

## **The organisational structure and teachers' performance in high schools: Perceptions from head teachers and teachers**

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### **Abstract:**

This study sought to establish head teachers' and teachers' perceptions on the role of the organisational structure in high performing schools of Eswatini. The study was located in the interpretivist research paradigm and followed a qualitative research approach which applied a case study design. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions with a purposive sample of 2 head teachers and 10 teachers were used to collect data. Data were analysed for content and conclusions were drawn. The findings of the study reveal that there are benefits in high flexible structures which foster conditions that are more conducive to teaching and learning than "rigid" structures. Flexible structures enhance greater control, higher motivation and more collective learning opportunities for both teachers and learners; this exerts a definitive impact on students' progress in diverse aspects of their development. The study also found that high performing school structures promoted creativity and enhanced collective decision making. The main conclusions of the study were that high performing schools' structures enabled teachers to form productive teams which enhance student performance. In flexible structures teachers were able to acquire and share knowledge.

**Key terms:** organisational structure, school, head teachers, high performance, teachers

### **Introduction**

Every school has a defined structure meant to regulate the operations and functions of its departments. Members of the school are expected to adhere to the dictates of the structure in pursuit of the stated goals and objectives of the organisation. The school structure determines how resources are shared among members in different departments and the structure defines the leader of each department. Nelson and Quick, (2011) posit that departments in a school

set-up are categorised according to functional or subject areas, these departments are meant to be interconnected to shape the structure of the school. The structure of a school is meaningless unless it is supported by appropriate systems. In the Kingdom of Eswatini school structures are defined by the Ministry of Education and Training. At the epitome of the school there is a Head-teacher or Principal followed by the deputy head-teacher/principal whose span of control hovers over heads of departments. Directly under heads of departments there are subject leaders, class teachers, prefects and class monitors. Thus, all school members are expected to adhere to the dictates of the structure for the smooth running of the school organisation. According to Lunenburg, (2011) the school structure has a positive impact on school performance. Thus, it is vital for the schools to ensure that the set organisational structure permits a healthy school environment.

## **An organisational structure**

Organisational structure refers to the way people are organised or how their tasks are divided and coordinated (Mintzberg, 2009). Greenberg (2011) views an organisational structure as the formal design among people and gatherings concerning the duties, designation of undertakings and specialist in the association. The structure of an organisation defines the way individuals should operate, in departments or divisions and it is meant to link people as they interact towards achieving set goals. An organizational structure reveals vertical operational responsibilities, and horizontal linkages of individuals. Organizational structures may be much complex due to the size and geographic dispersal of an organisation. In view of the above definitions one can assume that an organisational structure is the physical format of duties in an association. Schools have predefined structures whose implementation depends on school leadership, some are made rigid while others are flexible. This study was set to determine the head teachers' and teachers' understanding of the role of the organisational structure in high schools that have attained high academic success in Eswatini.

## **Forming an Organisational structure**

George and Jones, (2005) depict an organizational structure as the relationship between the management team and the workforce for performing formal tasks and reporting. The management team designs the structure of an organization and the basic inspiration is the motivation of employees to work to their expectations in an organizational structure that allows them to best execute their duties to produce the desired work. Therefore, the formation of an organisational structure typically refers to the hierarchical arrangement of lines of authority, communications, rights and duties of an organization. The structure typically determines how the roles, power and responsibilities are assigned, controlled, and coordinated, and how information flows between the different levels of management. A structure depends on the organization's objectives and strategy. In a centralized structure, the top layer of management has most of the decision making power and has tight control over departments and divisions. In a decentralized structure, the decision making power is distributed and the departments and divisions may have different degrees of independence.

## **Types of organisational structures**

Morgan (2015) points out that there is a hierarchy type of a structure that takes the form of what is used in the military as a way to show a chain of command. In the hierarchy type of a

structure people who work there are treated like dispensable individuals who are there to take command. Communication naturally flows from the top to the bottom which means innovation decays, commitment suffers, and collaboration is essentially non-existent. There is also no focus on the employee experience in this type of a structure. The hierarchy has permeated virtually every company around the world regardless of size, industry, or location. The greatest strength of the hierarchy used to be that it was so reliable at maintain the status quo, which was exactly what companies wanted decades ago.

There is also a flatter, flat and Flatarchies types of organisational structures that seeks to open up the lines of communication and collaboration while removing layers within the organization. In flatter organisational structures, there is still a strong focus on communication and collaboration, improving the employee experience, challenging the status quo around traditional management models. In the holacratic organizations there is still some form of structure and hierarchy but it's not based on people as much as it is based on circles or what most people would think of as departments. Information is openly accessible and issues are processed within the organization during special and ongoing meetings (Morgan, 2015).

### **Benefits of having an organisational structure**

Organisational structures play vital roles in organisations, among other roles, management utilises the structure to motivate the senior and junior support staff on their efforts (George and Jones, 2005). The main task of the individuals given a leadership role in the organizational structure is coordination for best results in favor of the organization. The old adage “failing to plan is planning to fail” is most applicable to the organizational structure used for operational purposes in any organisation.

