Power Relations between Teachers and Head Teachers: A Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

by

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Abstract

The study sought to explore power relations between teachers and head teachers and its implications on pedagogy on selected secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia. The study draws a theoretical framework from Michel Foucault's notion of power relations. The study employed a descriptive design through the application of qualitative method. Data was collected from 5 secondary schools in Lusaka District. The sample comprised of 20 teachers and 5 head teachers, who were sampled purposively. Data was gathered through interviews and documents and was analyzed thematically by identifying patterns and themes within or across the data. Frequencies and percentages were run to shed more light on the responses from teachers and head teachers and this was presented through the use of figures. The main findings of the study revealed that the causes of power relations between head teachers and teachers varied. Responses from head teachers included absenteeism, late coming, teachers having a negative work culture and not submitting teaching files on schedule. Teachers indicated the following causes of power relations; teachers having higher qualifications than the head teacher, incompetence on the part of the head teacher, unsatisfactory class allocation, and favoritism. Furthermore, the study revealed that power relations have a negative implication on pedagogy such as teachers projecting their frustration on learners, loss of morale on the part of the learners which results in disliking a subject (s) of that particular teacher. The findings of the study further indicated that teachers and head teachers were able to manage their power differences through various management strategies such as confrontation,

avoidance, dialogue, maintaining government policy by giving teachers copies of working conditions, charging the teacher, mediation, communication and scolding the teacher. Despite managing the power differences using several strategies, personal grudges between teachers and head teacher still exist. In light of the findings, the study recommends that both headteachers and teachers should undertake a compulsory course on management of power relations in the secondary school teacher preparation programmes. It also recommends that headteachers should also be encouraged to adopt a compromising style for conflict management.

Background

This study was underpinned by Foucault's power relations theory to understand the power relations between head teachers and teachers and its implications on pedagogy. By tradition, schools are known to be institutions where teaching and learning takes place. Teachers are expected to teach children and have the responsibility to develop in each child a positive attitude towards learning. Schools are known to be safe places where pupils interact with one another, their teachers and educational administrators (Boothe,1993). However, schools like any other organised entity is without power relation issues in its jurisdiction, leading to conflicts between some of the key players, thus, teachers and headteachers. Thus, conflict exists in every society and there is no unique institution that is exempt from it.

Reports of teachers and head teachers engaging in conflicts as a result of power relations relating to their practice have been on the increase. These conflicts are known to disturb communication networks within the school and ultimately have a negative impact on pedagogy (Mwamba, 2016). Conflict has been defined as (Cannie, 2002; Hart, 2002; Meeks, 2005) a disagreement or struggle and a state of opposition or incompatibility between two or more people. Given these definitions, conflict can be viewed as a contest of opposing forces or power and a struggle to resist or overcome.

While improved performance in education is expected, training teachers and head teachers in mediation skills is frequently neglected. The impact has reflected on frequently and repeated conflicts between teachers and head teachers in schools resulting from power relations. According to Rejoice (1993), Conflict management skills for teachers and head teachers in most schools have not been emphasized. Therefore, this calls for conflict management strategies to deal with issues of boycotts, riots as well as the breakdown of managerial capacities in schools. Kasenge and Muleya (2020), note also that conflict management strategies in schools are designed to control costly struggle in order to minimize negative impacts of unstrained forces. Not only that, Bergersen and Muleya (2019), note that the general citizenry should learn how they ought to relate with one another as well as respecting divergent views. As such, secondary schools in Zambia should have an emphasis on education that positively impacts on the learners in order to advance national interest (Magasu, Muleya, and Mweemba, 2020). Where the teachers and headteachers fail to resolve their differences due to power relations, the possibility of pedagogical challenges are bound to occur in such schools. Therefore, this paper explores the power relations between teachers and head teachers and its implications on pedagogy in selected secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia.

Statement of the problem

Despite the Ministry of General Educations effort to address the problem of conflicts in secondary schools through the introduction of disciplinary committees, head teachers and teachers still engage in various forms of conflicts. This study sought to explore power relations between head teachers and teachers in selected secondary schools in Lusaka District of Zambia. It further established implications of power relations on pedagogy.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:
  (i)   To determine the relationship and causes of power related conflicts in selected secondary schools in Lusaka district.

(ii)   To examine the effects of power relations between teachers and head teachers among selected secondary schools in Lusaka district.

(iii) To establish the best practices used to manage power relations between teachers and head teachers from selected secondary schools in Lusaka district.

