The Work Obligations of the Head Masters in ZEP Schools in Mauritius along a School Improvement Framework

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Abstract
This paper highlights the challenges of the heads of schools in the context of the underachieving primary schools which are termed as Zones d’Éducation Prioritaires - ZEP schools (Priority Education Zones as its English translation would mean). These schools are found in the deprived regions of the Republic of Mauritius and have been given specific considerations by the government. This significance of this paper lies in its attempt to explore those planning processes from a perspective of implementing a total quality management approach while delivering on the set objectives with the right leadership style. The arguments presented can provide some answers to questions asked about the failing schools. The discussions are framed around developing a standard management protocol and therefore evolving a School Improvement Framework (SIF) to improve performance of ZEP schools in the country. The above considerations are important as they are part of the educational reform agenda of the Ministry of Education as it meets the internationally agreed goals.

Keywords: ZEP/ Priority education zones schools, school organisation, school improvement framework.

INTRODUCTION
The ZEP (‘Zones d’Éducation Prioritaires’) Priority Education Zones) Project was launched in Mauritius in July 2003 as a response to the continued high academic failure rates of some 30 primary schools found in the deprived regions of the country (Ministry of Education & Human Resources, 2002). The ZEP Project is the Mauritian version of similar project that exist in many countries (England, France, USA, Belgium, Portugal…) to be a compensatory education policy of the government implemented with the aim to direct extra resources to disadvantaged schools (Roland Bénabou et al, 2009). Indeed, it has been observed that the academic performance of the primary school pupils at the Certificate of Primary Examinations has a direct correlation with the socio-economic conditions of the students’ families where they are found. Hence the setting up of the ZEP project by the government is a priority as it provides answers to the first 2 goals of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations in that it attempts to eradicate poverty through the National Education system by ensuring that efforts are made to secure universal access to primary education. The ZEP project therefore is an important component of the educational reform plans of the Ministry of Education (Presidential Address, 2012).

Not disregarding class pedagogy and the principles of good teaching which are equally important here; this paper focuses its discussions on the management framework which will provide a systematic way of planning the school routines amidst many features and variables which if not handled properly will denature the purpose of the ZEP schools. The deliverables of this paper will therefore be one which is based on the management issues that the Head Master will need to attend to in view to organise his work and plan ahead with confidence. This research generally supports the conclusion that school leadership exerts a measurable, albeit indirect, effect on students’ learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008 in Heck & Hallinger, 2010). The organisation of this paper will therefore give an overview of the challenges of the ZEP schools in making the ZEP project unique in its kind. The paper proceeds in describing a model of management which needs to be implemented to ensure that work obligations of the head master as well as the teachers proceed through quantifiable measures which are identified as Key Performance Indicators. The ZEP school is therefore highlighted as a case for best practice in terms of the working management agreement which is reached. For the first time in the primary school sub sector in Mauritius, the school management model is shown a concrete way towards

Total Quality Management Approaches
The importance of this paper certainly lies in the fact that it shines light on possible solutions for many failing schools by adopting the right management model at the level of the schools. It is interesting to note that this paper also advocates for a decentralised approach where the Head Master develops its
management structure to confer attributes of a self-managed school to the ZEP school. The self-managing school is deployed by standing on notions which are otherwise common to the business sector but which are here translated to meet with the world of educational management. Perhaps one could read and interpret that the job of a Head Master here is one of an all-rounder as s/he manages both strategic and technical operations of the school but at the same time exerts himself / herself to be a human resource manager to uphold the motivation of the teachers.

The limitations to this research are that there could be systemic factors proper to the Ministry of Education as a state party which could impinge on the strategy so as to slow down the implementation of the management model. The latter could be the alignment of the inspectors’ traditional ways of carrying their duties which may not be in conformity with the management spirit entertained here. Hence, further discussions could elaborate on the aspect of training as a critical measure to align all parties to the cause. Added to the above factor, there are certainly socio-cultural factors at the level of the school which deserve to be studied as they are known to particularly define the ambitions and the commitment of the stakeholders including the parents to change things in partaking with the challenging journey of the Head Master and his team.

THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE ZEP SCHOOLS AND THE CHALLENGES OF THEIR HEAD MASTERS  
A brief overview of the ZEP project as a best practice and its unique features

The ZEP project which was conceptualised into a strategy document presents a revised version of past attempts to cater for the underachieving school. The initiative dedicates a special unit called the ZEP Unit at the Ministry of Education to man the reforms in those 30 selected primary school whose percentage pass rate were continuously under 40% prior to 2003.

In fact, the mandate of the ZEP Unit under the headship of a Project Manager is to see to it that decisions and actions are fast tracked to address emerging urgent issues. As at to date, the ZEP project concerns some 8,139 primary school pupils (as at 2012) representing around 8% of the total primary school population. It can be said that the ZEP project also caters for about 7000 families whose socio-economic conditions are less than average in the country. The latter statement is to be correlated with the fact that on average only 16.15% of the parents in the ZEP schools completed high school education. (The Indian Ocean Child Rights Observatory, 2008).

The survey carried out by the Indian Ocean Child Rights Observatory indicates the precarious conditions in which the children of the ZEP live. Either there is parental neglect or simply they live in poverty with lack of basic care. The above statements cry out for Government’s actions to protect the Rights of the Children of the Republic (United Nations, 1990, Child Rights Convention). Policy decisions concerning the welfare of the ZEP project are taken by a ZEP Council which is under the direct chairmanship of the Minister of Education.

The unique aspects of the ZEP project which are not to be found in other primary schools of the island are:

- The ZEP schools are managed under the operative guidelines of the ZEP Unit but considerations are given to the specificities of the schools and the implementation of the directives is done at the school level by the Head Master in a School Development Committee.
- The ZEP schools are required to implement socio-pedagogical projects at the level of the schools to bring the home realities of the child closer to the demands of school and fight the low morale and disaffection of parents.
- Each ZEP school benefits from the accompaniment of a business organisation. The Company Delegate advises the Head Master on techniques of management and supports the development school programmes more in terms of advice that in financial term.
- Medical Officers and nurses are recruited at the level of the school carry out medical screening of the pupils through a health card. Medical referral actions are followed up by the parents. A food programme has also been implemented where the ZEP school children are given a meal at mid-day to compensate for their environmental constraints.
- Additional resources are put by government thorough the Local Education Authority to review the school infrastructure so that an adequate physical environment is given to the students which is conducive to learning.
- Least but not all, teachers are posted in the ZEP school on a voluntary basis. Nonetheless, the gross majority of 63.2% of teachers have been posted on the basis of administrative convenience by the Ministry of Education. Teachers are compensated in financial terms as a way to recognise and value the additional efforts that they put in their work.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE HEAD MASTERS OF THE ZEP SCHOOLS IN MAURITIUS

Head Masters’ Increased Load of Work and Requirement for Accrued Managerial Expertise

With the advent of the Zones d’Education Prioritaires project, the schools categorised in the ZEP category have seen their basic functional modalities changed overnight. The ZEP school is now a place heightened to fight social exclusion and
inequality through the National System of education. The heads of schools are bestowed with the authority to implement different and additional programmes ranging from the management of a food programme to the implementation of medical screening of the pupils to detect physical impairments to learning as early as possible. The socio pedagogical obligations direct the head master to welcome social workers inside the school and work with them in a coherent manner without losing grip on the pedagogical imperatives which characterise a school. In face of such situation, the head masters have their load of work increased and they are drawn in all directions.

Developing a Special Management Style with More Partners in a Team at School Level

Decentralization to the school level is a key part of the developments reported in this paper as the Head Master of the ZEP school takes the lead. The concept is variously known as school self-management and it is here practised with varying degree. A self-managing school is a school in a system of public education to which there has been decentralized a significant amount of authority and responsibility to make decisions related to the allocation of resources within a centrally-determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards and accountabilities (based on a definition of Caldwell and Spinks, 1988, 1992, 1998, 2008 in Watterston & Caldwell, 2011). The Head Master is called upon to evolve a participatory style of management thereby giving everybody a voice and calling on partners to help in the execution of the different tasks which might appear far from being the duties of a ‘regular’ Head Master.

Reporting Skills as an Administrative Competence to Ensure Good Governance

The principles of good governance (Adamson, 2012) imply that there must be an inherent transparency in the proceedings of the management committee of the School Development Unit (SDU). Members of SDU play a vital role in serving the communities around the school and bring passion and commitment as well as new skills and experience to the ZEP school. They provide long term vision and protect the reputation and values of their organisations they represent. Hence the Head Master must be the custodian of all proceedings and records. More importantly, the decisions reached by the SDU will need to be officially communicated to the Ministry to ensure sustainability of the project along clear guidelines and principles.

