Managing and Organising Secondary Schools for Ineffectiveness?  
The Views of Principals in Zimbabwe  

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Abstract  
This study examined possible strategies for improving current management and organisational approaches to secondary school effectiveness in Zimbabwe, given the contextual realities of demographic, educational, heath, economic, resource, political and cultural dimensions. The perceptions of secondary school principals (N=32) organised in four (4) focus groups of eight participants each on the main purpose of secondary schooling, the organisational model replicated in the management of secondary schools, the management style mostly used, how principals spent most of their working hours doing, and how the organisation and management of secondary schools in Zimbabwe could be improved to trigger school effectiveness were solicited. The main question in this study is: How could secondary schools in Zimbabwe be organised and managed for effectiveness given certain contextual realities? The interface between Western modes of secondary school management and organisation and contextual realities in developing countries were found to activate school ineffectiveness. The adoption of ivory tower goals, bureaucratic organisational school structures, despotic leadership styles were found to be particularly inappropriate in a developing country such as Zimbabwe. Participants also cited work over-load and ad-hoc meetings as some of the key drivers of secondary school ineffectiveness in Zimbabwe. Participants suggested contextualised goals of secondary schooling and secondary school management and organisational approaches to secondary school effectiveness in Zimbabwe. This final point by the participants succinctly captures the importance and significance of this study. In consequence, the findings of this study has the potential to help reduce the gap between Western modes of secondary school management and organisation secondary school management and organisation that take into account the specific contextual realities such as demographic, economic, resource and cultural contexts that are so pervasive in most developing countries.

Keywords: principals, secondary school effectiveness, secondary school management, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION  
In his book, Administration in developing countries, Riggs (1964) developed the theory of prismatic society in order to understand the conflict between the highly differentiated and relatively autonomous Western modes of organisation and management imposed at the time of colonialism and the less differentiated indigenous modes of organisation and management. Harber and Davies (2006) argue that Riggs’ theory has retained its relevance to organisations such as schools during the post-colonial period of what Fuller (1991) terms “fragile states”.

By definition, therefore, in secondary schools found in prismatic societies, traditional and modern practices and values of management and organisation co-exist in the same school- though not always in a harmonious way. Secondary school principals in these schools are usually trapped between their contextual realities and the desired replicas of established Western secondary schools. It is these contradictions that inevitably affect the principals of secondary schools in developing countries such as Zimbabwe.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM  
Despite numerous opinions on the possible relationship between secondary school management and school effectiveness, little has been researched and written that reflects the real world of secondary schools, not only in Zimbabwe but in most developing countries as well. Like in many other developing countries, a major concern of secondary school effectiveness management debates in Zimbabwe has been the need to train secondary school principals to manage for contextualised secondary school effectiveness.

The issue of concern in this study, therefore, is the perceived “ivory tower” secondary school effectiveness management and organisation in developing countries in general and Zimbabwe specifically. To this end, the key question that this study attempts to address is:

How Could Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe be Organised and Managed for Effectiveness?  
Research Sub-Questions  
In a bid to get the understanding of the research participants of how secondary schools could be managed contextually in order to trigger secondary
school effectiveness in Zimbabwe, the study attempted to respond to the following research sub-questions:

- How is secondary school effectiveness viewed by the participants?
- To what extent is the organisation and management of secondary schools affected by contextual realities?
- To what extent are the leadership styles of secondary school principals influenced by contextual realities?
- What do most secondary school principals spend most of their working hours doing?
- How can the organisation and management of secondary schools be improved to enhance secondary school effectiveness in Zimbabwe?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In the review of related literature, the researcher has, principally, focused on how secondary school principals in developing countries set about achieving school effectiveness in spite of resource, demographic, educational, health, political and cultural realities. It is how these principals drive secondary school effectiveness as team leaders and how they exercise authority in the context of generally hostile conditions that the review of related literature attempts to highlight.

The Concept of School Effectiveness

School effectiveness exists where any school, as a social system and given certain resources and means achieves its objectives through the harmonisation of paradigms between clients and stakeholders (Harber and Davies: 2006). This definition implies, among other things, the development of a consensus about school priorities and the selection of appropriate effectiveness criteria. In this sense, the contextualisation of school effectiveness is advocated. From the conception of school functions, school effectiveness can be classified into five types: technical/economic effectiveness, human/social effectiveness, political effectiveness, cultural effectiveness and educational effectiveness.

