected secondary schools in Chipata district. Chipata was chosen as a study area because it has the highest concentration of secondary schools, being the provincial headquarters of Eastern province. The objectives of the study were to establish strategies employed by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials, identify challenges faced by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials, and determine perceived effects of procurement challenges on pupils' academic performance. The study employed a descriptive research design. A sample of 44 respondents comprising 8 head teachers 8 deputy head teachers and 28 heads of department was purposively selected. Data was collected using interview guides. It was analysed qualitatively by content analysis and results presented in key concepts and narrations. Verbatims which were found significant to the findings were also included. The study revealed that strategies employed by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials included facilitating the planning and budgeting processes, approving budgets, allocating material and financial resources, sourcing for funds and monitoring the purchase of materials. The study also revealed that challenges faced by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials were erratic and inadequate funding by government, stringent conditions attached to grants from government which relegated purchase of teaching and learning materials, pupils' failure to pay school fees in full and absence of full-time and trained procurement officers. The study also indicated that the perceived effect of procurement challenges on pupils' academic performance included poor results in some subjects and pupils' negative attitude towards certain subjects. The study recommended that the government should increase the grants allocated to schools and consistently disburse them; pupils should be compelled to pay school fees in full before they start learning; and the Ministry of General Education should employ full-time and trained procurement officers in order to improve the procurement process.

Key words: Challenges, school management, procurement, teaching and learning, pupils' performance

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Introduction

Education has a huge impact on any human society and it can safely be assumed that no society is optimally functional until it is properly educated. In the global perspective, it is an undeniable fact that the progress of a nation is very much dependent on the education of its citizens (Komakech & Osuu, 2014). School management plays an important role in ensuring that quality education is offered in schools. Quality in education means value and relevance (Kelly, 1999). Lack of sound leadership in the school management affects the extent to which lessons get delivered and this may have a negative effect on pupils' performance. This leadership includes the ability of the school management to organize teaching and learning materials (Oluka & Opolot-Okulut, 2008). According to Kelly (1999), school management plays an important role in ensuring that quality education is offered in schools.

Quality in education ranges from physical conditions of schools to better teacher training, availability of textbooks and parental involvement in training learners. Quality entails focusing on the individual needs of learners which includes having a low teacher-pupil ratio. Quality education, therefore, is one which is meaningful, worthwhile and responsive to the needs of both individuals and society. It determines how much and how well learners acquire skills and the extent to which their education translates into personal, social and developmental benefits. For education to have quality, the teaching and learning processes have to bring the school curriculum to life. It includes the effectiveness of what happens in the classroom and the quality of the learning process (Ramandria, 1995). This implies that quality education is a multifaceted phenomenon comprising a number of prerequisites, one of which is the availability of sufficient teaching and learning materials.

Statement of the Problem

Most secondary schools in Chipata district are owned and funded by the Government of the Republic of Zambia. It is the role of school management to ensure availability of teaching and learning materials. It has, however, been observed that management in secondary schools in the district generally face challenges in the procurement of these materials. Furthermore, little has been documented on these challenges and their perceived effect on pupils' academic performance, hence the relevance of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore challenges faced by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials and their perceived effect on pupils' academic performance in selected secondary schools in Chipata district.

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Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Establish the role played by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials in selected secondary schools in Chipata district.
2. Identify challenges faced by management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials in selected secondary schools in Chipata district.
3. Establish the perceived effect of teaching and learning material procurement challenges on pupils' performance in selected secondary schools in Chipata district.

Literature Review

The literature for the study was reviewed under the following themes: the nature of school management, factors that affect pupils' academic performance and challenges faced by schools in the procurement and management of teaching and learning materials.

The nature of school management

Any education system at every level depends heavily on the school management for execution of its educational programmes. According to Berliner (1988), management involves performing duties and responsibilities of an education institution so that the desired education outcomes can be attained. Management has various components which include planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, controlling and evaluation.

According to Beeby (1996), planning involves systematically analyzing the process of education development so as to improve its effectiveness and efficiency and to respond to the needs of both individual learners and society at large. Planning, therefore, means putting in place strategies on how an institution will achieve certain objectives.

Planning is important because without it, educational objectives cannot be realized. In a school as an organization, there are lots of important things that compete for the few available resources. Therefore, if there is no planning, it is difficult to prioritise which activities have to be allocated with resources so that objectives are realized as needed by the institution. In the Zambian education system, school management is done by the head teacher, his/her deputy and others who serve in administration such as heads of department. According to the Ministry of Education (1992), head teachers should exhibit leadership in performing their roles as both teachers and administrators. Head teachers should be leading models to other staff in the manner they discharge their duties and inspire others.

