An investigation of the effectiveness of the school-based workshops approach to staff development in secondary schools in Botswana

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The development of staff in any organization in order to attain quality results is a sine qua non. The human resource of any organization, including schools and colleges is central to its effectiveness. What matters is the model that is used to enable the development of staff, in this case the development of teachers in secondary schools. This article argues that the school-based workshops as a component of staff development in the schools is the most effective due to several reasons, among them, the contextuality of the approach, it needs-driven nature, and the collaboration and teamwork that are its hallmark. Apart from the above, the study highlights some advantages that accrue such as being cost-effective and time saving and not being disruptive to the teaching and learning processes. The study combines both the qualitative and quantitative approaches to research.

Key words: staff development; school-based staff development; Botswana; school-focused.

INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions and descriptions of staff development. This article concentrates on those definitions that emphasize school-focused staff development as it has a relation to school-based workshops, which this paper argues is an essential component of staff development. Cunningham and Cardeiro (2000) described staff development as any activity or process intended to improve the skills, attitudes, understandings, or performance in present or future roles. They go on to say that it plays a critical, integrative role as a driver of cultural change, process improvement, individual growth, job design, and continuous improvement. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) believed that:

"The only way we're going to get from where we are to where we want to be is through staff development... When you talk about school improvement, you are talking about people improvement. ... the school is the people, so when you talk about excellence or improvement, or progress, we are really focusing on the people who make up the building".

Staff development is a sine qua non for any organization, including schools, to be successful in achieving its aims and objectives. Monyatsi (1997)

contended that the development of human potential is so valuable to the success of any modern organization that investment towards that goal needs to be directed at identified and proven competencies which lead to superior performance. He further pointed out that competency in this context refers to the skills, knowledge, attitudes, traits or any individual characteristic that is critical to the effective performance of a job. This idea of investing in human development as a way of improving staff performance is succinctly pointed out in the National Development Plan 7 (Republic of Botswana, 1991) where it is stated that:

"Botswana's development strategy has been to re-invest the returns from the exploitation of its mineral resources in order to achieve sustained development. One of the main investments has been in the development of human resources. There has been rapid expansion of education and training aimed at meeting the needs of a growing economy, and this will continue in the next plans".

The importance of staff development in the achievement of organizational goals cannot be over emphasized as literature abounds of references to its role. According to Van et al. (2001), strategic human

resources development means the process of changing an organization, stakeholders outside it, groups inside it, and people employed by it through planned learning, so that they possess the knowledge and skills needed for the future. Nel et al. (2004) posited that people are a form of capital in business. If astutely managed and developed, motivated employees can improve the organization's efficiency, effectiveness, and financial results. If teachers as employees are also regarded as a form of capital, then schools are bound to improve tremendously.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) are of the view that teachers are best suited for staff development based in their schools because such a model holds the promise of producing substantial positive change in our schools, yet it is a complex process involving new expectations and roles and reorientation in the way we think and operate schools at district level. It means moving many decisions about improvement out of the central office into the schools. In this way, the onus of staff development is therefore placed on the schools on the understanding that schools are better placed to come to grips with their needs and circumstances which in most cases are unique to them. Staff development programmes should not be based on the intentions and values of people outside the schools per se but on the needs of those in the forefront, the teachers.

Staff development has been described by Hewton (1988) 'as a planned process of development which enhances the quality of pupil learning by identifying, clarifying and meeting the individual needs of staff within a context of the institution as a whole'. Hewton (1988) further refers to school-focused staff development as all the strategies employed by trainers and teachers in partnership to direct training programmes in such a way as to meet the identified needs of the school, and to raise the standards of teaching and learning in the classroom. Day, Calderhead and Denicolo (1993) defined school-focused staff development as:

"A process designed to foster personal growth for individuals within a respectful, supportive, positive organizational climate having as its ultimate aim better learning for students and continuous self-renewal for educators and schools".

Monyatsi (1997) defined school-focused staff development as:

"A process through which a school staff identifies the school's strengths and shortcomings and utilizes such information as a basis for school improvement. The process is accomplished school or building level planning that is goal-directed, outcome-focused, and considerate of staff interests and needs and which is consistent with the school system's strategic plan.

It is therefore, very clear from the above descriptions and definitions of staff development that for it to be more meaningful and have a positive impact on the teachers and their schools, it must be approached from a human resources development perspective as a process rather than an event. It would be a fatal fantasy for any organization that seeks to enhance its productivity to ignore the continuous acquisition of essential skills, knowledge, attitudes and so forth, because in doing so, it shall be robbing itself of the only fuel needed to arouse creativity and innovation in the face of ever accelerating change. Most importantly, for staff development to be a success, it is paramount that it should be based on the needs and interests of the teachers, identified by the staff themselves and not imposed on them from above or outside. This is so as the needs of the staff ought to be in congruence with those of the school to avoid conflict of interests, and also to necessitate ownership of the staff development activities.

