

Micro commercialisation the new threat to teacher collegiality in Masvingo district¹

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the phenomenon of money-making among humanities teachers in secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Contemporary literature (Murisa, 2010; Mukeredzi, 2013) reveals that there has been a deterioration in the working conditions of teachers which has dented teacher morale to an all-time low. In order to make ends meet, teachers resort to the micro commercialisation of education. A qualitative study was carried out in Masvingo district with the purpose of exploring the effects of education commercialisation on teacher collegiality among history and geography teachers. A convenient sample comprising eight Heads of Departments (History and Geography) and 20 teachers within these departments was selected for this study. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Findings from this study indicated that extra lessons have been commercialised, which has ripple effects on cluster-based seminars and school and teacher associations. The article concludes that micro commercialisation of education negatively affected teacher collegiality. The authors recommend that the responsible authorities should address the working conditions of teachers in order to curtail micro commercialisation activities.

Keywords: teacher collegiality, money-making, extra lessons

INTRODUCTION

This article interrogates the implications of the micro commercialisation of education among history and geography teachers in Masvingo district in Zimbabwe. Contemporary literature (Murisa, 2010; Mukeredzi, 2013) reviewed in this study revealed that there was a decline in teacher morale in Zimbabwe over the past two decades due to the effects of widespread national economic decline. The decline in the working conditions of the teachers was attributed to the commercialisation of education in Zimbabwe (Murisa, 2010). A qualitative study was carried out in one district with the purpose of exploring the influence of the commercialisation of education on teacher collegiality. The article starts by providing a literature review contextualising the key variables in this study. The researchers then present a research methodology section. The section that follows presents and discusses the findings from this study. Lastly, concluding remarks are provided.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been wide reportage of the economic decline in Zimbabwe over the past two decades as well as on its implications on the education system. The economic decline in Zimbabwe led to the erosion of teachers' salaries due to rising inflation (Murisa, 2010; Shoko, Manyumwa, Muguwe & Taruvinga, 2011; Tichigwa, 2012). An emerging thread of literature that addresses the implications of the economic situation in Zimbabwe on the teaching profession reports the exodus of teachers to neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Some teachers who have not migrated have begun commercialising education to cushion themselves from the effects of the economic crisis. Commercialisation of education can occur at various levels: macro, meso level and micro (Amadi & Ekechi, 2018). At the macro level, commercialisation takes place nationally whereby the government adds a financial element to the provision of education. At the meso level, commercialisation of education takes the form of mushrooming of independent colleges and private schools. At the micro level, commercialisation of education occurs among individuals. This article specifically focuses on the commercialisation of education at the micro level. In this article, commercialisation of education is viewed as any paid activity engaged in by teachers for private gain other than their normal salary and allowances. Statutory Instrument 1 of 2000, which guides the conduct of teachers in Zimbabwe, prohibits teachers from engaging in any commercial activities. Teachers have to apply for special permission to engage in any commercial activity from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education according to the code of conduct for teachers in Zimbabwe.

Munikwa and Mutungwe (2011: 28) argue that 'one of the survival strategies employed by teachers has been to engage students in extra lessons for a fee as a way of supplementing their incomes to sustain their [the teachers'] families'. It can be noted that the offering of extra lessons in Zimbabwe has been largely a visible form of commercialisation of education. Teachers give parents and other stakeholders the impression that the only way for their children to excel in their studies is through paid extra lessons (Ndlela, 2009; Masuku, 2009). Munakukama (2015) perceives that, similar to Zimbabwe, contemporary teaching practice in Uganda has fallen victim to an increasing struggle for private gain.

Teacher collegiality can also be termed 'teacher collaboration'. Harris and Anthony (2001: 372) argue that

despite the fact that the term 'collegiality' remains somewhat problematic, as it is ill-defined, over-used, and open to multiple interpretations, it has come to be viewed as a critical feature of effective development efforts.

