

Research Article

Primary School Educators' Understanding of Staff Development in Zimbabwe: Implications for Quality Education

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Abstract: This research article was derived from the researcher's Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Management Thesis that was submitted to the Zimbabwe Open University in May 2019. The main study investigated 'teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of primary school staff development programmes in Zimbabwe: in search for quality education'. The current study explored 'primary school educators' understanding of staff development in Zimbabwe: implications for quality education' and was rooted within the social constructivist philosophy that informed the qualitative research methodology and case study design that were adopted. The study focused on five selected primary schools in Hwange district of Matabeleland North province in Zimbabwe where a sample of 30 (n=30) participants; comprising five head teachers and twenty-five classroom teachers was utilised in order to accomplish the study. Expert sampling under the non-probability purposive sampling framework was used to identify participants which accommodated educators, thereby, preventing inappropriate elements from being part of the study which ensured the generation of expert and relevant data regarding the research problem. In-depth face-to-face interviews with head teachers and focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers were used as the research techniques. Consistent with qualitative inquiries, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the generated data was done. The major findings were that head teachers' excerpts generally showed that they took staff development to involve 'activities that addressed areas of concern in teachers' work', on-going education and training for teachers' as well as 'activities meant to inform teachers on new developments in their working conditions'. On the other hand, excerpts from focus group discussions indicated that teachers took staff development to refer to activities and experiences meant to develop their knowledge and pedagogic skills or simply experiences focused on improving their professional effectiveness for the benefit of learners. Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that both teachers and head teachers' had a correct understanding of staff development and that their conceptualisation of staff development was generally positive, hence, fostered quality education. The researcher concluded that the concept of staff development be clearly explained to new teachers in schools so that they are on the same page with senior teachers in their understanding of staff development in order to foster quality education by all teachers.

Keywords: Primary school teachers, staff development in education, quality education.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1980s, staff development in education has been the focus of considerable research, yet, most of the available literature provides compelling evidence that a significant number of schools do not take staff development seriously; with some teachers even shunning the need to participate in staff development programmes (King and Newman, 2009 cited in Guskey & Huberman, 2012). Arguably, reluctant and negative attitudes towards staff development by schools and teachers, respectively, has had a negative impact on some schools and the competence of teachers as well as learner

outcomes as it consequently compromises the general quality of education offered. Within the current dynamic educational system largely characterised by the ever-changing teaching and learning landscape, it takes a lot of in-service teacher-training or continual professional development for one to remain an effective teacher. This is relatively true even in instances where the teacher would have received effective initial teacher training/education mainly because curricula changes from time to time, students also change, the teaching and learning environment is never the same, new educational policies are passed and new approaches to teaching and

Quick Response Code



Journal homepage:

<http://www.easpublisher.com/easjehl/>

Article History

Received: 25.05.2018

Accepted: 05.06.2019

Published: 29.06.2019

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learning are always being developed. All these factors and other educational dynamics require that school educators keep up-to-date with new and emerging information in order to remain effective and relevant in their work (http://www.ehow.com/info_7993294_staff-development-activities-teachers.html, Retrieved on 27 October, 2016; Brennen, 2011).

In Zimbabwe, for example, school staff development is highly regarded and all schools are essentially expected to implement it for the benefit of educators and learners. This is revealed by Ndlovu (2014) who reported that in Zimbabwe, the government's concern for staff development featured in the speech of the then Minister of Primary and Secondary Education who stated that the 'Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) is planning a massive staff development programme for all teachers in the primary and secondary school sector in order to improve their efficiency and general school effectiveness'. This was then followed by the implementation of teachers' professional development at school, cluster, district and national levels, though at different paces, with the responsible Ministry providing the appropriate guidance and support (Ndlovu, 2014). As noted by Mukeredzi (2013), the fact that the professional development of teachers largely focuses on improving the teaching and learning enterprise justifies the tremendous effort and expenditure for its existence. Thus, coupled with the need to promote quality education, the professional development of teachers is, therefore, a critical endeavour in the teaching profession as evidenced by the unequivocal support it has received in most countries by teachers themselves, the school, community, relevant Ministry, central government and other organisations that are interested in promoting educational provision and upholding its excellence.