School-based staff development in Botswana since 1993

Since the introduction of the Secondary Schools Management Development Programme in a new era of staff development was ushered in, which was more formalized with structures and procedures clearly in place, the old days of disjointed, unfocused staff development ventures were history and the new ones were put in place. One of the strategies of staff development brought in and popularized by the project was the notion of school based workshops. This was also in line with Recommendation 105 (c) of the newly instituted Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994) which changed the traditional approach to staff development by placing it in the schools. It reads:

"The head as an instructional leader, together with the deputy and senior teachers, should take major responsibility for in-service training of teachers within their schools, through regular observation of teachers and organization of workshops to foster communication between teachers on professional matters and to address weaknesses".

According to Monyatsi (1997; 2003) and Irvin and Tombale (1996), school-based in-service training offers the following advantages over the traditional approaches. Firstly, it is based on the needs of the schools as identified by the schools themselves during the School Development Planning process. It is driven by the needs identified by the school management teams together with the staff in consultation with the Boards of Governors, and to some extent, the students. Each year, schools are called upon to identify some needs starting with the subject departments and then pass the identified and prioritized needs to the School Staff Development Committee to also look at and make some preliminary prioritization. The needs are then passed to the Senior Management Team, the school Parliament, to come up

with the three needs to be placed in the year's School Development Plan. The prioritized needs are finally taken to a general staff meeting for discussion and adoption or rejection.

Secondly, the school-based model of staff development is contextual in nature and allows the possibility of management ideas being shaped to the particular needs of the whole school. The teachers also get motivated as they feel that their needs are recognized and valued. This also leads to ownership and commitment to issues prioritized. Thirdly, compared to the traditional models which were based on external workshops, school-based workshops reduce the disruptive effects of teachers who have to leave their classes unattended to travel long distances to attend staff development activities. Apart from being disruptive to the teaching and learning processes, the traditional mode was rather expensive as there was need for funds for travel and accommodation expenses.

Fourthly, the resources for school-based workshops are specifically designed to support the needs identified by the teachers at school level; and they are not provided by an external register of expert trainers or advisors. Fifthly, the model encourages the sharing and analysis of ideas on an equal basis in a group in which no one is considered more expert than the others. Sixth, it attempts to balance the upward thrust of school initiative with the downward force of bureaucratic regulation in such a way that neither dominates to the detriment of the other.

Furthermore, the needs-driven school-based approach relies on the values that underpin the processes of peer-assisted leadership, co-consultancy and action research, the methodology that also guided the secondary schools management development programme.

In order to manage staff development in the schools, a blue print was produced to give schools some guidance on the most effective management and implementation of school-based workshops (Irvin and Tombale, 1996; Monyatsi, 1997; Republic of Botswana, 1994). Basically, each school should have a Staff Development Coordinator and a Staff Development Committee which should liaise with the Senior Management Team. There is also a cluster co-ordinator under whom the school falls. A cluster is a group of about six schools within reasonable distance of each other.

a) The role of the Staff Development Co-ordinator:
The Staff Development Co-ordinator in any school is responsible for a number of chores, including among others:

Working with all school staff in identifying and prioritizing specific staff development activities for the whole school; making arrangements for the school-based workshops with the School Management Team well in advance; ensuring that high standards are maintained in workshops by providing the necessary requirements; and

chairing the Staff Development Committee.

b) The role of the Staff Development Committee:
It organizes school-based workshops from the needs identified and prioritized; It liases with the regional In-Service Officers on staff development activities in the school, though through the School management Team; and is responsible for the orientation of new staff members.

c) The Cluster Co-ordinator co-ordinates a quality programme of school-based staff development workshops that address the Region's and individual school needs; provides a link between the schools in the cluster and within the Region to foster activity coherence; and provides professional support and guidance to all workshop facilitators in the cluster.

d) The Senior Management Team consults with the stakeholders on designing the annual school development plan, and to identify the priority needs for the school-based workshop programme for all staff; works with the staff development committee in identifying staff training needs in specific subjects in the curriculum; and communicating them to the in-service section so that subject specific cluster-based workshops can be organized and resourced; informs the school management advisor of the three priority training needs at the Heads and Deputies consultation seminars in September each year; and drafts an Action Plan arising out of the workshops, and agree it with the staff within a week of holding the workshop.