The other component of management is organizing. The school, as an institution, is an organization. Daft (2007) defines an organization as a social entity that is goal oriented, which is designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems and linked to the external environment. Therefore, organization in educational management means that resources at an education institution that are aimed at realizing educational objectives are available and put in place. This means that resources such as the human, financial, including teaching and learning materials should all be appropriately allocated and managed.

Directing is another component of educational management. This means having in place an educational authority which has to give directions on policy matters (Ministry of Education, 1992). Without a central authority to give directions, people can be working in the manner they wish. This may lead to disorganization, disharmony, disruption and, ultimately, result in failure to realize educational objectives.

The other cardinal aspect of management in the education sector is coordination (Kelly, 1999). The school is made up of various educational units called departments. These

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units involve different aspects of the school which require coordination. For the school to run smoothly there should be a way of bringing these units together. Therefore, without coordination, the units of a school cannot work in harmony and cannot complement each other and may at times conflict with each other.

Management further involves control (Berliner, 1988). To control means to steer an organization in a direction one wants it to go. The school, as an organization, can be affected by various aspects of the environment in which it is found. This requires that from time to time, control has to be exercised. Staff members who are involved in the educational programs should discharge their duties efficiently and effectively. Without a measure of control, staff members may be autonomously functioning and possibly deviate from the intended educational objectives.

Evaluation is another key component of educational management. To evaluate means to assess if the objectives have been achieved and to determine the extent to which what was planned for has been attained (World Bank, 2007). The purpose of evaluation is to conduct an assessment on where the school, as an organization, has performed better and where it needs to improve. In order to achieve objectives, there must be evaluation on a short-term or long-term basis. From time to time, evaluation has to be conducted so that it is determined whether educational objectives are being met according to plans and what has to be done in case of deviation.

Factors that affect pupils' academic performance

Studies reveal that in the correct settings teachers and schools can become more effective in improving the performance of pupils (Alspaugh, 1992). This means that improving various conditions of schools can improve pupils' performance. According to Oluka and Opolot-Okulut (2008), there are various factors that affect pupils' academic performance, among which is the manner in which the school is managed and the availability of teaching and learning materials. They explain that lack of sound leadership in the school administration affects the extent to which lessons get delivered and this has a negative effect on pupils' performance.

A study in Uganda found that lack of text books and other learning materials, teachers' guides and charts were the main factors contributing to poor performance of pupils (Liddell, 1984). Furthermore, The Ministry of Education (2001) asserts that some pupils in schools in Zambia perform poorly because of teacher-related factors such as inadequate preparation and teacher's lack of dedication to duty. The Ministry points out that teachers are expected to prepare what they teach in schools and these preparations could be in form of schemes of work, records of work and lesson plans to guide the teaching process.

The National Assessment Surveys carried out in Zambia in 1999 and 2003 revealed that staff and learner absenteeism, late coming and knocking off early had a negative bearing on the learning achievements (Kasanda, 2003). Pupil over-enrolment was also said to have contributed to poor performance among learners. According to Ndoye (2007), most schools in Zambia are characterized by large enrolments which have a negative impact on the quality of education. This, in turn, results in higher pupil-teacher ratios, pupil-classroom ratios, pupil-book ratios and pupil-desk ratios that ultimately affect the performance of the learners.

Mbozi (2008) established that the limited number of textbooks in Zambian schools was a factor affecting the performance of the learner. Mbozi found that most public schools in Zambia had a problem of purchasing teaching and learning materials because of their reliance

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on public funding. The government, as the proprietor of schools, did not provide sufficient resources to these schools due to other competing needs.

Challenges faced by schools in managing teaching and learning resources

Schools face challenges in their day-to-day operations such as the management and procurement of resources. Wamunyu (2012) undertook a study to determine the challenges faced by head teachers in managing school projects in Mathira Constituency. The target population was thirty three (33) public secondary schools in Mathira constituency, Nyeri County. The study found out that head teachers faced major challenges in the management of school projects. It also found that although most of the school principals had been trained in project management, they still experienced challenges related to management of finances, stakeholder involvement and monitoring and evaluation of projects.

A study by Mutungwa (2015) in Kenya examined challenges and main coping strategies on resource management and academic performance amongst primary schools in Makindu district, Makueni County, Kenya. The study established that resource management challenges were inadequate funding by the government, overstretched physical facilities as well as inefficient utilization of the available physical and human resources in schools. The researcher recommended that schools managers should involve teachers and learners in the decision making process and adopt management strategies that enhance learners' academic performance.

