

Improving school leadership

[Education](#), [School](#)



From the nature of the education system depicted by the organizational structure, critically discuss problems that can result from such a structure and suggest solutions.

Introduction: Zimbabwe as a nation believes in education for all. Systems are in place to ensure everyone has access to education. This paper will examine the structure of the Zimbabwean education system, highlighting problems which may arise because of its nature, and attempt to give solutions. Two terms, education system and organizational structure, are defined.

Definition of terms Education system:

According to Wikipedia, "Education in its broadest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual and in its technical sense education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, values, and skills from one generation to another through institutions". Wikipedia also defines a system as integrated an 'integrated whole' which has a structure, behaviour, interconnectivity of various parts which " have functional as well as structural relationships between each other".

The term system may also refer to a set of rules that governs behavior or structure. Education system therefore refers to the structure and behaviour as well as functionality of the entity through which children acquire knowledge, values and skills through a formalized set-up. Organizational structure: Structure is, according to wikipedia, a fundamental and sometimes intangible notion covering the recognition, observation, nature, and stability

of patterns and relationships of entities. A structure defines what a system is made of. It is a configuration of items.

It is a collection of inter-related components or services. The structure may be a hierarchy (a cascade of one-to-many relationships) or a network featuring many-to-many relationships. Organisational structure therefore refers to the nature, patterns and relationships within an entity or social arrangement. Nature of the Zimbabwean education system: Structure: The Zimbabwean education system is a bureaucratic system, which has a hierarchical governing structure which goes from the top to the bottom. The hierarchy begins at the head office where the Permanent Secretary and his team of directors are housed.

The Permanent Secretary, is the senior civil servant, and reports to the Minister, who is a politician and is in charge of policy making. The directors are in charge of the various elements within the system, such as quality control, administration, curriculum and human resources. Below the national, is the provincial level, whose hierarchy is headed by the Provincial Education Director (PED). He has two deputies, one in charge of Quality Assurance and the other of Professional Administration. There are several provincial level education officers below them.

The provincial office also houses other professionals in finance and other departments who report to the PED. At the district level, the District Education Officer (DEO) heads a team of Education Officers (EO)s who supervise education activities within the district. At school level, the head is in charge of the school, and is deputized by the deputy head. Teachers fall

below him but they too have seniority levels. This body at school level is responsible for the direct teaching of the child. Other ancillary staff falls below the professionals at school level but report to the head or whoever is assigned, by the head, in the finance office.

Having completed primary education, which includes earlychildhood elementary education, children graduate automatically into secondary school, where they are required to complete four years of schooling leading to an Ordinary Level pass. If successful at this level, they can proceed to high school where they attain Advanced Level passes and proceed to university, or choose to go to other colleges and tertiary institutions. Problems of the Organisational structure, and possible solutions: One major problem which may occur because of the bureaucratic nature of the education system is delay in the decision making process.

The hierarchical structure poses the major problem associated with bureaucracy. This means that if a problem occurs at the school level or even at district level, answers have to be sought from the top, which may take time. A practical example is when partners want to carry out programmes in districts and have to wait long as education personnel seek authorization from headquarters. This can be solved however by allowing officials at lower levels to make appropriate decisions or designing mechanisms through which decisions can be expedited.

The Minister, being the person in charge of policy, may choose to act without much consultation with others below him or with stakeholders. Sometimes hasty decisions are made, and these impact negatively on the ministry.

When school fees were announced during the first term 2009, not much consultation was done, resulting in exorbitant fees being charged per term. The majority of parents could not afford to pay the fees for first term, which was pegged at US\$150 for urban primary schools. A teacher, or any other civil servant, whose child went to these urban schools could therefore not pay.

Ministers must be accountable to their constituencies, and encouraged through workshops and trainings to involve their stakeholders in policy formulation exercises. The popularity of the minister is enhanced through consultation. The problem of non-consultative policies has also occurred with policies such as that of uniforms at schools. A former minister announced a few years ago that there would be a universal uniform for all schools. This caused an uproar, and was never implemented, mostly because the modalities had not been thought out or consulted on.

The country has a policy that all school children must wear a uniform, though it is the duty of the head to enforce this. There is also a policy which bars schools from excluding a child on the grounds of non-wearing of uniforms. Such contradictions arise from non-consultation. Encouraging policymakers to have an ear for the public could solve this. Where public opinion is not sought, they can involve key stakeholders, who may be better informed. Headmasters and teachers who are on the ground, are a source of vital information on practicalities of policies.

The curriculum is centralised and determined by subject panels of teachers, education officers, and representatives from the teachers' association,

universities, churches, and other stakeholder groups. The Curriculum Development Unit within the Ministry of Education and Culture coordinates the subject panels. The primary school curriculum includes mathematics, English, agricultural and environmental science, physical education, social studies, moral and religious education, music, craft and art, and the indigenous languages (Ndebele and Shona).