Furthermore, the School Management Teams prioritize the needs for the whole staff after the staff have identified their own needs because as school managers, they should know the resources at their disposal as it would be foolhardy to arrange for staff development activities while the resources are not enough or available at all. After prioritizing, the needs chosen are discussed with the whole staff at a general meeting. As for the subject related needs, they are sent to the Regional In-Service office for further prioritization under the supervision of subjects specialists. Prioritization is very crucial to the success of staff development activities, not only because of funds, but also because one cannot do everything at once.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The use of multi-methods in a study secures in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question as it adds vigour, breadth and depth to the investigation (Cresswell 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Salomon 1991). Most quantitative data gathering techniques condense data in order to see the bigger picture. Qualitative data gathering techniques, by contrast, are best understood as data enhancers, because when data is enhanced it is possible to see key aspects of cases more clearly. In this study the perceptions of teachers regarding the school-based workshops

as a component of staff development in secondary schools in Botswana were captured by applying both a quantitative and qualitative approach.

The quantitative approach involved a questionnaire survey, because it gathers data at a particular time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions (Cohen and Manion 1995). The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed questions. For the closed questions, the Likert scale was used. A piloting exercise was done in a few selected secondary schools in the Gaborone City. Six categories of questions were covered in a semi-structured interview schedule, namely, behaviour questions, feeling questions, opinion or value questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions and demographic questions.

The sample for the questionnaire was taken from eight school clusters in the South and South Central Regions of Botswana and consisted of 400 secondary school teachers (of whom 384 returned their questionnaires). For the semi-structured interview, purposive sampling was used to select optimally information-rich participants, namely two school principals, two deputy principals, two heads of departments, two senior teachers, two teachers and two assistant teachers.

Data analysis

Analysis of the questionnaire data was computerised. For the free-response questions the drawing up of a coding frame and verbatim reporting of responses were used (Bell 1993; Oppenheim 1992).

For the analysis of qualitative data, the interviews notes were transcribed. Data was then coded by reading through the field notes and making comments. From the themes as identified initially, patterns and categories were identified and described.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation whereby survey data was verified by interview data. Respondents were representative of different post levels. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Field notes made during the interviews were used to verify the data collected during interviews.

Findings

The objectives of this study were to find out:
1. How school-based workshops are managed; and
2. The effectiveness of school based workshops as a component of staff development.
Of the four hundred questionnaires distributed to the schools in the targeted schools, three hundred and eighty four were returned correctly completed, and this represents 96% of the whole target population. This overwhelming return rate might have been made possible by the use of the school Staff Development Coordinator to distribute and collect the completed questionnaires from the teachers. The researcher after a week to give the respondents enough time to complete the question--naires.

Management of school-based workshops

The first objective of the study aimed at establishing how the school-based workshop as a component of staff development was managed. An overwhelming three hundred and sixty eight (95.8%) of the respondents believed that the school-based workshops should be made compulsory for all teachers in the schools. In order to make them more effective and to have some uniformity, three hundred and fifty (91%) of the respondents pointed out that the Ministry of Education should come up with a programme for school-based workshops. However, in order to contextualize the workshops, three hundred and sixty three (94.5%) are of the opinion that each school should produce its own programme which is aligned to the one produced by the Ministry of Education. That the programmes must be aligned to the Ministry of Education's was illustrated by three hundred and twenty five (84.6%) respondents emphasizing the point that it should not be only the needs of teachers at each school that form the basis of school based workshops.

The reason given by one of the respondents during the interview clearly supports this thinking that:

The Ministry of Education should provide a national format to be followed during the school-based workshops as some schools have more educated and intelligent teachers. It will not be fair for those schools that do not have adequate resources. The other thing is that teachers move from one school to another frequently and for the sake of continuity, there needs to be a format that covers the whole country.

A Staff Development Coordinator concurs with the sentiments echoed above and declares:

"School-based workshops are part and parcel of the education system and therefore should be carried out in the same way as the other business of the Ministry of Education. Some teachers in the schools if allowed to come up with their own programmes may end up high jacking the objectives of the ministry. Some schools may not do anything as there are no guidelines. For them to be effective there should be something like a syllabus to guide schools."

Another respondent pointed out that if it is a compulsory programme, then it should have a central guide for ease of monitoring and effectiveness.

The involvement of guidelines from the Ministry of Education should not be construed to mean that staff development is being taken back from the schools, but as a way of formalizing, diversifying and enriching the programme. It was illustrated above by Irvin and Tombale (1996) and Monyatsi (1997) that a blue print was produced at Regional level to give guidance and the

administrative structure also serves to consolidate the effectiveness of the workshops. Therefore, what the respondents are calling for is something at national level as teachers can be transferred to any region in the country. For instance, a large number of respondents in the interview favour the use of experts from outside, especially from the Regional offices and ministry of Education because they are experts and more familiar with issues being discussed in the workshops. However, a teacher interviewed, who echoed the sentiments of many suggested that:

"Members of staff are better placed to be resource persons during the school-based workshops as they know their problems and need better than any outsider and their participation would enhance self-development".

