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HEADTEACHERS' REWARD SYSTEMS AND TEACHER WORK ENGAGEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MBALE MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between Headteachers' reward systems and Teacher Work engagement secondary schools in Mbale Municipality, Uganda. The study aimed at determining level of headteachers' reward systems use, level of work engagement among secondary school teachers, and to establish the relationship between headteachers' reward systems and teacher work engagement. Sequential explanatory mixed method design, specifically cross sectional survey design was employed. The study population was 467 and a sample of 215 respondents was drawn using purposive, simple and stratified sampling techniques. Data collected using questionnaires and interviews, was analyzed by use of descriptive, Pearson correlation analysis, and thematic analysis. It was established that headteachers' reward systems use was moderate (M = 13.16, SD = 3.75); teacher work engagement was very high (M = 65.06, SD = 10.80); and a positive significant relationship (r = 0.38, p < .05) was observed between headteachers' reward systems and teacher work engagement. Therefore, it was concluded that headteachers' reward systems are very vital in enhancing work engagement among secondary school teachers.

Keywords: reward systems, work engagement, secondary school, Municipality, Uganda.

Introduction

The fundamental role of teachers in education cannot be overstated. The success and survival of an educational organization depends on teachers' work and performance (Okumbe, 1998). However, teachers' performance is highly dependent on how they are rewarded and the reward systems in place in the school. The reward and the reward systems also determine teachers' level of work engagement (Nsubuga, 2010). Work engagement, a positive and persistent state of mind (Schaufeli& Bakker, 2004) that includes a personal interest in one's work as well as satisfaction and enjoyment from the work itself (van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012; van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011), plays a great role in enhancing teachers' performance. Consistent with this discourse, Schaufeli, Salanova, González- Romá and Bakker (2002, p. 10) consider work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption."

Globally, work engagement levels seem to be dropping and this poses a threat to the performance of employees and the organizations at large. A recent survey by a global consulting firm found out that on average four employees out of ten world over are not engaged (AON Hewitt Report, 2012). This is a significant proportion of employees that negatively affects work engagement. On the other hand, only thirty percent of teachers in USA according to the Gallup Organization (2004) are engaged in their work. This shocking statistic inspired further research which revealed that up to thirteen percent of the disengaged teachers were *actively disengaged* in their work. *Actively disengagement* is a situation where workers are not only unhappy but also act out of their unhappiness in ways that undermine what their colleagues accomplish (Agrawal & Hastings, 2015). This behavior adversely decreases work engagement of employees; the Gallup Organization report indicates that disengaged teachers miss approximately 2.3 million work days per year.

A worse situation on employee's engagement than what is reported in USA has been reported in other countries. For instance, in South Africa, Rothmann (2015) found out that more than eighty percent of employees feel disconnected from their work, 43% consider quitting their jobs, which situation should worry employers. For teachers, this means very poor results for students' education. This too implies that employers and supervisors need to engage their workers differently to enhance work engagement and the eventual employee productivity.

Wanyama (2013), in a study to investigate school-based factors influencing students' performance at Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations in public secondary schools in Narok North District, found that head teachers were not effectively supervising and giving feedback to teachers. The study attributed teachers' disengagement to ineffective reward system that in essence is part and parcel of good supervision. Similar studies in Uganda (Ogomarach, 1994; Sekiwu, 2002) reported dismal secondary school teacher work engagement. The studies attributed teacher absenteeism to part-time teachingwhich has bedeviled Uganda's education system, grossly affecting teacher work engagement.

In a study carried outby Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda, only six percent of schools reported not having an issue with teacher absenteeism, whereas about forty percent of schools reported absenteeism as a frequent occurrence. Other issues reported by head teachers in the same study were skipping classes in about thirty percent of schools, and late arrival at work reported in 45%of the schools (Teacher Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa [TISSA] report, 2014). Despite different reforms in civil service, the TISSA report and Sekiwu (2002) attributed the high level of absenteeism to the inappropriate reward systems, especially themeager salary paid by the government. Additionally, the teachers' nonfinancial reward systems in the form of terms and conditions of service are also dismally poor which also affects teacher work engagement practices (Kasaija, 1997). Consequently, teachers' strike actions due to dissatisfaction of their present terms and conditions of service are rampant in most schools in Uganda (Kibuuka, 1998; Nakyanzi, 2004; Genza, 2008; UNATU, 2013).