Jarzabkowski (2003: 2) describes collegiality as 'teachers' involvement with their peers on any level, be it intellectual, moral, political, social and/or emotional'. In addition, Shin in Tshuma and Bhebhe (2016: 1) state that 'collegiality is sharing ideas and responsibility amongst colleagues for pursuit of common goals'. Teacher collegiality in this article is viewed as the collaboration of teachers in the same school or in different schools with the sole purpose of improving their teaching practice and the learning taking place in the relevant schools. Teacher collegiality can take different forms, for example, sharing textbooks, past examination materials, marking guides and expertise, among others.

Little (1990: 508) argues that collegiality relations amongst teachers reflect

a continuum from independence to interdependence: storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work. Through storytelling and scanning for ideas teachers exchange experiences, gather information, nourish their friendships...

Conceptualising collegiality as a continuum is essential in this study because commercialism is viewed as influencing teachers to move away from interdependence to independence. Prior to the spread of

commercialism, teachers can be regarded as being interdependent. However, commercialism can be seen as a threat to this teacher interdependence.

Conceptualising collegiality as a continuum

A number of studies have established the importance of teacher collegiality in the education system (Barth, 2006; Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Marion, 2007; Shah, 2012). Teacher collegiality promotes staff development (Shah, 2012) and provides 'a shift from teaching in isolation and one-on-one mentoring to school-wide collaboration and conversation' (Middleton, 2000: 52). Hargreaves (1995) in Shah (2012: 1243) summarises the benefits of teacher collegiality as

moral support; increased efficiency; improved effectiveness; reduced overload; synchronized time perspectives between teachers and administrators (i.e. shared and realistic expectations about timeframes for change and implementation); situated certainty of collective professional wisdom; political assertiveness; increased capacity for reflection; organizational responsiveness; opportunities to learn; and continuous learning.

Hence, it can be argued that there is apparent consensus among scholars on the numerous benefits of teacher collegiality. There is ostensible agreement in literature that teacher collegiality is a vital cog in the functioning of the school system. Teacher collegiality in Zimbabwe is evident in seminars and teacher associations (Mukeredzi, 2013). However, not much is known about the threat posed by commercialisation of education activities on teacher collegiality in Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study on the ramifications of money-making on teacher collegiality among humanities teachers in Masvingo district was interpretivist and qualitative. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018: 8) explain that

the interpretive view, however, while sharing the rigour of the natural sciences and the concern of social science to describe and explain inanimate natural phenomena and, indeed from each other.

The qualitative approach was used because the researchers wanted to study teacher collegiality in its natural setting. Furthermore, qualitative research allows for the use of multiple methods and multiple perspectives on teacher collegiality and micro-commercialisation. A case study research design was adopted for this study. Creswell and Poth (2018: 101) opine that 'case study researchers provide an in-depth understanding of a case (or cases)'. A case study involving four secondary schools was utilised for this study.

Masvingo district has both rural and urban schools. The researchers conveniently sampled four secondary schools in urban areas in the district. Two heads of department (HODs) (Geography and History) were conveniently sampled from each of the four schools. Additionally, 20 teachers teaching geography and history examination classes were purposively sampled. Teacher collegiality has been reported to be most active for examination classes in Zimbabwe (Chirume, 2016). Five teachers were sampled from each of the four secondary schools that participated in this study. The researchers conducted eight semi-structured interviews with the HODs at their respective schools. Interviews allowed the researchers to probe answers provided by the participants. Participants in both interviews and focus group discussions were asked for their views on the relationship between teacher collegiality and micro commercialisation. In addition, the participants were asked about the implications of micro commercialisation on teacher collegiality. A mini-focus group was conducted at each of the schools that were selected for this study. Focus group discussions were utilised in order to obtain group views on teacher collegiality. Teacher collegiality entails interaction amongst teachers, and, therefore, views could best be obtained in group settings. Johnson

and Christensen (2007: 185) aver that 'a focus group is a type of group interview in which a moderator leads a discussion with a small group of individuals to examine in detail, how the group members think and feel about a topic.' The researchers made use of NVIVO to identify themes in the transcribed data. Thematic data analysis was utilised to analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006: 10) further reveal that 'a theme captures something important about data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set'. The study from which this article is derived was guided by the ethical considerations stipulated by the researchers' respective affiliated universities. Trustworthiness was enhanced by a pilot study, which eliminated any ambiguities in the data generation instruments. Additionally, the researchers utilised member checking of the transcripts after the interviews and focus group discussions.