Much as the needs of other stakeholders are taken cognizance of, the crux of school-based workshops is the teachers' needs identified by themselves in their schools as illustrated by Monyatsi (1997; 2003) and Irvin and Tombale (1997) who contend that it is based on the needs identified by the schools themselves during the School Development process. The involvement of teachers in their development has also been emphasized by Hargreaves and Fullan (1992:170 who asserted that teachers should be designers of their own professional development. This involvement of teachers in their own development was also captured by Calderhead and Denicolo (1993:88) when they declare that when approached in this way, staff development fosters personal and professional growth for individuals within a respectful, supportive, positive organizational climate as the teachers develop in familiar grounds surrounded by colleagues. A major tenet of school-based workshops is the role of teamwork as the activities facilitate the involvement and sharing of common ideas and understanding.

Effectiveness of school-based workshops

The school-based workshops have been overwhelmingly successful as this study shows. In response to the statement that school-based workshops are a waste of teachers' time (item 6), three hundred and seventy-four (97%) of the respondents disagreed illustrating that time is effectively used. Three hundred and seventy (96%) of the respondents believed that teachers' time is used profitably by not disrupting school time to attend workshops. Three hundred and seventy five (96%) of the respondents agreed with item 21 where the statement declared that teachers spend most of their time in school instead of traveling to workshops. This clearly illustrates that school-based workshops are able to effectively balance the time for workshops and that of teaching by reducing the distances traveled by the teachers. These are supported by responses to the interviews when most

respondents suggested that school-based workshops should be held in the afternoons to avoid interfering with school work. This was succinctly spelt out by a Staff Development Coordinator who declared:

"School-based workshops should be scheduled for afternoons so that everybody attends as they would have finished teaching. Another suitable time is weekends although some people attend to their social services."

Another teacher interviewed said that:

"They can be improved by making them compulsory and being held after the normal teaching time. They should not be allowed to disturb the teaching process. Students must not be allowed to miss their learning due to workshops.'

The effectiveness of school-based workshops in the management of time in the schools was illustrated above by Monyatsi (1997; 2003) and Irvin and Tombale (1996) when it was pointed out that unlike the traditional models which took teachers from the schools to a central place, they are less disruptive. In item 13 where respondents were asked to show their degree of agreement with if resources in terms of money are being wasted, three hundred and sixty (93%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. This was also illustrated by Monyatsi (1997; 2003) and Tombale (1997) when they agreed that it was cost effective as there are no travel and accommodation expenses.

School-based workshops have also been successful in enhancing inter-departmental and inter school relationships, and transparency in the schools. This is an indication of the breakaway from the traditional cultures associated with teaching, namely isolationism. This has shown that teachers like all other professionals fit in the public domain of sharing and collaborating with other colleagues. Such cross pollination of ideas among staff members and those from neighbouring schools, it should be hoped, should usher in a new breed of professionals in an enabling environment for professional and personal development. This concurs with Oldroyd and Hall (1991)'s assertions that school-based workshops improve capacity for control of one's working conditions, enhance professional status and career development. Teachers are also said to be engaged in meaningful research.

That the school-based workshops are mostly based on the needs identified by the teachers in their own schools also leads to ownership of the programme. This has led to teaching becoming interesting as illustrated by three hundred and fifty (91%) of the respondents agreeing with the statement. Furthermore, three hundred and sixty (93%) were of the opinion that teachers know more about their job which may be making teaching more interesting. These were supported by responses from the interviews. For instance, one respondent declared that:

"School-based workshops improved my attitudes towards teaching to the extent that as a teacher, I know more about my work and the needs of students than before."

Another respondent pointed out that:

"School-based workshops help most teachers to actually attend to their immediate problems and needs because they can easily bring them up during workshops and get them attended to. On the other hand, they help mostly with identifying expertise amongst teachers."

Furthermore, some respondents suggested that for the school-based workshops to be more effective, the following should be done. Firstly, evaluations of the workshops should be done immediately after the workshops by all teachers involved instead of a few selected individuals. Secondly, more Senior Teachers of high caliber should be appointed for the effective supervision during the implementation of the agreed issues. Thirdly, the school administration should be supportive at all times.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that school-based workshops as a component of staff development provide a more enabling and conducive environment for effective staff development because of a number of reasons. Firstly, school based workshops are based on the needs that were identified at school level by the teachers themselves. Consequently, teachers feel that they are being valued and, therefore, develop commitment and ultimately ownership of the outcomes. Secondly, due to the contextual nature of school-based workshops, teachers are able to learn a lot and develop personally by changing their attitudes towards teaching. Thirdly, the study has also shown that the workshops encourage the spirit of teamwork and collaboration in tackling professional development. Fourthly, teachers become responsible for their own professional development, an issue that is very encouraging. Fifthly, school-based workshops are very cost effective in terms of resources such as time, money and materials.

Therefore, it would be in line to conclude that the school-based workshops approach to staff development is a very effective way. However, there is need to sustain it providing more resources for their management.

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