Steyn (2011) asserts that educators can play a key role in making a difference in the general quality of education and that investing in teachers' continual professional development may have more positive effects than investing in any other physical resources within the education system. This view is corroborated by Rout and Behera (2014, p.1) who assert that "good teachers constitute the foundation of good schools and improving teachers' skills and knowledge is one of the most important investments of time and money that local, state and national leaders can make in education". In addition, the importance of investigating teachers' views regarding school staff development issues in general has been underlined by studies in which teachers' motivation, cognition and instructional practices were proven to be key facets in their continual professional development and to students' learning (Lipowsky and Rzejak, 2015). Rout and Behera (2014) also note that in recent years, an array of educational research has been conducted on the subject of school staff development and emphasis has essentially been made on the role of 'teacher professional development'

in the promotion of quality education and student success.

Lipowsky and Rzejak (2015) aver that although many teachers support staff development programmes that benefit them throughout their careers; there has been limited research on determining their understanding of staff development which has possible implications on the quality of education the teachers deliver within schools. Having been a primary school teacher for over a decade and having, therefore, participated in several school staff development programmes as both participant and facilitator; the researcher had strong reasons for yearning to explore teachers and head teachers' understanding of staff development in the primary school sector for its possible implications for quality education. The researcher's interest was hailed by Khosa, Mapolisa, Tshabalala and Gazimbe (2015)'s advise that there is need for educational researchers to assess how teachers perceive and understand staff development in order to foster its effectiveness as well as promote general school effectiveness. Thus, it is against the above broad background and motivation that the current study investigated primary school educators' understanding of staff development as it has germane implications for quality primary education.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Staff development in education is generally perceived and understood differently by different stakeholders including primary school educators. The problem at stake, therefore, is whether such differential conceptualisation of staff development by the primary school educators in particular is correct and positive or not, hence raising questions on whether or not it fosters quality education in the area under study.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore primary school educators' (meaning; classroom practitioners and head teachers) understanding of staff development as it has important implications for quality education in the primary school sector in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following specific research questions;

- How do primary school educators (meaning; classroom practitioners and head teachers) understand staff development?
- What do school staff development programmes involve from head teachers' perspective?
- What implications for quality education in Zimbabwe do primary school educators' understanding of staff development have?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The current study is considered significant to a number of key stakeholders within the primary school

sector, including; primary school educators (both classroom practitioners and head teachers), learners as well as the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). In that regard, teachers are expected to develop a better understanding of staff development and as well benefit through participating in more effective staff development practices for the enhancement of their expertise and competencies. Learners would subsequently benefit through the improved quality of the education they would receive from their more knowledgeable and competent teachers. The MoPSE would benefit as it would be assured of a teaching staff complement that has an appropriate understanding of staff development which would be poised to enhance its effectiveness. Other primary school stakeholders would benefit through the fact that the different benefits of staff development would ultimately foster the delivery of quality education in the primary school sector in Zimbabwe.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Staff Development

The concept of 'staff development' is quite fluid and wide-ranging in meaning as it often depends on the nature and context of the organisation it is referred to. According to <http://dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/staff+development+1>, Retrieved on 25 April, 2017), "staff development is a process that assists individuals or employees in an agency or organisation in the improvement and attainment of new skills, knowledge, attitudes and values; while gaining increased levels of competence and growing professionally". Various resources within and outside the organisation that employ individuals may, therefore, be used, and the process may include such programmes as orientation, induction, in-service education and training as well as other forms of continuing professional development for employees. This implies that organisations are usually the contexts within which staff development is implemented; with a focus on improving employees or staff knowledge, skills and values about their profession.

For Villegas-Remers (2009), staff development is basically as a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in one's profession. Rouse (2009) resonates that 'staff development' refers to different types of continual education and training experiences related to an individual's work and career path. The same source notes that professionals in a wide variety of occupations and businesses participate in staff development to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that will improve their performance on the job. Shindler and Case (2006) say that staff development is a systematic attempt to harmonise individuals' interests and wishes and their carefully assessed requirements for furthering their careers with forthcoming requirements at the organisation within which they are expected to work

and produce results. The International Accreditation Council for Education (2011) posits that continuing professional development is a structured process of education and training that is designed or intended to support the continuous development of professionals to maintain and enhance their professional competence. This implies that staff development is essentially a process of identifying staff needs and learning new skills in order to help employees grow and succeed at their work.