Entrepreneurial abilities in planning ahead and mobilising resources to make things happen

In face of the challenges posed, Head Masters are required to evolve into entrepreneurs who will be able to foresee the challenges ahead of them and gear their resourcefulness to address same with the ability and flexibility that is required of shrewd professionals. In this respect, the concept of networking is relevant. Indeed the idea of school autonomy goes hand-in-hand with being connected to community, other educators, and the broader society. Hence, there is a need for key roles of networks, and partnerships. Too much educational practice in OECD countries is characterised by isolation: schools from parents and the community and from each other; teachers and learners in isolated classrooms (Johansson, 2003, p. 149). The official goal of the ZEP program was also to provide the means for schools to create new educational projects and connect more closely with local institutions such as municipalities

Managing pupils poor performance: Developing new pedagogical projects

The academic profile of the primary sub sector of education in Mauritius is unusual as the analysis of past figures indicates that the distribution of scores is “U-shaped” instead of the expected normal bell-shaped distribution associated with the distribution of intelligence in the population. The “U-shaped” curve indicates that the Nation Educational system in the sub primary sector has developed into a two-track system and is drawing attention to an appalling phenomenon, which is the creation of an important inequity in learning pupil achievement (Ministry of Education & Human Resources, 2009: p28). Based on facts and figures from the yearly reports of the Mauritius Examination Syndicate, it is clearly seen that the rising right hand arm of the U-shaped distribution where low performances accumulate is largely contributed by the performance of the pupils from the ZEP schools where systematically year after year the percentage of pupils failing these examinations stands at a high percentage of 65%.
Louis S. Coutet is a ZEP school where underperformance is most critical. A. Bazerque is a ZEP school where underperformance is average among ZEP schools.

Figure 2: Comparative results at National level and the ZEP schools (source: Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, 2011)

Despite all efforts made by the government since the past 10 years that the ZEP project has been launched, it would seem that most of the ZEP schools are still lagging behind.

As part of the inclusive pedagogical approach proposed, it is here argued that the talk and chalk method will certainly no longer work and teachers should move from the black board and engage the pupils in learning activities. The principles behind the activity based approach is that children are “doers” and learn primarily because they need to remember the early acquired competencies better because they will use it in a real life situations. Activity based learning recognizes that young children are physical, tactile and use all their senses. The Head Master’s role in this case would be to ensure resource allocation as well as validate teachers’ strengths and experiences by supporting their instructional efforts. The Head Master as an instructional leader is a significant factor in facilitating, improving, and promoting the academic progress of students.

Supporting Teachers’ Morale and Motivation

Teacher’s morale is critical to school success. The factors that cause low levels of morale appear to stem from extrinsic sources that are controlled by the administrators and in some cases the media (Willis & Varner, 2010). Teachers may lose motivation because of the school culture and climate might not be conducive. These are most often correlated with administrative practices.

A survey of teacher profile in the ZEP schools carried out by the Indian Ocean Child Rights Observatory in 2008 in Mauritius revealed the following:

a) 63.2% of the teachers surveyed would like to be transferred to a non-ZEP schools
b) The three factors that contributed to the teacher satisfaction were ranked by the standard 6 teachers posted in ZEP schools as follows:
   - Good relationship with the parents
   - Good leadership of Head Master
   - Seeing my pupils learn

There are not about 28% of all standard 6 teachers wished to change their profession if they were given a choice and that about 37% would wish to change posting from a ZEP to a non-ZEP school. Only 49% of the respondents simply wished a change in posting.

Indeed, Arnoud T. Evers et al (2011) have highlighted school organisational factors which support not only teachers’ morale but also the continuous development of teachers. They communicate directly and frequently with teachers about instruction and student needs. An example of frequent interaction with teachers is Head of schools making a "conscious effort to interact in a positive manner with every teacher on a daily basis" (Reitzug, 1989). Indeed, Reitzug's (1989) noted that students were achieving when there were more interaction between teacher and Head Master. Moreover, these Head Masters not only discussed academic issues, they guided, encouraged, reinforced, and promoted teachers' instructional efforts. Cuban (1989) found that such Head Masters were flexible and supportive with teachers' efforts to adapt, modify, or adjust instructional approaches to meet the needs of students. Support for the teachers' instructional efforts occurs because these instructional leaders are cognizant of what the teachers are doing.