FINDINGS

The findings from this study are presented and analysed using the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The findings from this study on the threat of micro commercialisation on teacher collegiality are presented under the following themes: extra lessons, seminars, school and teacher associations, and unequal relations.

Extra Lessons

The participants' views on the implications of fee charging for extra lessons on teacher collegiality are presented as verbatim narrations below. The verbatim narrations are followed by interpretation and analysis of the findings.

HOD2 revealed that

Teachers have been conducting extra lessons for a very long time in Zimbabwe. However, the approach has since changed with some teachers demanding extortionate fees from the parents. Now we have extra lessons after normal school hours and during weekends. Teachers are now competing for learners to join their extra lessons. The competition has affected team-work.

T11 stated that

Extra lessons have lost direction. It's now extortion to say the least. If you ask a colleague from a neighbouring school to assist your class on a particular topic, they will just advice you to tell your class to come for extra lessons. Instead of collaborating, the teachers view this as an opportunity to make more money through extra lessons.

T1 noted that

Paid extra lessons are now being offered during weekends and holidays. Teachers who used to collaborate are now competing for learners. Teacher collaborations are no longer viable as teachers lure learners from neighbouring schools.

T15 explained that

Prior to the era of paid extra lessons, teachers used to have more collaboration. However, now the focus is now on making more money through extra lessons.

T9 indicated that

Extra lessons have affected our relations as teachers. Parents have contributed to the animosity amongst teachers. Parents can decide to send their children to a neighbouring school for their extra lessons instead of their regular school.

The findings revealed that extra lessons that were historically free were now being offered at exorbitant fees. Evidently, teachers were using extra lessons as opportunities to make more money. The suggestion that extra lessons have become more of a business activity is in line with the conclusion by Munikwa and Mutungwe (2011: 34) that 'extra lessons were a lucrative form of employment and [teachers] would not give it up until the government adequately remunerated them'. Additionally, the participants revealed that paid extra lessons created unhealthy competition amongst teachers, which has affected teacher collegiality. Teachers were competing for learners in the study area. Acrimonious relations have emerged amongst teachers as there is competition to recruit more learners for extra lessons. It was also evident from the participants that the most rampant form of micro commercialisation in education was extra lessons. The participants noted with concern that extra lessons were initially meant for examination classes such as Advanced Level and Ordinary Level. Additionally, the extra lessons were coordinated as revision classes which did not introduce new concepts and topics. However, the participants revealed that new concepts and topics were now being introduced during extra lessons which disadvantaged learners who cannot afford to pay for the extra lessons. In addition, there is unhealthy competition among teachers as they compete for learners to join their extra lessons. Therefore, extra lessons have become more of a business activity than an honest endeavour aiming to improve the pass rate of learners. Extra lessons – initially put forward as a stop-gap measure to help learners cope with their studies – have been commercialised. A stop-gap measure has become a permanent feature of the Zimbabwean education system. Hence, this study established that extra lessons contributed to a decrease in teacher collegiality in the study area.

Seminars

The participants in this study indicated that the commercialisation of education affected cluster-based seminars. Cluster-based seminars are inter-school seminars conducted in order to prepare learners for external examinations. The views of the participants in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are presented as verbatim quotes and analysed in this section.

T6 stated that

Advanced Level seminars are now a thing of the past in our cluster. The seminars were organised and funded by schools. The host school would provide refreshments for all the participants. The facilitators were teachers from the participating schools.