An Overview of Literature Review

There has been a growing debate in the literature of educational leadership on the power relationships between head teachers or school managers and teachers. Xia (2014), found that power relations between head teachers and teachers at times create what is referred to as a Zero-sum game theory which implies that one of the two persons may need to loss or win. Xia (2014), re-conceptualises the meaning of power as well as the term power relations. He notes that "power can be viewed from three approaches that is power-over, power-with, and failure of power exercise. The three powers can be associated to power-with to the win-win situation while connecting power-over with the zero-sum game theory. The headteacher could exercise his or her power with or over a teacher or a group of teachers, while a teacher or a group of teachers could also exercise power with or over the headteacher. It is this power-with/power-over option that determines the situation as a win-win situation or a zero-sum game.

The concept of power is a vital influence in any organisation including education because it builds the productive capacity of the institution. (Foucault, 1981). Levant, Özdemir and Akpolat (2018), explored the relationship between school heads and teachers in relation to power and trust. The findings of the study indicated that there was a moderately positive relationship found between power sources except coercive and all organizational trust subscales. The findings also showed that sub-dimensions of organizational power significantly predicted organizational trust scores. According to Weber (1970), power is an aspect of social relationships which has a possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another person. Thus, power is the ability to influence others to believe,

behave, or to value as those in power desire them to or to strengthen, validate, or confirm present beliefs, behaviours, or values. Word Bank (2004), postulates that, power can be embedded in institutions, policies and social norms, and is especially difficult to transform when those whom outsiders regard as victims seem to be complicit in its exercise.

A study by Kosar et al. (2014), examined the relationship between primary school principals' power styles and teacher professionalism. Their findings indicated that teacher professionalism was positively and meaningfully related to personality and power relation. This had a direct effect as it negatively and significantly correlated with legitimate and coercive power. The results also showed that the power styles of school principals greatly predicted teacher professionalism and pedagogy. Thus, power relations have implications on teacher effectiveness and teaching/learning process in the classroom. In schools where power relation is understood to mean the capacity of the head teacher to impose his or her will over the will of the teachers, there are possibilities that this most likely will have an implication on pedagogy. Therefore, in the next section, the paper discusses the power relations perspective as proposed by Michel Foucault so as to understand how this is mediated in secondary schools between teachers and head teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The study employed the Foucauldian power relations theory to understand the phenomenon under study. The fundamental point Foucault raises among the many in his works is that power is not owned by anybody but it is rather something that acts and manifest itself in a particular way and therefore power is a strategy more than possession. As such, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), offers an understanding of power in relation to individuals and society. This means that individuals are the vehicles of power and not its points of application. The choice of theory is fundamentally important because individuals whether teachers or head teachers cannot and should not be viewed as objects of power but that they are the locus

where power and the resistance to it are exerted. This should not be literally noted that where there is power, there should also be resistance. Therefore, we should use it as a basis upon which such power is applied in a relationship between the teachers and head-teachers. According to Foucault (1981) it is not ideal for those that wield power over others to use it in order to impose their will over those that they superintend over.

Once power is understood in its correct context for example being productive and causing new and positive behaviour to emerge, then they will be likelihood of good relationships between teachers and head teachers in secondary schools. In turn this is likely to enhance the teacher' professional potentials and at the same time help in improving the learners' intellectual skills and capacities thereby impacting positively on pedagogy (Machila, Sompa, Muleya and Pitsoe, 2018). Similarly, Muleya (2015), notes that both those with power and those with less power should reflect, think and criticise taken for granted positions in a bid to transform society. In the context of this paper, we argue that teachers and head teachers in secondary schools should equally reflect, think and criticise each other in order to enhance strong relationships. The Foucauldian lens of power therefore provides a comprehensive understanding of how various individuals ought to apply power on groups or individuals. Using Foucault's power relation perspective, we argue that power does not only produce negative effects but does also produce positive effects since it is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge and understanding. The use of it correctly has benefits that would enhance pedagogical practices in secondary schools.

Methods

The research methodology of this study was a qualitative approach. Using a descriptive research design, the study implored a homogeneous purposive sampling method. A homogeneous purposive sample is one that is selected based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study (Creswell, 1994). This study targeted teachers and head teachers in selected secondary schools in Lusaka district of Zambia. A non-probability sampling design

was used to select head teachers and teachers who were sampled purposefully. The sample size for this research was twenty-five. A total number of 5 public secondary schools in Lusaka Province were selected using the non-probability sampling design. The sample consisted of 5 head teachers and 20 teachers.