2.2 Staff Development in Education

Staff development in education is generally viewed as continuing career professional development for educators; which is an ongoing programme of education and training planned to enable educators to reinforce their knowledge and develop the required skills for the performance of specific school functions; as well as acquire additional competencies to meet educational changes including curricular, programme emphasis, enactment of new legislation and so on (Manual of Policies and Procedures on Staff Development, 2000). In that regard, it entails continual education and training focused on improving teachers' knowledge and pedagogical skills in order for them to become effective and as well counteract educational changes. For Mukeredzi (2013), teachers' professional development is understood, in simply terms, as representing the growth of teachers in their profession. Professional development may lead to a promotion or change in the level of a job, or simply to doing better in a current job position. Wherever it leads an educator, professional development includes important elements such as defining the educational institution's vision, mission and core values; creating a vision of group and individual staff success, knowledge of the skills required to succeed, engaging staff development facilitators, development and implementation of the staff development plan as well as formal or informal assessment and evaluation of the staff development enterprise in order to determine the accomplishment of its predetermined goals and objectives (Crowther, 2012).

Thus, the professional development of teachers has been described as an organised effort to change teachers' expertise with the expected result of improving their teaching practice and student learning. According to Glatthorn (2011, p.41);

Teacher professional development involves planned activities within schools that are meant to assist teachers in attaining knowledge, new skills, attitudes, values and dispositions; thereby gaining increased levels of professional competence for the benefit of learners. It is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically.

By gaining increased knowledge in one's teaching role, teachers systematically gain increased expertise in their professional growth through examination of their teaching abilities and potentials. Lieberman (2008) avows that when looking at 'school staff development', one must essentially examine several factors, including; the key goals and values of the school, the content and diversity of experiences of individual teachers, the emerging needs of the teachers as individuals and groups, the processes by which the professional development will occur and the contexts in which it will take place.

For Halliday (2013, p.193), the essentials of contemporary teacher professional development include:

- Planned and structured learning experiences designed to make the fullest use of the abilities and potential of school staff for present and future needs of the education service;
- Staff improvement programmes and incentives meant to increase school staff's satisfaction and commitment, and;
- The use of processes to monitor and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the teaching-learning experiences for the benefit of learners.

The above statements indicate that today's school staff development stresses strategic and structured learning experiences for teachers, staff improvement as well as monitoring and evaluation processes to determine the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In other words, the contemporary perspective of school staff development is more teacher-centred; based on the basic tenets of what Rout and Behera (2014) describes as 'social constructivism' which stress the fact that participants (i.e. educators) are considered as active constructors of knowledge and beliefs through their interaction within their environment (i.e. selected primary schools).

As noted by Clement and Vandenberg (2012, p.49), the modern world's perspective staff development in education has several characteristics; including the fact that:

- It is perceived as a process that takes place within a particular context. The most effective form of teacher professional development is that which is based in schools and is related to the daily activities of teachers and learners;
- It is perceived as a long-term process as it acknowledges the fact that teachers learn over time. As a result, a series of related experiences rather than one-off presentation is seen to be the most effective as it allows teachers to relate prior knowledge to new and emerging experiences;
- It is conceived of as a collaborative process, hence, even though there may be some opportunities for isolated work and reflection,

most effective professional development occurs when there are meaningful interactions, not only among teachers themselves, but also between teachers, administrators, parents and community members;

- It should be a process that is intimately linked to the aims and objectives of school improvement and reform. A teacher professional development programme that is not supported by the school or curricular reform objectives is not effective;
- Schools are transformed into communities of learners, dynamic communities of inquiry and not traditional institutions responsible for gate-keeping of traditional information;
- The most successful teacher development opportunities are 'on-the-job learning' activities such as study groups, action research, demonstrations, portfolios, and so on;
- Teachers are empowered as professionals, and therefore, should receive the same treatment that they themselves are expected to give their students;
- Teachers' personal and professional motivation as well as institutional regular follow-up support are regarded as 'indispensable catalysts' of the educational change process;
- A teacher is conceived of as a reflective practitioner, someone who enters the profession with a certain knowledge base, and one who will continue to acquire new knowledge and experiences based on prior knowledge. In so doing, the role of teacher professional development is to aid teachers in building new pedagogical theories and practices as well as help them develop their expertise in the teaching field; and
- It may look and be very different in diverse settings, and even within a single setting, it can have a variety of dimensions. Thus, there is not one form or model of staff development better than all others and which can be uniformly implemented in different schools within different contexts. Thus, schools and educators must evaluate their needs, cultural beliefs and practices in order to decide which model would be most beneficial to their particular situation in order to best benefit learners.