Unfortunately, this problem may continue ifthe long bad history of the civil service (especially teachers' salary issues) is not addressed. Peach and Wren (1992) in their study traced the evolution of pay for performance system from antiquity through the 1950s, viewing it from the perspective of four overlapping eras. Drury (1915) posits that when the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) first promoted the art of management they were not interested equally in all of management's different aspects. The problem which they considered almost exclusively was termed the "wage problem." Taylor, while responding to the wage problem, presented a paper to the ASME in 1895 titled, "A Piece-Rate System: A Step Towards Partial Solution of the Labor Problem" (Merkle, 1980, p. 123). The paper gave rise to a reward system for rewarding highly those workers who attained the standard, while giving a much lower pay to those who did not meet the standard (Wren, 1987).

Herzberg (1957), in his two-factor theory of motivation, classifies employees' needs as satisfiers and dissatisfiers. The relevance of Herzberg's theory to this discourse on reward system and work engagement is that a dissatisfied employee cannot be motivated and therefore is disengaged. It is thus important that an organization first focuses on hygiene factors before introducing motivators into the workplace (Nel et al., 2001). The aspect of headteachers' reward systems and its relevance in articulating teacher work engagement paradoxes is thereforea pertinent issue in Uganda's education system just as it is globally. Thus, there is needfor such efforts to understand and addressteachers' engagement and the concomitant performance issues.

Statement of the Problem

Effective Reward System, both financial and nonfinancial, boosts employees' Work Engagement. That is, teachers will exercise high levels of engagement in performing their duties if they are well-rewarded. The result of such is high quality performance and discipline in secondary schools. However, teachers in Uganda are consistently disgruntled by the poor working conditions and low remunerations, which accordingly doesn't measure up to their welfare needs (UNATU, 2013). For instance, the Public service salary structure of 2016 /2017, has the basic salary of teachers ranges between 370,000 (USD 100) to about 750,000 (USD 200) shillings per month depending on the qualification and work experience. This salary is extremely small, and cannot make a teacher to meet his or basic needs. Thus,it de-motivates teachers to the extent that 84% of teachers in active service are willing to leave the profession (Ministry of Education consultative council meeting, October 2013, cited in UNATU, 2013).

This low motivation further affects Teacher Work Engagement as reflected in deteriorating and low quality teaching, performance and learning outcomes (UNATU, 2013). The low quality of education has put teachers in the spotlight and disapproval by politicians, parents, communities, and even by the very students they teach. UNATU (2013) maintains that low pay, late pay, no pay, and poor terms and conditions of service affects the level of work engagement of teachers and their image in society as well. Consequently, many teachers have quit the profession, and some resent and hate the profession yet teachers are supposed to be the cradle of professionalism because they are charged with a dear duty of molding all the future leadership of any nation (Ogomarach, 1994). The influence of Reward Systems on Teachers' Work Engagement is however, not sufficiently analyzed in the academic and policy circles. This suggests that teachers' welfare in terms of monetary and non- monetary aspects needs to be improved by fast-tracking how Headteachers' Reward Systems influence Teacher Work Engagement with specific reference to secondary schools in Mbale Municipality. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the relationship between Headteachers' Reward Systems and Teacher Work Engagement.

Literature Review

Reward Systems

According to Okumbe (1998), the success and survival of an educational organization is pegged on the work and performance of teachers. However, teachers' productivity and performance is highly dependent on how they are rewarded and the reward systems in place in the school. Reward systems has been variedly categorized and defined by many scholars; for example, Byars and Rue (1997) defined reward system as the returns that employees receive as a result of the employment by the organization. Consistent with this discourse, Bratton (2007) considered reward system as all the financial, nonfinancial, and psychological costs that the organization provides to its employees in return for the job they do.

What can be deduced from the above definitions is that for a reward system to be inclusive, it must include the financial and nonfinancial elements in the reward package of employees. Common to these definitions is the idea that a reward system refers to the financial and nonfinancial rewards that an organization gives to the employees to compensate for their performance. Financial and nonfinancial rewards are very instrumental in enhancing teacher work engagement in secondary schools.