This research used a semi-structured interview to collect primary data. Due to the flexibility of a qualitative study, both open and closed ended questions were included in the interview schedules to collect in-depth information, so as to get a complete and detailed understanding of the study (Meeks, 2005). The study got its secondary data from different school records which included the head teacher's diary and the school log book. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data and this was done by identifying patterns and themes within or across the data. Frequencies and percentages were run to shed more light on the responses from teachers and head teachers and this was presented through the use of figures.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study have been presented in line with emerging themes for the purpose of data presentation. Responses from all the teachers and head teachers were presented numerically through the use of figures and charts. Frequencies and percentages were run and presented to shed more light on power relations between teachers and head teachers and its implications on pedagogy in selected secondary schools.

Personal Relationship between Headteachers and Teachers.

In order to address the question on the personal relationship between teachers and headteachers, researchers decided to separated positive responses from the negative responses for easy analysis.

Positive Responses on Personal Relationship from Teachers and Headteachers.

Below are some of the positive responses that were recorded from the teachers and head teachers:

Teacher 1: "I have no problems with the head teacher because I do what I am expected to do, and I am also in management as I am in charge of guidance and counselling department."

Teacher 2: "I socialize well with the head teacher as she was my former teacher in secondary school. I am however aware of the power relations that exist between some teachers and the head teacher which are as a result of some teachers having higher qualifications than the head teacher, not submitting teaching files and constant late coming.

On the same question, one head teacher said: "My experience of working with teachers at this school is generally good especially those that are in management." Another head teacher mentioned that he had a good relationship with his teachers because most of them were had working and execute their duties with less supervision.

Negative Responses on Personal Relationship from Teachers and Headteachers.

Having looked at the positive responses, below are some of the negative responses from the teachers and head teachers:
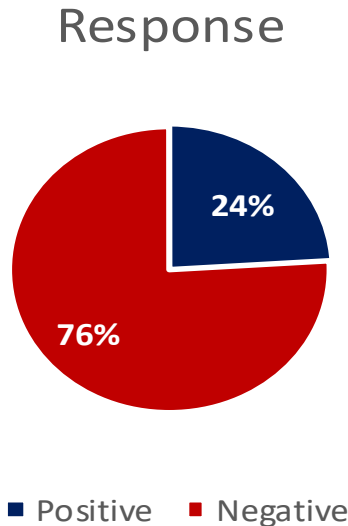
Teacher 3: "I do not have good relationship with my head teacher because from the time I was transferred to this school the head seems to dislike me for no reason."

Teacher 4: "I have a bad relationship with my head teacher because he wants to be hero-worshiped."

On the same question, one head teacher stated that she had problems with some teachers because of their laissez-faire attitude towards work. Another head teacher stated that he was not in good terms with some teachers because they were undermining him as he was junior in service.

Having looked at responses from both teachers and head teachers on the positives and negatives, the findings were summarized and presented numerically as shown in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Type of responses regarding teacher-head teacher relationship

Response

■ Positive   ■ Negative

As noted from the above responses and as shown in figure 1, in general, the study revealed that overall, 76% (19/25) teachers and head teachers provided a negative response, while 24% (6/25) teachers and head teachers provided a positive response. This suggested that very few teachers in schools related well with their head teachers. The study further suggested that some teachers and head teachers in schools did not relate well because of the misunderstandings amongst them. This was as a result of lack of communication and poor working environment. This agrees with Sompa (2015) who alluded that communication and a conducive working environment is vital in understanding conflicts in learning institutions. In addition,

the study suggested that power differences usually lead to negative work culture. Thus, the power relation scenario in these schools was anchored on power as possession and individual teachers were not seen by the head teachers as vehicles of power but points of the application of power. When such is manifest in the schools, chances are high that pedagogical practices will be hampered greatly.

On the positive side, the study revealed that 24% (6/25) teachers and head teachers provided a positive response. This suggests that while there were more negatives than positives, some teachers related well with their head teachers because of the trust that existed between them, and this resulted in teachers being given responsibilities such as guidance and counselling. This agrees with Levant, Özdemir and Akpolat (2018) statement that in some organisations, there is moderately positive relationship between supervisors and subordinates because of the trust the exist among them.

Causes of power related conflicts between head teachers and teachers in secondary schools

On the question of the causes of power related conflicts in schools, responses from participants revealed that there were several personal and administrative causes of power related conflicts between the teachers and head teachers. For easy analysis, teachers' personal and administrative causes of power related conflicts were presented first as shown in the figures 2 and 3 below.