Throughout the literature of school effectiveness, the point is made that school effectiveness and quality education are still vague concepts even though they are often extensively used in the literature of school management and improvement (Cheng: 1996). For example, the critical elements of effectiveness conceptualisation such as what criteria, whose criteria, effective for whom, how to evaluate, and under what environmental constraints are often problematic because there does not seem to be any standard dimensions accepted by all concerned constituencies for evaluation.

Of major significance, a school is an organisation in a changing and complicated social context, bounded by limited resources and involving multiple constituencies such as education authorities, school managers, teachers, learners, parents and the public. In such a context, understanding school effectiveness is quite complicated without discussing school functions and the context in which those goals are to be performed. This is one of the major concerns of this study.

Realities of Being a Secondary School Principal in Developing Countries

In most developing countries, principals face a number of problems relating to the management of staff. Given the fragile and sometimes hostile contexts, the tasks and problems faced by secondary school principals (especially those in rural settings) in developing countries, are likely to be unique. For example, the study of activities of four secondary schools in Barbados by Sealy (1992) found that in one week, the total number of activities performed ranged from 113 to 194, with a daily average of 30 activities. The activity with the largest amount of time was, curiously, personal: having lunch, managing a family concern by remote control or reading for a degree, for example. This was closely followed by unscheduled meetings, paperwork and correspondence.

Additionally, principals in developing countries such as Zimbabwe do not recruit the teachers and this usually results in some secondary schools being used as dumping grounds for ineffective teachers. As Harper and Davies (2006) point out, it is these poor teachers who give principals problems in regard to discipline. In this regard, Harper and Davies (2006) assert that teachers’ misbehaviour such as lateness, absenteeism and sexual harassment of female learners stem from a weak code of professional ethics and cultures of power and gender. Moreover, many teachers in many secondary schools in developing countries are untrained or poorly trained in some instances. Morale and motivation are often low because of poor pay, lack of promotion and inadequate resources.

In developing countries, the existence of what Fuller (1991) calls “fragile states”, means that governments must attempt to enhance their shallow authority by appearing modern. One way of doing this is by constantly preaching to the populace about the existence of meritocracy and mass opportunity. In the majority of cases, secondary schools are used for the extension of propaganda. To this end, secondary schools in developing countries in reality do not operate in terms of the classic Weberian bureaucracies in terms of such principles as merit, the fair and equal application of rules, consistency, honesty and integrity.
Most Common Leadership Style of Secondary School Principals in Developing Countries

As Harber and Davies (2006) aptly note, how secondary school principals behave in developing countries depends on a number of factors—natural inclinations, political, economic, social and cultural factors. In this regard, Harper and Davies (2006) describe the most frequently found type of principal in developing countries as the benevolent despot. In this sense, this means the role of the secondary principal in developing countries is significantly concerned with domination. In Zimbabwe, for instance, secondary school principals occupy the top of the school hierarchical chain of command. The role of teachers and learners in this authoritarian model is, to all intents and purposes, to support the principal’s decisions.

According to DuBey et al (1979:37), in Nigeria, for example: 

*In theory, it is expected that most heads will fall into categories like autocratic, democratic or laissez-faire, but most heads tend to be authoritarian, if not altogether autocratic. To a certain extent, this tendency can be attributed to the traditional ways of life, in which the elder or the man authority ….. has the final say in all matters and must be obeyed.*

The Actual Job of the Secondary School Principal in Developing Countries

School leadership is often seen as a key variable in school effectiveness studies. And yet, as Harber and Davies (2006) correctly observe, despite the importance attached to the principal as being central to the success or failure of a school, we still know very little about what secondary school principals in developing countries actually do. Books on the subject usually provide a list of functions.

In developing countries, we know very little about what principals actually do, given the contexts and the school organisation. Even if we were to assume that the job of a principal in developing countries is just as messy, untidy, fragmented and event-driven as in schools in developed countries, the actual events, tasks and problems faced by principals in developing countries are substantially different.

Options for Managing and Organising Secondary School Effectiveness in Developing Countries

Harber and Davies (2006) maintain that the key to contextualised secondary school organisation and management and school effectiveness in developing countries is flexibility. The import of this argument seems to be that the automatic and uncritical transfer of Western secondary school management and organisation tools to the context of developing countries, both in terms of relevance and feasibility should be viewed with serious reservations. The challenge here is whether there are procedural values that can best facilitate flexible and contextualised secondary school management that is capable of triggering school effectiveness.