Work Engagement

From its evolution, numerous definitions have been formulated from practice and research. Work engagement, according to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), is a positive and persistent state of mind that includes a personal interest in one's work as well as satisfaction and enjoyment from the work itself (van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, &Schreurs, 2012; van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011), and this enhances teacher work engagement. Kahn (1990) looked at work engagement as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles, bringing in the social, cognitive, and emotional engagement (Kahn, 1998, 1992, 1990; Kelman, 1958;& Alfes et al., 2010), during role performances. This dimension by Kahn requires an employee to be present both physically and psychologically when performing organizational roles.

Work engagement is voluntary and variable activity, in that one cannot be forced into it, and circumstances that engage one employee may not result in engagement for another employee (Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). The experience of work engagement is typically stable and long-lasting (Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), although it can fluctuate over time (Kahn, 1990). Arising from all these definitions is the idea that employee engagement is a multidimensional construct with a desirable state, having an organizational purpose. It brings together involvement, commitment, passion, dedication and absorption at work. In other words, work engagement refers to cognitive, social and emotional involvement of an individual to his/her work.

Theoretical Review

This study related Reward Systems and Teacher Work Engagement concepts to three theories namely Hertzberg's two factor theory, expectancy theory, and Social Exchange Theory (SET). The Hertzberg's (1957) two factor theory relates that higher employee engagement is realized when both Hertzberg motivators and Hygiene factors are fully met by the organization. In other words this theory proposes a comprehensive reward system consisting of financial and

nonfinancial rewards that boosts high work engagement among employees. The expectancy theory proposed by Vroom in 1964 proposes that reward system is all about understanding the expectations of the employees and meeting these expectations to ensure their work engagement keeps on improving. Expectancy theory thus explains the effects reward system has on employee engagement.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) focuses on the rational assessment of self-interest in human social relationships. Therefore employee engagement has its explanation in SET since it represents a reciprocity or two way relationship. Schaufeli (2013) states that when employees receive particular resources from their organization (e.g., decent pay, recognition, opportunities of development) they tend to respond in kind and repay the organization through active involvement in their work.

Levels of Employee Engagement

Employees' engagement levels vary across occupations, industries and globally. Studies conducted by Gallup Organization reveal international evidence on Employee Engagement Index in many countries. Gallup Organization (2004) in a survey conducted in Thailand revealed that only 12 per cent of employee population is 'engaged', 82 per cent are 'actively disengaged' and 6 per cent disengaged. This shocking revelation is a cause to worry on the teacher work engagement levels and performance. Similar studies in Australia, China, Japan, NewZealand and Singapore posted low engagement levels among employees; 18 per cent, 12 per cent, 9 per cent, 17 per cent and 9 per cent respectively (Gallup Organization, 2004).The Met Life Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy (2012) found that only 44% of teachers surveyed are satisfied with their jobs. Perhaps even more worrisome is their finding that 29% of teachers say they are likely to leave the profession. The most worrying issue is that much of the available studies seem to have been carried out among other employees than teachers. This leaves paucity of information on teachers' level of engagement.

Relationship between Reward System and Employee Work Engagement

Although reward systems (financial and nonfinancial rewards) are effective in producing positive employee outcomes, few studies seem to exist that directly examined the effects of reward systems on teacher work engagement. Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter (2001)in their study found out that while lack of rewards and recognition leads to burnout, appropriate reward and recognition is important for work engagement. The results of this study indicated the pivotal role played by nonfinancial rewards towards promoting teacher work engagement. However, both financial and nonfinancial rewards (reward system) have a positive relationship with employee engagement (Ram & Prabhakar, 2011).

Merchant (2007) argues that people value money and therefore making money an important form of reward. Because of value attached on financial rewards, employers need to include financial rewards in the reward packages. Muchai and Mwanyi (2012) in their study on the effect of employee rewards and recognition on job performance in Kenya public sector also found that engaging employees through total rewards had reduced employee complaints about pay fairness and equity and reduced general employee problems. Most of the studies seem to all agree that employers need to employ robust reward systems consisting of both financial and nonfinancial rewards if they are to realize high employee engagement. Therefore, headteachers' reward systems should be appealing and inclusive so as to enhance teacher work engagement in secondary schools.