This viewpoint by Clement and Vandenberg (2012), in a way, is therefore; somehow a new understanding of staff development within the teaching profession in that traditional professional development for teachers simply consisted of workshops or short term courses that offered teachers new information on specific aspects of their work. Thus, as a paradigm shift, Brookfield (2009) posited that regular opportunities and experiences for contemporary professional development over the past few years have yielded systematic growth and development in the teaching profession. For Sparks (2003) cited in Khosa, Mapolisa, Tshabalala and

Gazimbe (2015), such conceptualisation of staff development in education is critical in that it combines the needs of the individual teachers with those of the school. The researcher notes that this would be a more holistic approach to an understanding of staff development within the educational fraternity, as consideration of school needs also encompasses the diverse needs of learners.

2.3 Quality Education

A number of definitions of quality exist in literature; which is a clear testimony of the fluidity of the concept 'quality'. Nyenya and Gabi (2016) assert that quality entails the characteristics of a product or service that consistently satisfies specified standards set by experts and meeting or exceeding customer and stakeholder requirements. In the context of education:

Quality education entails an evaluation of the process of educating which enhances the need to achieve and develop the talents of learners, and at the same time, meets the accountability standards set by the clients who pay for the process or the outputs from the process of educating (Hoy, Bayne and Wood, 2012, p.10).

The International Working Group on Education (2010) cited in Askling (2011) notes that quality education is characterised by a number of related notions, including, fitness for purpose, value for money, exceptionally high standards, perfection and consistency, transformation capabilities and the fulfillment of individual, community and industrial needs and demands.

Considerable consensus exists around the fundamental dimensions of contemporary quality education; which include the attitude and level of expertise as well as the professionalism of service providers, the nature of the educational service being delivered, the environment within which the service is provided, the social and cognitive aptitude of learners, the way the teaching and learning process is accomplished, the way customers and stakeholders view the quality of the educational service provided as well as the quality of the end product or graduates of the service provision (Wallberg and Kahn, 2011). Quality in education is also viewed as the expression of significant range of educational effectiveness and reflection of a new approach in which need of systematic evaluation of undertaken activities is taking essential meaning including improvement and making endeavours towards accreditation with the aim of confirming that all the standards of educational effectiveness are provided (Dobrzanski and Roszak, 2007).

Asking (2011, p.89) is of the view that quality education involves a number of key aspects, namely:

- *Education that is facilitated by qualified educators with relevant knowledge and expertise;*
- *teaching and learning that is supported by responsible authorities particularly through provision of appropriate resources;*
- *learning programmes that are buttressed by the cooperation and support of learners' families and communities;*
- *teaching and learning environments that are conducive, safe, protective and gender-sensitive;*
- *learning content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic learning skills; and*
- *student outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are linked to goals for education and positive participation in society.*

The above aspects indicate that quality education is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses several quality issues that surround the field of education.

Grisay and Mahlck (2011, p.105) aver that the evaluation of quality education largely entails examining the following aspects:

- *The extent to which the products or the results of the education provided meet the standards stipulated in the educational system's aims and objectives;*
- *The extent to which the knowledge, competencies, skills and values acquired by learners are relevant to human and environmental needs; and*
- *The extent to which the acquired education is generally utilised by individuals and groups as well as their communities to solve micro and macro problems in life.*

Thus, the evaluation of quality education, therefore, enables us to determine whether education is valuable or not to the institution, learners and stakeholders. As noted by Dobrzanski and Roszak (2007), the idea of quality education is relatively youthful; and has since the dawn of the 21st Century; come to be used in replacement of the concept of 'effectiveness of education'. The current study was premised on the assertion that primary school educators' understanding of staff development had important implications for quality education in Zimbabwe.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Philosophical underpinning

This study was premised on the 'social constructivist philosophy' which essentially represents an epistemological stance and is primarily based on observation and scientific study about how individuals

get to be knowledgeable and construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Kafai and Resnick, 2012). It is a theory that is used to explain 'how people get to know what they know' and is primarily based on the assumption that individuals do not find meaning in the world but construct it; and that the meaning they make is largely affected by their perceived knowledge and interpretation of a specific phenomenon within their experiences (<http://education.stateuniversity.com/-Constructivist-Theory-html>, Retrieved on 13 July, 2015).