Supervising Teachers’ Work and Reporting on Remedial Strategies

The Head Masters as a strategic talent manager are required not only of welcoming and developing talented staff, but also creating the working conditions in which staff fully commit their time and energy. Managing a school’s teaching talent becomes strategic when it’s systemic link to school instructional improvement strategies, to the competencies needed to enact the strategies, and to success in boosting student learning. This requires of the heads of the ZEP schools to continuously monitor the work of the teachers and to provide feedback to them as well as to the system. Amidst so many criteria, the main fields of the review of teachers’ work which are deemed to be effective and which are centred on the aspects of both the human and professional development are:
Head Masters solicit and provide feedback on instructional methods and techniques. When Head Masters interact with teachers about classroom efforts, they are communicating with teachers about the instructional process. Such two way communication is critical in establishing a climate of collaboration. Opportunities to interact with teachers on instructional issues increase as Head Masters become a frequent visitor in the classroom. Providing follow-up comments to assist teachers’ improvement was one of the variables characterizing high achieving schools reported by Heck, Larsen, and Marcoulides (1990). Head Masters who are frequent classroom visitors become more aware of the daily challenges and constraints that teachers encounter (Eilertsen et al. (2008)). This information enhances the Head Masters’ ability to practice instructional leadership that leads to student academic gains.

Head Masters use data to focus attention on improving the curriculum or instructional approach to maximize student achievement. When Head Masters use data about trends in students’ performance to adjust the curriculum or instructional practices being used, instruction is maximized. In schools where at-risk students are achieving at high levels, Head Masters structure time to evaluate and monitor students’ progress, and lead staff efforts in designing focused instructional approaches to meet the special and specific needs of students. They work in concert with the teachers to review, modify, and adjust their instructional efforts (Sizemore, Brossard, and Harrigan, 1983 cited in Méndez-Morse, 1991).

Head Masters use data and faculty input to determine staff development activities that strengthen teachers’ instructional skills. Effective Head Masters use data to determine areas of need for staff development activities. In schools where at-risk students are achieving, Head Masters provide and promote professional development opportunities to improve teachers’ instructional skills. Decisions about staff development are made based on students’ progress data as well as on teachers’ discussions, input, and needs. Sizemore, Brossard, and Harrigan (1983 cited in Méndez-Morse, 1991) reported the prompt evaluation of teacher and staff performance and the provision of assistance, help and in-service where necessary.

Evaluation will improve instruction only when it is embedded in a performance management process that includes goal setting, frequent and specific feedback, access to coaching and support, and recognition of success as well as consequences for poor performance (Kimball 2011). Teachers now understand that there is evidence on which they and their school will be judged.

Enlisting More Support from the Inspectorate of the Local Education Authority to Have Systemic Legitimacy

It is noted that the ZEP project developed as part of the government agenda was not well integrated in the system. It was even mentioned in official reports that the collaboration of the Local Education Authority identified locally as Zonal Directorates and the National Inspectorate are essential for a successful implementation of the ZEP project (United Nation Development Programme, 2005). The disaffection of the local education authority through its inspecutatorate system is clearly seen in the irregular visits of pedagogical inspectors to the ZEP school (Indian Ocean Child Rights Observatory, 2008, p29). The reason could probably be that the ZEP project was developed as an adjunct body to work out the agenda of the ZEP prerogatives.

It is here argued that systemic legitimacy of the ZEP project would be achieved if work obligations at the level of the Head Master’s Office are carried out in a systematic manner of moving the project through a planned approach with official documents submitted and motivated by performance indicators. Hence the ZEP schools develop a strategy focused on the principle of outcomes-based accountability. Such focus has a number of benefits:

a) It keeps state and local activity focused on a goal.
b) It provides a basis for collaboration.
c) It promotes “consistency of action” among service deliverers by balancing the desire to respond to clients with the need for alignment with a set of framed purposes.
d) Increases effectiveness.
e) It raises morale through tracking success.
f) It fosters commitment and encourages support from collaborative partners and funders by establishing service deliverers’ credibility.
g) It empowers a community by bringing external recognition and support.
h) It can be “exchanged” for funding support.