Methodology

This study employed sequential explanatory mixed method design. In which, a cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the quantitative methods and interpretative phenomenological approach for the qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007; Tashakkori &Teddlie, 2003). A QUAN-qual model was adopted in which quantitative data was first collected and analyzed followed by qualitative data. The use of mixed methods, as advocated for by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), promoted triangulation, enabled development beyond single method findings, and linked qualitative with quantitative data, increasing the validity, interpretation, clarification, and illustration of the key findings. In addition, using qualitative methods to augment quantitative conclusions was done to make the link between purposes, questions, and methods stronger, and thereby increase validity (Crain-Dorough, 2009).

The population consisted specifically of Head teachers because these are the accounting officers of the respective schools who have the mandate to highlight key issues as far as Reward systems of their staff is concerned and the modalities in place to improve where necessary. So it was fundamental to seek their opinion in this study. The teachers form the major target group for this study thus including them in the study is of paramount importance. In more categorical ways, this study population consisted of six Head teachers and 461 drawn from the six secondary schools. From a target population of 467respondents, a sample size of 215 respondents was selected using Yamane's (1967) sampling process. The formula developed by Yamane (1967) was used to calculate the study sample is given below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: N = population siz
n = sample size
e = margin error of study set at $\pm 5\%$

Both Probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to determine the samples of respondents. Purposive sampling according to Koul (2007), is used to identify samples that the researcher has a pre-conceived idea that they have the relevant empirical data required, in this case the headteachers. Again, Stratified random sampling was used to divide teachers into different strata such as Gender (Female and Male Teachers). Dividing respondents into manageable strata, according to Creswell (2009), is indicative of social science research especially where such samples are large. In this way, the researcher also used Yamane's (1967) formula to proportionately distribute the teachers sampled. The study also used simple random sampling to select teacher respondents with minimal bias (Kothari, 2004).

To generate quantitative data for Headteachers' reward systems, Al-Nour's (2012) questionnaire was used. The questionnaire had 16 items measuring financial and moral incentives from which 10 items were adopted to measure financial and nonfinancial rewards in this study. Teacher work engagement was measured using Engaged Teachers Scale (ETS) that was developed by (Klassen, Yerdelen&Druksen, 2013). The scale had 16 items; four items for cognitive engagement (CE), four items for emotional engagement (EE), four items for social engagement-student (SES), and four items for social engagement-colleagues (SEC). All the scales had acceptable Cronbach's alpha reliability above .70.

After securing approval of the proposal from Busitema University Research Ethics Committee, the researchers then obtained an introductory letter from the Dean of Faculty of Science and Education, Busitema University. This enabled the researchers to meet with gate keepers and headteachers for prior arrangements for data collection.Self-administered questionnaires were left at schools while arrangements were made to interview headteachers and teachers.Face to face interviews with the respondents and researcher to give in-depth information to corroborate numerical data was conducted.Editing of data was done during data collection especially to highlight particular issues before leaving the field. Editing of responses was also done after data was tabulated to encode the readings.

After collecting questionnaires, they were checked to ensure that they are completed and accurate. The data from questionnaires was coded according to the sections of the questionnaire, dimensions or construct of sections, and the item by item. To obtain the extent to which teachers are rewarded, each item on financial and nonfinancial was recorded on a five point Likert scale within the range 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). The financial and nonfinancial rewards were interpreted as follows: 5 – 11, low; 12 – 18, moderate; and 19 – 25 high financial and nonfinancial rewards. Teacher Work Engagement (TWE) was scored on a five point Likert scale within the range 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 5 (*strongly agree*). The scores of TWE items were added to obtain the total TWE score for teachers. The resultant scores were interpreted as follows: 16 – 31, very low; 32 – 47, moderately low; 48 – 63, high; and 64 – 80, very high TWE. The data from coded and screened questionnaires were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for analysis.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed to analyze the quantitative data from the questionnaires. Data derived from the demographic section of the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics that included the use of means, frequencies, and percentages. The results were representedin tables. Pearson'scorrelation coefficients were computed to determine the relationship between reward system and teacher work engagement. While, for qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. The results were presented in themes and patterns as per the objectives of the study and used to corroborate quantitative data.