Von-Glaserfeld (2009, p.102) avers that:

Social constructivism is fundamentally a philosophy of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge, beliefs and attitudes are constructed through interaction with the social environment. It is a social theory of knowledge that applies the general philosophical constructivist principles into the social.

For Derry (2009, p.109):

Social constructivism is a philosophical theory of knowledge that examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. The theory centers on the notions that human beings rationalise their experience by creating models of the social world and largely share and reify these models through language.

Gredler (2010) avows that it largely emphasises the importance of human culture and context in understanding what occurs in social settings and constructing knowledge, beliefs and realities based on experience and related understanding.

As Derry (2009) further notes, social constructivism focuses on the construction of reality and beliefs by individuals and groups in well-defined social contexts. Thus, in social constructivism, knowledge, meanings, values, beliefs, attitudes and reality are socially constructed and are generally subjective. In the same vein, Emerald and Michael (2011) note that social constructivists generally believe that knowledge and perceptions are constructed socially and that everyone constructs social experiences differently resulting in multiple realities and truths. In addition, social constructivism states that people work together to construct artifacts; focusing on individuals' experiences during their interactions in a group.

Kukla (2010), McMahon (2012) and Ernest (2013) concur that the social constructivist view is based on specific assumptions about the construction of reality, knowledge and learning. In that regard, Ernest (2013, p.103), posits that with regards:

- i. *Reality: social constructivists believe that reality is constructed through human activity. Members of a society together invent the social properties of the world. Reality cannot be discovered; it does not exist prior to its social invention;*
- ii. *Knowledge: social constructivists believe that knowledge is a human product that is socially and culturally constructed. Individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live or work in; and*
- iii. *Learning: social constructivists view learning as a social process. It does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours that are shaped by external forces. Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities and tasks.*

Rogoff (2010) adds another critical rubric to the social constructivist assumptions, namely, 'inter-subjectivity'; which Rogoff says is a shared understanding among individuals whose interaction is based on common interests and assumptions that form the ground for their communication. Communications and interactions entail socially agreed-upon ideas of the world and the social patterns and rules. Construction of social meanings, therefore, involves inter-subjectivity among individuals. Social meanings and knowledge are shaped and evolve through negotiation within the communicating groups. Any personal meanings shaped through these experiences are affected by the inter-subjectivity of the community to which the individuals belong. Knowledge and perceptions are, therefore, derived from interactions between individuals and their environments and resides within specific social settings and culture. In essence, the construction of knowledge is, thus, influenced by the inter-subjectivity formed by cultural and historical factors of a specific social context such as a community (Prawat and Floden, 2012).

To further clarify, Kafai and Resnick (2012) posit that at its simplest, the social constructivist view posits that knowledge is constructed; hence, in other words, individuals make sense of their world by constructing their own representations or models of their experiences. Knowledge and understanding cannot be passively accumulated but is the result of active cognitive processes undertaken by individuals as they organise and make sense of their day to day experiences. Thus, the meaning individuals derive for any phenomenon arises in and out of the interactive human community (Kafai and Resnick, 2012). In the context of the current study therefore, it stands to reason that the meaning that primary school teachers derive from their understanding of staff development arises out of their interaction as educators within their school settings.

From the foregoing, the researcher deduced that the social constructivist philosophy entails that knowledge and understanding are not given, but are constructed based on individuals' experiences and through interaction within their social environment; which in the case of this study, was basically teachers' interaction within the schools they were stationed. Creswell's (2007) interpretation of social constructivism is perhaps one of the most favourable for the current study as it indicates that this philosophical underpinning entails individuals searching for an understanding of the life-world in which they live and work as well as developing subjective meanings of their experiences which are multiple and varied. In the current study, the 'individuals' in question were the primary school heads and senior teachers and the social contexts within which they work and developed perceptions and truths were the primary schools they were stationed. Creswell (2007) adds that the fundamental principle that underpins social constructionism is to rely predominantly on participants' subjective views regarding a particular phenomenon. In this study, therefore, the researcher essentially relied on primary school heads and senior teachers' subjective views regarding their understanding of staff development programmes at their specific schools; as both groups of participants (school heads and senior teachers) had wide experience in staff development practices.