Management by Objectives and Target Setting as a Viable Means to Plan the ZEP School Obligations

The ZEP school Head Masters where at-risk students learn are required to practice the skills and apply the knowledge of effective instructional leadership. They
need to have a vision - a picture of what they want students to achieve. They engage teachers, parents, students and others to share in creating the vision. They encourage them to join in the efforts to make that vision a reality. They keep the vision in the forefront by supporting teachers' instructional efforts and by guiding the use of data to evaluate the progress of the school. Figure 3 below schematically outlines the pre-requisites to frame a sound management system at a ZEP school.

![Figure 3: Oakland Vision and Mission Framework (Oakland, 2011)](image)

Bringing Notions of Total Quality Management Model in the ZEP School Improvement Framework

It has been acknowledged that the ZEP school model nowadays suffers from the challenges of the proper management of the school daily routines and needs to be reviewed (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). This feature could be amongst the reasons why improvements in many of the ZEP schools are still being awaited in the form of an increase in percentage pass rates of the pupils at the CPE examinations.

The discussions that follow aims at proposing a school improvement framework where the assignments and the work process developed at the school are aligned to modern concepts of management that probably is more affluent in the business sector but an adaptation of same may prove beneficial in the case of the ZEP school dilemma to Head Masters. In those terms, the ZEP schools definitely carry with them the traits of site based school management model or called by another name it may be said that ZEP schools adopt aspects of a self-managed school model.

In particular, Malaklolunthu and Shamsudin (2011) mentioned the following pre-requisites before implementing a school-based management strategy which are critical to sustain innovations and change management with regards to the human resource aspects of the work devolution at a school:

- a) The school-based management requires clarity of goals agreed and accepted by the school community and has the real power to influence the issues and decisions made by them.
- b) In order to effect any changes, the school people should be able to make decisions and implement initiatives as planned.
- c) The success of a school-based management model also lies in the degree of trust that exists among the school community members. Open and honest interaction among members and
inclusion of every member in decision making is also imperative for the successful operation of the school   
d) In addition to these, attention must be given to teacher recruitment and retention, student performance improvement, fund management, and educational process transformation. 
e) Key decisions about human resource management, student performance, budgeting and transparency in finance, and restructuring of instructional practices are crucial for establishing successful schools. 

Hereunder is a schema proposed by Oakland (2011) which befits the path which needs to be partaken by the ZEP school organisation to bring a systemization of the reform agenda at school level and at the same time bringing in coherence and consistency in policies and strategies. The vehicle for achieving excellence in leadership is by Total Quality Management. Using the construct of the Oakland TQM Model (Oakland, 2011), the four Ps and four Cs provide a framework for this: Planning, Performance, Processes, People, Customers, Commitment, Culture, and Communications.

![Oakland TQM Model (2011)](image)

**Figure 4: Oakland TQM Model (2011)**

**Planning**
- develop the vision needed for constancy of purpose and for long term success;  
- develop, deploy and update policy and strategy;  
- align school organisational structure to support delivery of policy and strategy.

**Performance**
- Identify critical areas of performance (as per a balance score card model as discussed hereunder in section 4 of this paper);  
- Develop measures to indicate levels of current performance;  
- Set goals and measure progress towards their achievement;  
- Provide feedback to people at all levels regarding their performance against agreed goals.

**Processes**
- ensure a system for managing processes is developed and implemented;  
- ensure through personal involvement that the management system is developed, implemented and continuously improved;  
- prioritise improvement activities and ensure they are planned on a school wide basis.

**People**
- train team leaders (Senior teachers) in leadership skills and problem solving  
- stimulate empowerment (“experts”) and teamwork to encourage creativity and innovation;  
- encourage, support and act on results of training, education and learning activities  
- motivate, support and recognise the organisation’s people – both individually and in teams;  
- help and support people to achieve plans, goals, objectives and targets;  
- respond to people and encourage them to participate in improvement activities.

**Customers**
- be involved with customers and other stakeholders;  
- ensure customer (external and internal) needs are understood and responded to;  
- establish and participate in partnerships – as a customer demand continuous improvement.

**Commitment**
- be personally and actively involved in quality and improvement activities;  
- review and improve effectiveness of own leadership.

**Culture**
- develop the values and ethics to support the creation of the system’s design  
- implement the values and ethics through actions and behaviours;  
- ensure creativity, innovation and learning activities are developed and implemented.