Results and Discussions

Level of Use of Reward Systems among Headteachers in Secondary Schools in Mbale Municipality

Concerning the level of headteachers' reward systems use in secondary schools in Mbale Municipality,the mean level of reward system use were*(M* = 13.16*, SD* = 3.75*)*, indicating moderate level of financial rewards. This implies thatthe financial rewards given to teachers are very minimal and may most likely not meet most basic needs of teachers.This was in agreement with the findings of Ogomorach (1994) who noted that financial allowances like housing allowances, transport allowances, medical allowances and welfare allowances are very instrumental in enhancing employee job commitment. The minimal financial rewards may also discourage "A" level leavers from opting for teaching courses, a situation that lead to teacher shortage (Kasaija, 1997). The findings by Kasaija provide an insight to headteachers to take caution on low financial rewards that may cause teacher attrition and disengagement.

The results also indicated moderate level of nonfinancial rewards *(M* = 14.47*, SD* = 3.95*)*. This means that the use of nonfinancial rewards is not diverse in secondary schools.This is in agreement with the study byLuthan, Suzane, and Peterson (2006) who found out that when employees were provided nonfinancial rewards like housing, learning and development opportunities, recognition of achievements, or other assignments and sincere praise, their commitment and work engagement increased and that the reverse was true. The headteachers of Mbale Municipality therefore needed to leverage the use of nonfinancial rewards as this impact directly on teacher terms and conditions of service, which in turn increases teacher work engagement.

Level of Teacher Work Engagement in secondary schools in Mbale Municipality

On the level of Teacher Work Engagement in secondary schools in Mbale Municipality, the results indicated very high level of TWE *(M = 65.06, SD = 10.80)*. This implies that teachers are more dedicated, focused, and put in a lot of their energy to their duties. Our findings are in agreement with those of a study by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) that found out that highly engaged employees work 59% harder, perform 18% better, and are 23% more likely to remain with the company than employees with low levels of commitment. High level of engagement of engagement is also paramount in enhancing organizational performance.

Our results are also similar to those of a Towers Perrin (2007) study that compared companies with high versus low levels of employee engagement. The Towers Perrin study found out that high engagement companies had a 19% increase in operating income and 28% growth in earnings per share over a three year period. In the same vein high engagement companies also had almost 4% higher operating margins and 3.5% greater net profit margins than low engagement companies. Low engagement companies saw a drop in operating income of 33% and decline in earnings per share by 11%. These studies point to the fact that when engagement levels of teachers are high, teachers are more likely to work harder and present good performance in their schools.

The Relationship between Headteachers' Reward Systems and Teacher Work Engagement in Secondary Schools in Mbale Municipality

The results of our study revealed a significant low positive correlation between head teachers' reward systems and teacher work engagement *(r*=.38*, p*<.05). This implies that an increase in the Headteachers' reward systems structure would cause a similar output on teachers in terms of their work engagement. The teachers would show commitment to their work and their performance improved and the reverse would be true. The low level in the relationship is an indicator of the existence of other parameters/determinants of Teacher Work Engagement other than reward systems.

There was also a significant low positive correlation between financial reward system and teacher work engagement*(r* = .37*, p* <.05*)* nonfinancial rewards system and teacher work engagement*(r* = .25*, p* <.05*)*. These results imply that the financial rewards offered to teachers are meager and nonfinancial rewards are also dismally poor. This could be pointing out a fact that there is a low financial resource envelope in the secondary schools. These results support the hypothesis that financial and nonfinancial rewards are significantly related with teacher work engagement. Owalobi (2007) noted that financial and nonfinancial recognition are important factors in determining various teacher behavioral outcomes including level of teacher work engagement.

From the above discussion, Headteachers Reward Systems should contain competitive reward packages including a variety of financial and nonfinancial rewards. This will create dedicated, satisfied, and engaged teachers that are focused on achieving the goals and objectives of the school.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between Headteachers' Reward Systems (financial and nonfinancial rewards) and Teacher Work Engagement. The study found out that teacher work engagement was not exclusively a function of Headteachers Reward Systems but rather a product of other parameters such as leadership style, work resources, education level among others. This explains why the TWE level was very high yet the level of Headteachers Reward System is moderate. Therefore, it was generally concluded that headteachers' reward systems are very vital in enhancing secondary school teacher work engagement.

Recommendations

We recommend that headteachers should be helped through training and other forms of empowerment to further broaden the spectrum of their rewards that they offer so as to leverage TWE. Headteachers' should, as a way of enhancing teachers' work engagement, identify the different types of needs of individual teachers and be able to meet them so as to enhance TWE.

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