Cheng (1996) argues that values such as inclusion, participation and transparency are basically democratic rather than bureaucratic in functional terms and can significantly improve secondary school effectiveness in developing countries. These values, arguably, provide for the free discussion among the key participants of a possible range of locally relevant answers.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study conforms to the broad qualitative research tradition in education. Focus group interviews were carried out to obtain relevant data on the understanding of the concept of school effectiveness and how the operationalisation of the concept impinges on the management and organisation of secondary schools in Zimbabwe with specific focus on the actual job of the principals. In addition, the focus group discussions also sought to look at ways to enhance secondary school effectiveness in Zimbabwe.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants comprised four (4) groups of secondary school principals, each comprising eight (8) participants. The sample of thirty-two (32) secondary school principals (20 males and 12 females) were divided into four (4) groups of eight participants each. The four groups of principals were selected, initially, by randomly selecting four educational provinces out of a sampling population of ten educational provinces in Zimbabwe. It was from each of the four provinces that thirty-two (32) secondary schools were purposively selected. This was done to strike a balance between urban and rural representation. The principals from the thirty (32) secondary schools were then used as units of analysis.

THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

- Based on the theoretical framework of the study, the researcher sought the views and ideas of the participants on:
  - the extent of understanding of the concept of school effectiveness,
  - the extent to which the organisation and management of secondary schools was affected by contextual realities,
  - the extent to which the leadership styles of secondary school principals were influenced by contextual realities,
  - the actual job of a secondary school principal; and
  - ways of improving the organisation and management of secondary schools to ensure that they are effective.
The flexible structure of this discussion guide allowed the researcher to explore, probe and ask pertinent follow-up questions.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS
Focus group interviews were used as a primary qualitative data collection technique. The researcher’s objective, in this regard, was to gather high quality responses in a context that allowed participants to sharpen their contributions in the context of the opinions of others. Each interview session lasted about 45 minutes. The analysis sought, among other things, to discern patterns in each group or among the various groups.

Interviews were recorded on audiotape and thereafter transcribed into a written form. The researcher then proceeded to conduct a content analysis of the data obtained from the four (4) groups. The analysis, among other things, sought to discern trends and patterns within each group or among the various focus groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
From the data analysis, the participants expressed the following views on the following areas of concern which are actually their responses to the five (5) sub-research questions.

Research Question 1: How is secondary school effectiveness viewed by the participants?
Research Question 2: To what extent is the organisation and management of secondary schools affected by contextual realities?
Research Question 3: To what extent are the leadership styles of secondary school principals influenced by contextual realities?
Research Question 4: What do most secondary school principals spend most of their working hours doing?
Research Question 4: How can the organisation and management of secondary schools be improved to enhance secondary school effectiveness in Zimbabwe?

In Zimbabwe, the reality on the ground was that only the top 20 percent passed O-level examination. In this context, it could be argued that secondary schools in Zimbabwe are ineffective to the majority of the learners (80%). It was, perhaps, in this context that a sizeable number of participants suggested that parallel and equally valuable forms of assessment had to be found for the 80 percent who would fail or not take such an examination.

The Extent to Which Contextual Realities Influence the Organisation And Management of Secondary Schools
Many participants cited the shortage of resources as among the major sources of their ineffectiveness as secondary school managers. In this sense, the constant reference to “difficult working conditions” by several participants seemed to confirm Cheng’s (1996) conclusion that demographic, economic, resource and cultural contexts, among others, are extensively pervasive in most developing countries. For instance, many participants opined that contextual realities tended to influence the way power was distributed in most secondary schools. From their perspective, the power relations in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe are authoritarian and bureaucratic. However, as Harber and Davies (2006) argue, these secondary schools in developing countries do not operate in terms of the classic Weberian bureaucracies in terms of such principles as merit, the fair and application of rules, consistency, honesty and integrity. What most participants kept referring to as bureaucracy, to all intents and

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### Table 1: Demographic characteristics of principals in each focus group by gender (N=32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 indicates, the principal sample contained more males (63%) than females. These data were considered statistically significant to the extent that they tended to confirm the gender gap with regards senior management positions in education which had always been pointed out by many a gender activist and educational publications in Zimbabwe. For instance, the Secretary for Education in Zimbabwe (Annual Report of the Secretary for Education and Culture: 1995) clearly acknowledged the existence of disparities in education and described them as a cause for concern.