3.2 Paradigm, Design, Population and Sample

This study adopted the qualitative research paradigm and case study design; which enabled the researcher to study primary school educators while in their natural settings, namely the schools, in order to appreciate their understanding of staff development better (Creswell, 2012). Thus, consistent with qualitative case studies, the researcher was able to generate data from participants (meaning; senior teachers and head teachers') regarding their understanding of staff development through his direct encounter with them. Eisenhardt (2009, p.210) defines a case study as "an in-depth examination of an extensive amount of information about very few units or cases for one period or across multiple periods of time or a research strategy which focuses on understanding the social dynamics present within single cases". For Watt (2007) cited in Chakanyuka, Chiome and Chabaya (2010), qualitative case inquiries have the advantage of allowing the researcher to study a phenomenon in-depth from the lived experiences of people involved in them; who in this study were primary school senior teachers and head teachers and the phenomenon was their understanding of staff development. It should be noted that the diversity of information on participants' understanding of staff development was dependent on the fact that the current study was a 'multiple case study' that involved a sample of thirty participants within five schools.

Thus, the multiple case study approach focused on a particular group of individuals with related expertise (Dey, 2013); who in this case were twenty-five senior teachers and five head teachers; all of whom arguably had wide experience in the teaching profession in general and staff development in particular. More so, the multiple case study design was preferred for the current study largely because of its perspicuity in eliciting participants' multiple perceptions through their lived experiences, knowledge, beliefs and assumptions (Kuhn, 2006). Of note is the fact that of the five primary schools utilised for the study, three were rural schools while two were urban schools. Both rural and urban schools were considered in order to acquire data on participants of varying situational characteristics based on their experiences with either the rural or urban primary school schools. In conducting the study, it was not possible to study the entire population of participants in the area under study, hence, the researcher considered sampling elements in order to generate data meant to answer the research question.

It was, therefore, on this research theoretical basis that the researcher went on to utilise the Purposive expert sampling technique to come up with a sample of 30 (n=30) that comprised of five head teachers and twenty-five senior teachers from the 5 schools involved in the study. Wegner (2011) considers the Purposive expert sampling technique to be appropriate in a qualitative case inquiry such as the current one in that it was made up of knowledgeable educators (meaning; primary school senior teachers and head teachers) who were arguably also well experienced within the teaching profession in general and staff development in particular.

3.3 Data Generation Techniques, Analysis and Interpretation

In-depth face-to-face interviews were used with primary school head teachers while focus group discussions (FGDs) and narrative inquiry were used with senior teachers. Kvale (2015) views in-depth face to face interviews as appropriate for qualitative studies such as this one as their purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena. Consistent with Nunkoosing (2015), in-depth face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to generate first-hand information regarding head teachers' understanding of staff development. A focus group (FG) is viewed as a group of individuals selected from a specific population and assembled by the researcher in order to discuss and comment, from personal experience and perspective; on a topic or problem that is the subject of the research (Powell et al, 2010). Thus, FGDs held with senior teachers provided the researcher with the opportunity to analyse the strength with which each of the teachers within the group held a specific understanding of the concept staff development (Harding, 2013). At the collective level,

focus group data also revealed shared understandings or common views on teachers' conceptualisation of the staff development enterprise. Senior teachers' narratives (personal accounts) were also used as personal descriptions of their understanding of staff development; which the researcher used to complement teachers' their shared understandings of staff development as revealed through FGD data.

In harmony with Sanders's (2013) prescription for qualitative data analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of generated data was done. Direct quotes from participants were generally considered in the form of excerpts from the Interviews, FGDs and Narratives; which was done in order to capture primary school head teachers and classroom practitioners' understanding of what staff development entailed in verbatim form. Accordingly, the researcher believed that there was great value in these findings as they presented what participants would have actually said in as much as they perceived what staff development was. The researcher, thus, captured both the overt and covert meanings as well as ambiguities in data concerning what participants considered staff development to be. In addition, the IPA of data essentially began while the data generation was in progress, which implied that while the interviews, FGDs and narrative inquiry were underway, the researcher simultaneously conducted preliminary IPA of the data. This preliminary analysis of data during data generation allowed the researcher to redesign the research question in order to focus on key aspects of what participants perceived staff development to be; a technique the researcher noted to be in harmony with Denzin and Lincoln (2012).