T4 added that

Teachers did not demand any money from either the schools or learners to facilitate at the Advanced Level seminars. The seminars had the aim to improve the pass rates. Both learners and teachers actually looked forward to the engagements. However, everything disappeared with the demands for payment.

HOD3 narrated

Seminars were platforms for the interaction of teachers from different schools. Seminars promoted networks amongst teachers in the same cluster. However, seminars are no longer being prioritised which is affecting teacher collaboration greatly.

HOD1 explained that

Teachers now consider seminars are waste of valuable time and energy. They feel that the same time 'wasted' in seminars could be used for business activities. Teachers are now more focused on making money through paid extra lessons.

T5 observed that

I think the seminars have been affected by the booming extra lessons. Teachers would rather organise and conduct extra lessons which gives them financial rewards instead of facilitating at seminars.

T13 explained that

Teachers are no longer interested in sharing their expertise at cluster-based seminars due to commercialisation of education. Seminars are now shunned as a waste of time that can be used to pursue other paid activities by the teachers.

The study participants revealed that schools organised cluster-based seminars prior to the spread of the money-making mentality among humanities teachers. The cluster-based seminars were organised on a rotational basis amongst the schools to prepare the learners for their external and final examinations, such as those for Advanced Level and Ordinary Level. The humanities seminars were dealt a blow by the demands made by teachers for the payment of incentives to facilitate the seminars. The seminars were initiated in the spirit of teacher collegiality aiming to improve the pass rates in external examinations. Micro commercialisation of education adversely affected the organising of cluster-based seminars. Evidently, there was reduced interaction amongst teachers due to the negative effects of micro commercialisation on teacher collegiality. Cluster-based seminars were previously vehicles for the promotion of teacher collegiality. Hence, it can be argued that the ramifications on cluster-based seminars contributed to a reduction in teacher collegiality in the study area.

School and teacher associations

The teachers and HODs who participated in this study were asked for their views on the implications of money-making on school and teacher associations. The views from the teachers and HODs are presented below.

T8 stated that

Most activities in schools that used to be coordinated by teacher associations were affected by the money-making mentality. Voluntary teacher contributions in cash and kind are now a thing of the past. Teachers are no longer participating in teacher associations because they are now more about making money.

T1 argued that

It no longer makes much sense (for teachers) to volunteer towards teacher association activities when you can use that time to make money. Honestly, spending the whole day trying to solve the problems faced by students in the entire district when you can solve the problems in your class for extra income.

HOD2 stated that

It is now difficult if not impossible to ask teachers to volunteer their time during teacher association activities. Teachers no longer value the benefits of collaborating with their colleagues because their focus is now more on survival. The need to survive has propped up the money-making mentality. I think the mentality can actually be called being mercenary in a way.

There was consensus among the participants in the focus group discussions that the desire to make more money by teachers was limiting teacher associations. Teacher associations in Zimbabwe are a manifestation of teacher collegiality because of their ability to foster social networks among teachers. Educational activities in schools in Zimbabwe are coordinated through the instrumental role played by

school and teacher associations. Among the associations identified by the participants was the National Association of Secondary School Heads (NASH). NASH facilitates the coordination of staff development of secondary school teachers, as well as sporting disciplines and other extracurricular activities at district, provincial and national level. The updated curriculum introduced the concept of teacher associations. Teacher associations were introduced to promote teacher collegiality in Zimbabwean schools. The teacher associations are subject specific: geography teachers should be members of the Geography Teachers Association, for example. However, the participants in this study revealed that the activities of the school and teacher associations were being curtailed by money-making among teachers. Among the money-making activities most detrimental to school and teacher associations were extra lessons. The study established that teachers preferred to engage in business activities instead of volunteering for teacher association activities, which was the norm in the past. Teacher associations are hinged on voluntary participation with the aim to improve pass rates in a particular subject. Hence, it can be argued that micro commercialisation has hindered one of the essential manifestations of teacher collegiality in the study area.