The Meaning of School Effectiveness
All in all, the four focus groups felt that school effectiveness was associated with getting as many learners through the examinations as possible. For example many participants argued that skills at passing examinations were critical since these would enable the learners to get employment in the future. From their perspectives, other aspects of secondary school effectiveness were secondary to competitive testing. This finding is consistent with the conclusion by Harber and Davies (2006) that in many developing countries the standardised results are a good proxy for entry into employment and later productivity at work. The latter assumption is particularly questionable. Levin and Lockheed’s (1993) studies show that more educated and achieving learners in vocational schools show that there is higher productivity in agricultural activities, for instance.

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purposes, seemed to be a bureaucratic façade which usually results in messy and incoherent authoritarianism.

Several participants argued that the organisational model commonly replicated in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe was bureaucracy. This stance tends to lend credence to the assertion by Harber and Davies (2006) that the power relations in schools in developing countries are authoritarian and bureaucratic. Additionally, Glorgiades and Jones (1989), in their study of "principalship" in developing countries asked a sample of principals in Thailand about how their schools were organised: the most commonly used term was “hierarchically”.

The puzzle is why schools and principals in developing countries appear to shoot themselves in the foot by adopting management structures that seem to hinder creativity in the teachers and learners. Perhaps, Harber and Davies (2006) attempt to resolve this paradox when they suggest that, to understand such “footshooters”, one has to understand the cultures and logics of their position.

The Extent to Which Contextual Realities Influence the Leadership Styles of Secondary School Principals

Responding to a question on the possible influence of contextual realities on the leadership styles of the secondary principals, participants gave diverse comments with a sizeable number describing the most frequently found type of principal in most secondary schools as the benevolent despot. In many respects, this seems to confirm the conclusion by Harber and Davies (2006) that, given the nature of the school organisation, their own identities and the top-down, highly centralised systems of education in most developing countries, it would be unlikely for the majority of the principals to be anything than despots.

Put differently, most participants felt that the policies that drove management of secondary schools in Zimbabwe were imposed from the top. This finding is consistent with Harber and Davies’ (2006) description of the education systems in most developing countries as top-down and highly centralised. This finding is also consistent with the point made earlier that most secondary schools in most developing countries are organisationally bureaucratic. In this sense, this may suggest that the overall secondary school management framework is based on the classical theories such as scientific management approach and the theory of bureaucracy both of which emphasise the function of organisational structure, standard procedure and official power.

The Actual Work of Secondary School Principals

A large number of principals expressed the view that most principals spent most of their time on what they termed “crisis management.” The relative prevalence of comments about crisis management in this study seems to be consistent with the argument raised by Harber and Davies (2006) that, given the contexts of developing countries, the job of the principals is likely to be messy and event-driven. Findings of other studies tend to affirm this perception. For example, Sealy (1992) who shadowed four principals in Barbados found that in one week the total number of activities performed ranged from 113 to 194.

In Sealy’s study, the activity with the largest amount of time was, in fact, personal—having lunch or reading, for example. In Sealy’s study, “personal” activities were followed by unscheduled meetings, paperwork and correspondence. In this study, a fairly significant number of principals complained about too many meetings and workshops initiated either from their district offices or provincial offices. In particular, those based in rural schools elaborated saying that they were forced to walk long distances to these meetings because of poor transport systems in their areas.

Participants further claimed that, in many instances, they had to perform the duties of clerks and bursars because of the shortage of staff. The complaints in this study about role-overload triggered, mainly by shortage of staff is consistent with Lutanjuka and Mutembi’s (1993) citation of the example of a school they visited in Tanzania which had no accountant nor a financial clerk. Notwithstanding this situation, this school was annually allocated a sum of Tsh30 million from the government and collected fees worth Tsh4.8 million. The critical question to ask in a situation like this is: how does the untrained principal of a secondary school deal with audit queries?

Ways in Which Organisation and Management of Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe could be Improved to ensure that they are Effective

As regards to how the secondary school principals thought the secondary schools could be managed and organised to ensure that they were contextually effective, most participants lamented the fact that secondary schools in Zimbabwe were managed and organized to achieve academic outcomes. Asked to elaborate on this point, the participants explained that focusing on exclusively on academic outcomes tended to exclude most learners from active and meaningful learning. In further elaboration, most participants opined that contextualised management and outcomes means, among other things, taking into account a set of local values about the nature of school management styles and outcomes and the means by which such outcomes are to be achieved. These opinions seem to give credence an assertion
made by Bush and West-Burnham (1994) that management and outcomes have meaning only when they are interpreted in a specific situation. In this sense, secondary school management and outcomes are not absolutes which can be universally applied.