Figure 2: **Personal causes of power related conflicts according to teachers**

Causes	Number of responses	Percentage
Higher qualifications by teachers than the head teacher	7	35%
Opposing educational interests	2	10%
Poor communication skills	4	20%
Lack of support for individual career development	3	15%
Segregation and isolation of some teachers	2	10%
Different cultural and previous backgrounds	2	10%
Total	**20**	**100%**

Of the 20 teachers who were interviewed on personal causes of power related conflict, 35% said teachers' high qualifications as opposed to head teachers was one of the causes while 10% indicated opposing educational interests. Some teachers with the representation of 20% reported poor communication skills as the causes of personal power related conflicts. For the remaining last three categories of responses on the causes of teachers' personal power related conflicts, 15% of teachers mentioned lack of support for individual career development while the remaining two categories; segregation and isolation of teachers and different cultural and previous backgrounds were represented by 10 % each.

Figure 3: **Administrative/Managerial causes of power related conflicts according to teachers**
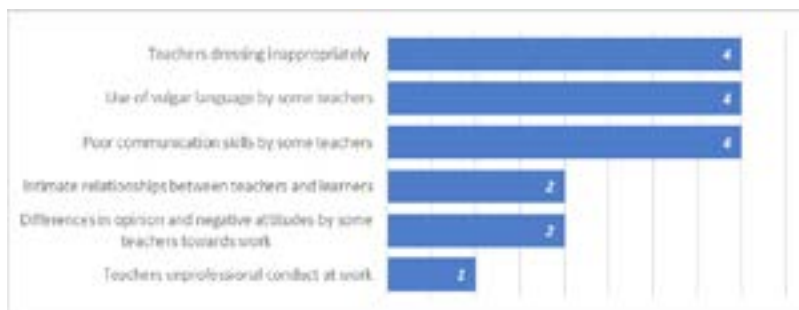
Causes	Number of Responses	Percentage
Poor management skills and Strategies	5	25%
Unsatisfactory class and task allocation	3	15%
Favouritism of some teacher by head teachers	4	20%
Unfair Performance appraises	2	10%
Lack of Transparency, efficiency & accountability	2	10%
Incompetent &unprofessional supervision	2	10%
Lack of support/access to further studies	2	10%
Total	**20**	**100%**

Figure 3 shows that of the 20 teachers who were interviewed on the administrative causes of power related conflicts, 25% mentioned poor management skills and strategies while 15% mentioned unsatisfactory class and tasks allocation. Further, 20% teachers mentioned favouritism of some teachers by head teachers while the last four categories; unfair performance appraisals, lack of Transparency, efficiency & accountability, incompetent and unprofessional supervision and lack of support/access to further studies were represented by 10% each.

Having looked at responses from the teachers on the personal and administrative causes of power related conflicts, the findings reveal that majority of the causes of power related conflict in schools are caused by misunderstandings between headteachers and teachers. While it may be true that the majority of the causes of power related conflict in schools are caused by misunderstandings

by the two parties, it may also not be correct because sometimes teachers become jealous of the headteachers and they do not see anything good in them. Similarly, some headteachers may also become jealous of their teachers and pretend not to see anything good in them.

Figure 4: **Personal Causes of power related conflicts according to head teachers**

The findings in figure 4 shows that out of 5 head teachers who were interviewed on the personal causes of power related conflicts, 4 head teachers mentioned inappropriate teacher dressing, 4 mentioned the use of vulgar language by some teachers, and the other 4 indicated that poor communication skills by some teachers contribute to causes of personal power related conflict. Two headteachers mentioned intimate relationships between teachers and learners, 2 indicated differences in opinion and negative attitudes by some teachers towards work, while only one mentioned unprofessional conduct at work.

Figure 5: **Administrative/Managerial causes of power related conflicts according to head teachers**

Of the 5 headteachers interviewed on the causes of administrative/ managerial power related conflict, 5 headteachers mentioned lack of submission of teaching files by teachers, another 5 mentioned improper lesson planning while 4 indicated constant late coming by teachers. On the same question, the study revealed that 3 headteachers mentioned lack of pedagogical content knowledge by some teachers, while the remaining last two categories of responses; constant absenteeism by teachers and illegal offering of school places by teachers were mentioned by headteachers each.

Having looked at responses from the headteachers on the personal and administrative causes of power related conflicts, the findings reveal that the power related conflicts are mostly administrative.