Methodology

The population comprised all head teachers, deputy head teachers and heads of department in selected secondary schools in Chipata district. Chipata was chosen as a study area because it has the highest concentration of secondary schools, being the provincial headquarters of Eastern province. A sample of 44 respondents comprising 8 head teachers 8 deputy head teachers and 28 head of department was purposive selected. Data was collected using interview guides. It was analysed qualitatively by content analysis and results presented in major concepts and narrations based on the objectives of the study. Verbatims which were found significant to the findings were also included.

Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion of the findings are presented in line with the objectives of the study.

The role of the school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials

The study revealed that the key role of school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials included facilitation of planning and budgeting processes, approving budgets, sourcing for funds and monitoring the purchase of materials. One head teacher said:

The budget is facilitated by the heads of department, who call upon subject teachers to submit lists of items that they need to use while teaching in order to initiate the purchasing process. After that, I come in to see the whole process through.

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Deputy Head teachers indicated that school management procured teaching and learning aids as requested by the various departments. One of them asserted:

The school administration at my school sources for funds. For example, they write business houses for help and when such help is given, departments purchase teaching and learning materials. The school administration strictly monitors the process of purchase so as to avoid mismanagement and theft of money.

The above findings are in line with Berliner (1988), who indicated that management involves performing duties and responsibilities of an education institution so that the desired education outcomes can be attained. One of the functions is the procurement of relevant teaching and learning materials. Beeby (1996) also holds that one of the roles of school management is to systematically analyze the process of education development so as to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. This also entails putting in place strategies, including procurement and provision of resources so that the institution can achieve its objectives.

Challenges faced by school management in the procurement of teaching and learning materials

The study found that school management faced some challenges in the procurement of teaching and learning materials. These included erratic and inadequate funding by government, stringent conditions attached to grants from government which relegated purchase of teaching and learning materials, pupils' failure to pay school fees in full and absence of full-time and trained procurement officers. One head teacher stated:

The major challenge at this school is lack of funds. The financial resources are not enough to procure the teaching and learning material. The last time the government funded us was last year in term two and the grant that was given was not enough to procure all the teaching and learning materials...

The finding is consistent with Mutungwa (2015) who established that resource management challenges in Kenya included inadequate funding by the government, overstretched physical facilities as well as inefficient utilization of available resources in schools.

Other head teachers reported that they never depended on school grants from the government to procure teaching and learning materials as the funds came with conditions. They stated that their source of income for the day-to-day running of their schools were fees that they levied pupils every term, which they said were not enough to meet the rising operational costs. Heads of department also explained that schools lacked full-time and trained procurement officers. One of them said:

Very few secondary schools have procurement officers. The school administration picks some teachers to be procurement officers. What happens is that when such teachers are required to go and purchase items, their lessons suffer and when they are expected to go and procure the teaching and learning materials, they are attending to pupils in class. Besides, these teachers are not formally trained in procurement.

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Similarly, Wamunyu (2012) posits that head teachers in public secondary school in Kenya faced challenges in the management of the school projects as they were not trained in project management and related aspects of management.

Perceived effect of teaching and learning material procurement challenges on pupils' academic performance

The study indicated that perceived effects of teaching and learning material procurement challenges on pupil performance included poor results in some subjects and pupils' negative attitude towards certain subjects. One head teacher said:

Teaching and learning materials improve pupils' academic performance as when school going children see and hear they are not able to forget. However, lack of or none use of teaching and learning materials may contribute to poor results and both teachers and pupils may not perform to expectation.

In addition heads of department reported that learners in many secondary schools did not perform to expectation in subjects that lacked of inappropriate study materials. One of them asserted:

Pupils find it difficult to access information due to the unavailability of aids such as computers, text books, charts, models and apparatus that are supposed to be used in the laboratories which may have contributed to poor results in the school.

Mutungwa (2015) points out that pupils in most government schools perform badly due to lack of teaching and learning materials. This finding implies that the significance of teaching and learning materials in any education system cannot be overemphasized. This is because they have a direct or indirect bearing on the academic performance of pupils in the school set-up.

Conclusion

The study concluded that school management played a major role in ensuring the procurement and availability of teaching and learning materials. It was responsible for sourcing for funds and supervising and monitoring of the procurement of the teaching and learning materials. The study also concluded that challenges faced by school management *vis-à-vis* procuring teaching and learning materials included inadequate and erratic government funding, resulting in failure by schools to procure necessary materials, which may have negatively affected pupils' academic performance.

Recommendations

The study recommended that the government should increase funding to secondary schools in Chipata district to enable them procure adequate teaching and learning resources. It also recommended that school management should be trained in procurement policies and procedures so that they could more effectively supervise procurement processes. The study also recommended that full-time and appropriately qualified procurement officers should be employed in order to enhance the procurement of teaching and learning materials in schools and that pupils should be compelled to pay school fees in full before they start learning in order to improve the financial standing.

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