In a follow-up question, the participants were asked to justify why the management and organisation of secondary schools ought to consider local conditions. Most participants who supported the contextualisation of the management and organisation of secondary schools cited the need to ensure that the schools’ programmes were relevant to the learners, teachers, parents and industries. However, a few participants rejected the concept of contextualisation of secondary school management, arguing that principals would lose control of schools. They opined that the coordination of secondary schools would be difficult without constant directions from the district and provincial offices. They also argued that the contextualisation of the management of secondary schools would compromise the quality of education in the country.

Responding to the question on what management and organisational strategies needed to be adopted to trigger secondary school effectiveness in Zimbabwe, many participants stressed the need to create common pictures in terms of which needs of the learners that secondary schools should address. A few participants argued that the management and organisation of secondary schools in Zimbabwe were externally controlled through a system that used the achievement of non-academic as rhetoric. In elaboration, these participants argued that since academic achievements were the only major indicator of secondary school effectiveness, the undemocratic secondary school management and organisation were destined to be ineffective for the majority of the learners, their parents, local communities and industries.

A large number of participants emphasised community involvement in the management and organisation of secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Most participants saw community involvement in terms of increasing the schools’ resources by providing in kind and by participating in school activities. This view receives support from a number of researchers. For example, Tsang and Thang and Wheeler (1993) found that in Thailand education received substantial support from communities through direct contributions and donations at school social gatherings.

An even larger number of participants saw the involvement of and support of parents as being even more important than the support of the community. In this regard a sizeable number of participants suggested that every school programme ought to include parent involvement. In this sense, the participants argued that one of the strategies for contextualising secondary school management and organisation in Zimbabwe would be for schools to establish planned opportunities by which parental views would have a greater impact on school decision-making. In elaboration, the participants stressed that secondary schools should turn themselves into places where parents feel wanted and recognised for their strength and potential.

Many participants indicated that in order to make the best use of the scarce resources, it was very important to adopt management and organisational mechanisms that are adapted to the lives of the majority of learners, the rural learners in the case of Zimbabwe. In this regard, most participants suggested the use of school clusters, arguing that clusters would have an influence inputs to the schools, the teaching-learning process and the school management process.

A number of participants suggested that secondary schools in Zimbabwe would be more effective if teachers were involved in the shaping of the schools, both in terms of setting goals and participating in the management process. This suggestion seems to find support from Levin and Lockheed (1993) who posit that in effective schools, teachers, typically, are decision-makers. Furthermore, in Thailand, Thang and Wheeler (1993) found a sharp contrast between schools where teamwork and collegiality characterized the relationships among teachers and the principals and conventional schools where teachers did their work individually and had hierarchical relationships with their principals.

Finally, most participants, in summing up their contributions, argued for a decentralisation of the secondary school management in Zimbabwe, maintaining that moving from centralised decision-making to greater local and school-based control would result in programmes that would meet the needs of specific communities and groups of learners. In this regard, Cheng (1996) posits that decentralization is an important phenomenon of school management reform which is consistent with the principle of equifinality. He, nevertheless, correctly points out that even in decentralised systems, central government inputs and financing are necessary to ensure equality and to set standards for appropriate service levels. However, since teaching and learning in the classroom and in schools, increasing the authority of the teachers and principals to design programmes that meet local needs appears to be the most promising strategy for improving secondary school effectiveness in developing countries.
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the study sought to provide a platform for secondary school principals in Zimbabwe to interrogate existing secondary school management and organisational strategies for achieving school effectiveness. Second, the study aimed to find out what secondary school principals in Zimbabwe perceived as ways of organising and managing secondary schools for school effectiveness given the contextual realities of demographic, educational, health, economic, resource, political and cultural dimensions. The general picture that emerges from this study seems to be that the management and organisation of most secondary schools in Zimbabwe revolve around pseudo-bureaucracy and incoherent authoritarianism. In this regard, it could be argued that centralisation in secondary school management stifles the principle of equifinality, a modern management theory which assumes that there may be different ways to achieve set goals. In this principle, flexibility is emphasised and secondary schools should be managed by themselves according to their own conditions. Doing otherwise in the context of critical shortages of financial, human and material resources is a sure way of managing secondary schools in Zimbabwe for ineffectiveness.

REFERENCES