In conclusion, figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 above, shows that power related conflicts are driven by a number of factors from a personal and administrative point of view. Several studies (Musah, 2018; Kasuba, 2016; Sompa, 2015; World Bank, 2004) have acknowledged the existence of power related conflicts in secondary schools. It is evident from the studies that power and autonomy are critical in understanding institutional management and relationships between individuals.

Effects of Power Relations between Teachers and Headteachers in Schools

According to the findings of the study on the effects of power relations between teachers and head teachers, all the participants indicated that power relations had a negative impact on the learning environment, on pedagogy and curricular activities. This is elaborated below.

Unconducive teaching/learning environment

In this study, research findings revealed that in most schools' teachers and headteachers' relationships were negatively affected. This was as a result of some head teachers aligning themselves to a few identified teachers in schools and sidelined others. When this happens, there is a lot of favouritism as evidenced by the response from this participant who stated that:

Teacher 5: "In this school there is a lot of favouritism and discrimination because the head has her own favorites and they are untouchable."

The findings above revealed that some teachers developed the sense of being neglected within the school and that affected their relationship with the head teachers. As postulated by Borhandden et al (2018), teachers and head teachers' relationships have a strong influence on teachers' psychological well-being, behaviour, sense of belonging as well as their satisfaction. Therefore, teachers and head teachers' relationship should be valued because if not well handled, it may result into conflict between the supervisors and subordinates. These unfortunate situations should be avoided by head teachers at all cost because they may lead to unpleasant teaching/learning environment. Another effect noted was that if power relations is not well handled, teachers may end up destroying the trust and confidence that have existed between them and their head teachers for the long time. As a result, the teaching/learning environment may be negatively affected because teachers may not execute their work well.

Pedagogical implications of power relation conflicts between head teachers and teachers

Research findings on pedagogical implications suggested that power relations affected the way teachers executed their work. This was evidenced by one participant who stated that he was no longer interested in work because he did not know why the head teacher hated him so much. From his explanation, the head teacher was intimidated because he had higher qualifications than him. The teacher narrated that because of the way he was treated, he became so frustrated such that his work was affected. This suggests that when teachers are frustrated, their morale go down such that they fail to execute their work properly. Furthermore, the findings suggest that frustration lead to loss of interest in work and experienced teachers become disturbed and fail to follow the prescribed daily routines to teach because they lose focus in pedagogical proficiency and experience (Chileshe et al, 2018). It is therefore the responsibility of the head teachers to make sure that all the teachers in school are happy when executing their work.

Implications of Power Related Conflicts on Curricular Activities

The findings also revealed that power relations between teachers and head teachers affected curricular activities in schools. In several schools, activities such as sports and clubs were not doing well because experienced teachers were not fully involved simply because they were not in good terms with their head teachers. Performance in curricular activities in schools where teachers and head teachers were not in good terms was very poor because there was no commitment.

Best practices used to manage power relations between teachers and head teachers in schools.

The findings revealed that there were several best practices used to manage interpersonal conflicts between teachers and head teachers. The face to face interviews with the teachers showed that dialogue and trust were vital in building good working relationships in an

organisation. The other best practices noted included among many others: accommodation, confrontation, cooperation and communication. These practical implications are in line with a study by Musah (2018), which alludes to several strategies on how to manage conflicts between head teachers and teachers in Malaysian high performing schools. Musah (2018), further offers several theoretical and practical strategies on how to manage conflicts between head teachers and teachers such as increased level of communication and mutual understanding. There is no doubt that head teachers have a major role to play in their relationship with teachers as they possess managerial power (Bottery, 2001). Thus, head teachers must develop strategies for implementing power related conflicts within their institutions.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that power and conflict exists in schools between head teachers and teachers, however, different management strategies can be used to solve such problems. Depending on how school head teachers deal with power relations, it may result into positive or negative effects such as conducive teaching and learning environment, poor pedagogical content knowledge by teachers respectively. Therefore, owing to the above situation, power relations have direct consequences on the teaching learning process such as teachers being less motivated in the delivery of lessons. This means that school head teachers must create good power relations between them and the teachers in order to enhance effective teaching.

Recommendations

The study recommends enhancing power relations training for various personnel in secondary schools that includes; teachers and Head teachers. There is need also to develop policies on school conflict management so as to address challenges associated with power relations in secondary schools. More research must be carried out in other secondary schools including private schools in various provinces in order to understand the extent of the phenomenon under study.

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