The rise of the 'super-teacher'

Another theme that emerged from the participants was the rise of 'super-teachers' due to the micro commercialisation of education in Masvingo district. The rise of 'super-teachers' was one of the factors influencing teacher collegiality in this study. The contributions of the participants are presented below.

HOD2 elaborated

It seems we now have super-teachers, teachers who have expertise in subjects (new topics) which are in great demand. In the past teachers who possessed unique skills would share with their colleagues. The new money-making mentality however has contributed to the rise of these 'super-teachers' who are not comfortable with collaborating in the staff development of their colleagues for free.

HOD1 indicated that

Teachers with expertise in new areas of the updated curriculum are demanding high fees to facilitate in staff development workshops. Examples of new areas include GIS [Geography Information Systems] and ICT [Information Computer Technology]. Now we have a situation whereby teachers with GIS competency profiting by charging their peers and schools. So essentially the teachers with GIS competency are viewed as superior than their peers which in turn affects teacher collaborations.

T3 concurred that

The updated curriculum provided an opportunity for teachers with skills like GIS to make money. GIS teachers are organising workshops to staff develop teachers in the district for a fee.

T10 added that

It is now difficult to ask teachers from neighbouring schools for subject-related advice. They will just tell you attend to workshops, since they would have paid to get the skills. The sharing of information for free is now a thing of the past. Teacher collaborations have been greatly affected by the behaviour of these 'superior' teachers because they no longer feel equal with their peers.

The participants noted that there was the rise of 'super-teachers' who had the skills that were in demand. The 'super-teacher' phenomenon was a factor influencing teacher collegiality according to the participants in this study. Additionally, the 'super-teacher' phenomenon was contributory to the creation of unequal relations. Unequal relations, according to the participants in this study, emerged with the wide spread of money-making activities among the humanities teachers. An example cited by one participant was of geography teachers with expertise in GIS who started demanding exorbitant fees to facilitate at

staff development workshops. Resultantly, there was a creation of unequal relations whereby the district education officials and the association of geography teachers viewed those teachers with GIS expertise (super-teachers) as a class above other humanities teachers. Tarisayi (2018) noted that the successful implementation of GIS in the new curriculum in Zimbabwe required staff development of geography teachers. Thus, it can be argued from this study that commercialisation of education was a challenge to teacher collegiality. The authors agree with Hazlewood and Bosher (2008) who argue that teacher collegiality thrives when all staff are equal and have an equal voice. Hence, we argue that the rise of 'super teachers' is contributing to the decay of teacher collegiality according to the participants in this study.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The ramifications of the micro commercialisation of education are intertwined to a certain extent. From the foregoing study findings, it was noted that the demise of seminars and the booming of extra lessons was not coincidental but related. The decline in appeal of seminars was caused by the financial rewards that teachers accrued from the extra lessons. Additionally, micro commercialisation of education contributed to the demise of the core values of teacher collegiality. Teacher collegiality in Zimbabwe manifested as teacher associations and participation in cluster-based seminars. Micro commercialisation was established by this study to have influences on teacher associations and cluster-based seminars. The study concluded that micro commercialisation of education affected school and teacher association activities. School and teacher association activities were important in promoting teacher collegiality prior to the micro commercialisation of education. This article widens the discourse on the ramifications of the economic decline on education in Zimbabwe by revealing the effects of micro commercialisation of education on teacher collegiality. From the foregoing discussion of findings in this study, we recommend that the responsible authorities should address the working conditions of teachers in order to dissuade the rampant micro commercialisation of education. Additionally, there should be a resuscitation of seminars as well as school and teacher association activities through the inducement of financial incentives. Deriving from the continuum put forward by Little (1990), we argue that teacher collegiality in Zimbabwe was at the joint work level prior to the deterioration in working conditions of the teacher. However, due to the micro commercialisation of education, joint work among humanities teachers has been severely hampered according to the conclusions from this study in one district in Zimbabwe.

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