4.0 Discussion of Findings

The demographic data of the study showed that there were 60% female and 40% male participants; which the researcher interpreted to imply that there were possibly more female teachers than males in the area under study. This could also further point to the general trend in Zimbabwean primary schools where there are often more female than male teachers. This claim is substantiated by the fact that in the year 2012, there were 74 355 primary school teachers countrywide (meaning; in Zimbabwe), of whom 55 percent were female while 45% were male (EMIS Report, 2014); while in 2017, there were 71 242 primary school teachers, of whom 42 043 (59%) were female teachers and 29 199 (41%) were male teachers (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017).

In discussing the main findings of the study, the main thrust was to address how primary school educators (both classroom practitioners and head teachers) understood the concept of staff development as it has possible implications for quality education in the primary school in the area under study in particular and in Zimbabwe in general. From the different data

generation sources (Interviews, FGDs and Narratives) used, findings showed that participants generally understood staff development to refer to a number of related notions which included;

- i. sessions where teachers come together in order to share ideas about managing the teaching and learning process;
- ii. formally organised school-based interaction which is meant to promote teachers' effective teaching;
- iii. sessions for helping each other as teachers in areas of routine classroom work such as interpreting the syllabus, scheming, planning, marking of learners' work and general classroom and class management;
- iv. activities and experiences meant to develop teachers' knowledge and skills in order to sharpen their competencies in order to meet the changing demands of the school;
- v. simply part of teachers' continual learning and development considering that their work involves facilitating learning including the learning of new and emerging information;

Thus, the major thrust from the above views was that staff development meant activities and experiences focused on improving teachers' professional efficiency for the benefit of the school, in order to enhance school effectiveness.

Related responses that highlight a further understanding of staff development were also given after further probing of the participants by the researcher. In that regard, an analysis of excerpts from participants generally revealed that staff development largely involved;

- i. activities that address areas of concern in teachers' work;
- ii. on-going education and training for teachers;
- iii. activities meant to inform teachers on new developments within the field of teaching;
- iv. sessions meant to update teachers on conditions of service regarding their profession.

Thus, for the participants, school-based staff development, therefore, essentially involved the continual acquisition of knowledge and pedagogic skills by educators in order to enhance quality education which is consistent with Lieberman (2008)'s assertion that the role of staff development in education is to produce better educators who are capable of promoting quality education. More broadly, participants indicated that staff development covered activities within and outside the school all of which are meant to enhance teachers' competencies. From the researcher's interpretation, which was in harmony with interpretive phenomenology analysis, the above findings had important implications for quality education as both

classroom practitioners and head teachers' experience regarding staff development revealed a good understanding of what it entailed. In that regard, primary school educators' understanding of staff development, therefore, was so much of a reflection of their experience of it, hence, denoting important implications for quality education. Interpreted from another perspective, the fact that educators defined staff development in somewhat different ways though related has implications for quality education in the Zimbabwean primary school sector; for basically all educators should have a common understanding of staff development in order that they collectively appreciate its significance in their continual professional development.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the researcher concluded that staff development meant an array of related concepts to primary school educators including sessions where teachers come together in order to share ideas on how to improve their teaching, formally organised school-based interaction meant to promote their teaching skills. In addition, it entailed sessions for helping each other as teachers in areas of need regarding teaching as well as all teacher activities and experiences meant to promote their general effectiveness particularly in the face of new developments within the school system such as the adoption of the Updated school curriculum. Thus, staff development largely involved helping teachers to gain knowledge and pedagogic skills, teachers growing in their profession and keeping abreast with new educational trends in order to remain effective and relevant as well as providing teachers with an opportunity to meet and share ideas about best practices relating to their work with learners.

Against the above findings and conclusions, the researcher recommended that:

- The meaning of staff development and its significance be constantly reminded and redefined to both teachers and head teachers in line with emerging trends in staff development;
- All primary school educators (meaning; head teachers and classroom practitioners) should share the same understanding of staff development and its significance; which should be dovetailed with the expectations of key staff development stakeholders, including the learners, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), Civil Service Commission (CSC) and the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ);
- Both teachers and head teachers should be motivated to develop and demonstrate positive attitudes and values towards staff development as well as take it as a vehicle for fostering quality education in Zimbabwean primary schools; and

- Future research in the field of school staff development should seek to find ways of incorporating the field of staff development as a learning area in Teachers' Colleges so that its implementation in schools would become a further reinforcement of what teachers know staff development to be in the context of the need for their continual professional development.

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