**Communications**
- stimulate and encourage communication and collaboration;  
- personally communicate the vision, values, mission, policies and strategies;  
- be accessible and actively listen.

The Aspect of Monitoring and Evaluation of the School Enterprise

It has been outlined in the ZEP strategy document that before the resumption of studies the school Head
Master is mandated to produce a School Development Plan (SDP) which summarises the school’s strategic planning and goal deployment identified as a set of critical success factors (CSFs) and associated Key Performance Outcomes with their Indicators (KPOs and KPIs). These factors have been derived from the school’s mission and represent a balance mix of stakeholders’ concerns around the school in the School Development Unit (SDU).

The design and obligations of the ZEP project are here outlined on the basis of 4 key components, namely:

a) Careful and diligent management of resources with element of accountability
b) Planning teaching and learning as the core internal process at school
c) Implementing innovations in the class activities
d) Ensuring an accrued participation of parents and stakeholders in school life.

The sustainability of the initiative herewith elicted depends heavily on the performance outcomes to match reasonable and acceptable key performance results which are quantifiable and therefore can provide for a measure of the overall performance of the school. It is therefore adequate that each of the above 4 components constitutes domains which will have a grading and measured on a score card. The results will be indicative of sustainable development and progress. Hence the idea to develop a balance score card (Kaplan and Norton, 1996 cited in Karathanos & Karathanos, 2005) as to support the strategic planning and implementation by federating the actions of all parts of an organization around a common understanding of its goals, and by facilitating the assessment and upgrade of strategy.

The advantages of the utilization of the Balanced Scorecard as a tool provide management with a comprehensive picture of its operations and may include the following:

a) The methodology facilitates communication and understanding of business goals and strategies at all levels of an organization.
b) Maximized Cooperation - Team members are focused on helping one another succeed.
c) Usable Results - Transforms strategy into action and desired behaviours.
d) The Balanced Scorecard concept provides strategic feedback and learning.
e) A cross organizational team - More open channels of communications - Enthusiastic People.
f) Initiatives are continually measured and evaluated against national educational standards.

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**Figure 5: Example of the implementation of a balance score card**
DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has been proposed in the light of the government’s concerns to reform the ZEP project since its existence in 2003. The overall academic performance of all the 30 schools shows that results have stagnated albeit some schools have improved remarkably. The morality of action will dictate that at no cost should the needs of the pupils be sacrificed at the altar of still finding a better way to address the problem of underachievement of pupils. As far as the conceptual framework is concerned, it is here argued that same has been done with acumen based on the situational context to bring urgent attention to the issue. No additional funds would make a school successful when management and leadership are poor (Araujo, 2009). Thus, the initiatives discussed in this paper aim to propose a school improvement framework where management teams and teachers are made to be more accountable, relying on their power to establish a new identity for the ZEP schools in view to acquire a systemic legitimacy. The teams at the level of the ZEP schools are accountable not only to the state, but also to the wider public through the high visibility given to this initiative and the close surveillance it was subjected to in the media. The ZEP project model in Mauritius has the additional merit that it involves the parent and associate community responsibility in the achievement of the pupils at the level of the school. Therefore the efforts to fight underachievement stem from the logic of shared responsibility as it is true the issue raised here is also of social and cultural order besides being educational. Hence the calling for each party concerned to bring its share in the ZEP initiative. The presentation of the ideas in this paper reinforces the position that the educational factor in the issue raised is first and foremost tackle at the level of school leadership.

Leadership skills of the headmaster: The managerial capability is discussed at the level of the structural transformation that is required of a ZEP school to deliver to the level expected of it. This involves a reconceptualization of the existing model of primary schooling and evolving a different mechanism to rupture from the ethos of ‘failure’. Different countries and education systems have also introduced educational reforms from time to time and emphasised on the importance of leadership for school effectiveness and improvement. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) in Salfi (2011) argued that effective leaders employed an indirect but powerful influence on school effectiveness and students’ achievement.