Indigenous tribal languages of the Kalanga, Tonga, Shangaan, Venda, and Nambya are taught during the first three years of elementary education within their communities. A school is not at liberty to determine its own curriculum. There has been a shift in public schools from the Cambridge based curriculum, to a local curriculum whose examinations are administered by ZIMSEC. Subject syllabi are then deduced from this national curriculum. The major flaw in this is that everyone is restricted to the same education standards, regardless of the nature of education which is academia oriented.

Only recently, there has been a thrust for technical and vocational education in schools, with importance also being given to introduction of these subjects in primary school. Expanding technical vocational education can improve the quality of graduates produced from the education system. This will ensure employable and relevant people for the Zimbabwean economy which is largely agrarian. In view of recent challenges in the economy, a purely academic curriculum will not help the country.

Increased and improved internet use in the education system will also ensure students produced have a wider world view in light of globalisation.

The organisational structure within the education system can stifle the grievance process. A teacher is required to report grievances he or she faces through the headmaster (in the event that the headmaster cannot help him or her). The problem lies where the headmaster is the source of the teacher's problem. It may be a case of misconduct and the same headmaster is required to forward the reports of the teacher to the DEO.

This will see the process taking long. A system can be put in place, which ensures that when grievances are targeted at the headmaster, a teacher can follow-up directly with superiors. Counseling or confidence teams can also be set up at school level to cater for reporting of issues and their follow-up. The teacher may also be encouraged to seek the advice of the DEO directly. A ministry hotline can also be established to cater for this. Where partners are interested in contributing to the education sector, there have often been problems associated with the bureaucratic system.

Interest is expressed but decisions or authorization takes long in coming. Non governmental organisations (NGOs) usually come with interventions in mind, and donations, whose programmes must be implemented within a specific period. Often, programmes are stalled and the NGO gets to the end of the reporting period without implementing, resulting in failure to liquidate and the funding being returned. A practical example is when one NGO implementing capacity building programmes faced challenges trying to take a senior officer at provincial level within the ministry on an exchange programme to another country .

While this system fosters accountability and is ideal for easier monitoring, it can frustrate the efforts of those willing to contribute to the sector where procedures are not explained clearly, or where their efforts are stifled. A change in attitude is needed, where NGOs cease to be seen as enemies of government, as exacerbated by certain political environments. Meetings which clearly explain the operations of NGOs and targets they seek to fulfill also need to be held so as to clarify areas of concern with the ministry.

Stakeholder dialogues are important as seen in Manicaland, which now holds them regularly. The education sector is a public organization which is non-profit making. Revenue comes from national treasury. As such, the system is such that remuneration of staff is within public sector standards which stipulate modest payment. Overpayment would result in an uproar by taxpayers. Problems which teachers and other civil servants are currently facing are largely because the sector is not generating profits and therefore cannot afford to pay teachers what they want.

Privatization of the sector could contribute to better payment, but this is a phenomenon yet to be explored as even developed countries also have public schooling systems which are in place. The government will have to lobby with external partners to fund education programmes or contribute in the education budget. The structure of the education system in primary school has been said to be ineffective with regards expertise sharing. The structure is such that one primary school teacher is assigned to teach all subjects in a class. In high school, there are various experts specializing in particular subjects.

Researchers advocating for the Sharing Teacher Expertise through Subject Specialisation (STESS) programme at primary school are lobbying for the change in system from one teacher all subjects to specialisation as practised in secondary school. In 2002, an education commission sanctioned the piloting of STESS in a few schools in each province, and the system was adopted by others who have also reported the success as seen by better results. Advocates also note that it will then be easier for children to adapt to the situation when they get to secondary school.

The system requires teacher support in the form of capacity development so they keep abreast of methodologies in subject delivery. Rennie L. J (1985), explains the effects of in-service training on Science teaching and motivation in the classroom. This will go a long way in rejuvenating teaching methodology and enhance delivery effectiveness. The U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in cooperation with the Salvadoran Ministry of Education, has developed a training program aimed at introducing these innovative teaching methods into hundreds of schools around the country <http://usinfo.tate.gov>. The same can happen in Zimbabwe, if these private players are invited to do so.

Conclusion: The Zimbabwean education system is hierarchical and that poses a lot of challenges with regards setting up of policies, grievance procedures, curriculum decisions, and issues of collaboration with partners such as non-governmental organisations. These challenges can be solved if decision making is decentralized, and the policy formulation process is done consultatively with stakeholders.

The government can also lobby with partners so they participate by funding education programmes in the country. References: 1. Peace Corps 24 July 2007, "New Teaching Methods Stir Enthusiasm in Salvadoran Classrooms" USAID train teachers in interactive teaching styles, 2. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>), Bureau of International Information Programs, U. S. Department of State. 3. Rennie L. J (1985), ED280867 - The Effect of In-service Training on Teacher Attitudes and Primary School Science Classroom Climates. Research Report Number 12. 4. <http://www.wikipedia>