Caldwell & Spinks (1998) demonstrated that Head Masters played a key strategic and empowering role in linking structural aspect of reform to teaching learning process and students’ outcomes. Indeed, school Head Masters play a key role in establishing cultures that are professionally stimulating for teachers which increase theirs sense of efficacy and beliefs that have the capacity to make a difference to students’ learning. Leadership at school is one of the significant factors for school effectiveness and successful schools are associated with the activities of effective leadership. In light of the above arguments, the following recommendations are made:

a) Head of the institution must share authority and distribute leadership activities to their subordinates and involve other personnel of school community in the process of decision making and school improvement.

b) The leadership activities should be distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected of them. The initiatives of those to whom leadership is distributed must be coordinated in some planned way.

c) Different committees should be organized to perform different functions of schools. In these committees senior and experienced teachers and community representatives should be included.

d) Public participation must be ensured in the process of school improvement.

e) Parents of students and community representative should be involved in different school activities.

f) An atmosphere of trust, collegiality and cooperation must be created in schools.

The above suggestions happen within a logic of management framework and a true desire to change the status quo in team efforts at school level. Therefore in the light of the above arguments, this paper has proposed a model of management which combine in an intelligible articulation with the leadership skills of the school principle to address this area of reform. Invariably the first step is to know how the students are performing and then proceed to the next aspect which is to identify a set of interventions to make the desired improvements in student outcomes. What follows is to adapt the interventions to the context, taking into account the history, culture, and structure of the school system. Interventions commonly adopted categorized themselves into these different areas: revising the school curriculum and standards by integrating more activity based learning, establishing an appropriate reward and compensation structure for educators, building educators’ technical skills through mentorship, assessing students, establishing data systems.

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1 Three schools namely St Therese de l’enfant Jesus RC, Bois des Amourettes GS and Stanley GS have performed at 66.7%, 61.5% and 55.3% in 2011 while the average national performance stands at 68.84% in the same year.
**Getting the right teacher.** It is a matter of fact that the ZEP schools suffer from the drawback of not having the right profile of teachers posted at these schools. Indeed, the Indian Ocean Child Rights Observatory (2008) reports that teachers’ retention in the ZEP sector in Mauritius is a major obstacle to have a continuity in the policy to build the capacity of teachers in that sector. Teachers’ motivation in the survey was measured inter alia, by the percentage of teachers who would like to change their profession being given the chance and the desire to be transferred from their present posting. The survey showed that more than 60% of the teachers surveyed would like a transfer away from the ZEP school to a non ZEP school.

Enriching ourselves from the Nigerian experience of its National Teacher Education Policy (NTEP), we can also derive the same principles that would touch on some of the key challenges we have seen in the ZEP sector (Obanya 2010). These are:

a) attracting the right calibre people into the ZEP sector  
b) Screening the right teacher into teacher education programmes,

c) Monitoring and evaluating the quality of teacher education programmes,

d) Gauging teacher’s mastery of the subject matter,

e) Assessing teachers’ level of classroom effectiveness,

f) Reviewing professional support for teachers, and

g) Ensuring their continuous education and professional development.

**The need for decisive HR policies in the ZEP sector in Mauritius.** The main purpose of renewed human resource management policies is first to institutionalised the management agreements between the Head Master and his team of teachers with the officers in the higher hierarchy such as school inspectors and the directors of the Local Education Authority known as the Zone Directors. The above aims at bringing more cohesion in the system and aligning the ZEP project as a government priority. The HR policies comprise issues such as bonuses, training and development as well as criteria for higher promotion and career ventures. The HR policies developed ensure that the government and the special provisions contained therein value the Head Masters and their teams for their additional efforts. The new personnel rules as per the HR policies will also clarify expectations of performance and behaviour and help create the desired culture. On the other hand, HR policies protect the teachers from arbitrary and discriminatory actions by possible casual oversights by the higher hierarchy. It is therefore advocated that by having recourse to measures such as the implementation of specific HR policies, the problem of dual administrative set up that the ZEP may perceive as being an adjunct body at the Ministry of Education which may appear to conflict with central policy will be cleared. At the same rate, standard performance will also be established and reviewed during performance appraisal of officers serving the system.

It has been advised by Obanya (2010) that the conditions of work hence the HR policies which are being advocated above should be in line with the provisions of the ILO/ UNESCO Joint Recommendations Concerning the status of Teachers. These recommendations were adopted by a special intergovernmental conference in Paris on 5 October 1966 and the provisions have remained relevant ever since. As with all major decisions, the implementation of bold measures as with those cited above will require political will and prioritization as key to the sustained development of the ZEP strategic initiative.

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