An organisational structure creates a system through which leadership can delegate decisions, identify roles and responsibilities and define the chain-of-command. In other words, an organizational structure is a framework that helps employees achieve their goals and do their jobs in the most efficient and productive way (Holtzhausen, 2002). A proper organisational structure can benefit an institution in several ways, including making it easier to delegate responsibilities and affecting change throughout the workplace. Properly organizing a school can help streamline operations, improve decision making, create and maintain relations with alike institutions, boost student academic performance and enhance teacher performance and creativity, therefore, it is important that school leaders and managers understand the importance and benefits of structure.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided the theories of organizational structure, propounded by Karl Weick in 1974. This theory takes into account the high-stressed, fast-paced nature of today's organizations and reduces what is referred to as “equivocality.” The term “equivocality” boils down to any lack of productivity due to an employee, on any level, having to check with superiors. In the Weick's model, there is an information system, which includes frequently and sometimes previously tackled issues.

Representatives utilise this information to battle any inner conflict or dormancy that may block settling on business choices. The definitiveness picked up by utilizing the data framework prompts higher profitability. Along these lines, it fortifies each worker and administrator's capacity to work all the more self-sufficiently. One of the real reasons why associations neglect to perform is a direct result of inflexible bureaucratic frameworks affected by lack of basic leadership

Weick's theory therefore assisted researchers to appropriately view the role of organizational structure in high performance in terms of structure flexibility and latitude of decision making by office leaders and their subordinates. This study established how head teachers and teachers view the role of organizational structure in high performing schools in Eswatini.

## **Problem statement**

Learners' performance in Eswatini varies yet teachers are trained in the country's institutes, and learners use the same textbooks and writing the same examination throughout the country and in some instances there are workbooks that guide the learners in the use of the textbooks (Hamid, Bisschoff, & Botha, 2015). Schools in Eswatini have a stipulated structure from the Ministry of Education but have different positions depending on the size of the school and the school governing board. Government owned schools have the head teacher and deputies as the top officials of the school. Church owned schools have a member of the church as the top official while private owned schools have a chief executive officer as the top official. Academic performance varies from school to school. This paper examines the impact of Organisational structure on school performance.

## **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study were to:

- Establish the organisational structures of Eswatini schools
- Establish the organisational structures that exist in high performing high schools in Eswatini.
- Determine the relationship that exists between organisational structure and teachers' performance

## **Research methodology**

Research methodology refers to the specific procedures and techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyze information in a research study (Kumar, 2019). It explains how data were generated and analyzed. The study was located in the interpretivist research paradigm and used a qualitative research approach which applied a case study design.

Schwardt (2007:195) defines research methodology as a theory of how an inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry. According to Schwardt (2007), Creswell and Tashakkori (2007), and Teddlie and Tashakkori (2007), methodologies explicate and define the kinds of problems that are worth investigating; what constitutes a researchable problem; testable hypotheses; how to frame a problem in such a way that it can be investigated using particular designs and procedures; and how to select and develop appropriate means of collecting data.

Furthermore, Cooper and Schindler (2001) describe research methodology as the researcher's operational framework within which data is placed so that its meaning may be seen more clearly to obtain facts for the research initiative

## Research paradigm

The study was located in the interpretivist research paradigm. Lincoln (2000) points out that a research paradigm is based on human constructions, which deal with first principles or ultimate indicating where the researcher is coming from so as to construct meaning embedded in data. Kivunja (2017) reveals that paradigms are important because they provide beliefs and dictates to scholars how a phenomenon should be studied, as well as, how the results of the study should be interpreted. The paradigm defines a researcher's philosophical orientation and, tells us how meaning will be constructed from the data collected. In this study the perceptions of head teachers and teachers on the role of organisational structure in high performance in their schools were sought.

## Research approach

This study followed a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posit that, qualitative research is a set of interpretive materials that make the world visible. In the same vein Merriam (2009) argues that qualitative research focuses on the process, understanding and the meaning of the phenomena. This then can be viewed as a systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings. This study was set to establish the role of organisational structure in student high academic performance. This approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed concentration on two sites where the structures were analysed.

## Research Design

A research design is defined by Jakaza (2013) as:

*... an overall plan for a piece of research including four main ideas; the strategy, the theoretical frame work, the questions for who or what will be studied, and the tools used for collecting and analysing materials. Design situates the researcher in the empirical world.*

A research design, subsequently, alludes to the general technique incorporating the diverse segments of the study in a sound and sensible route, to adequately address the research issue (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014), and constitutes the procedures for coming up with data, estimation, examination and analysis of data.

A case study design was utilised in this study, Harrison, Birks, Franklin, and Mills, (2017) posit that case study design are used in disciplines, especially in social sciences and education, to address a variety of research questions. This study was a case of high performing high schools in Mbabane in the Kingdom of Eswatini. An assortment of questions was used to determine the role of organizational structure in high performance in the Eswatini high schools.

## Research instruments

Face-to-face interviews were used to gather information in this study. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) state that interviews are a discussion between the researcher and the participant. Interviews can either be structured, unstructured or semi-structured. In a

structured interview, the researcher utilises an interview plan which is an arrangement of inquiries in a prearranged order, while in an unstructured interview the researcher simply introduces the topic or main research questions, and allows the participant to answer in the way they like (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In this study, we used semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in order to allow the participant to remain focused, as well as directly address research notions. This methodology permitted the specialists and members not to meander, and talk about superfluous issues.

## Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Two head teachers, six heads of departments and ten teachers were used to generate data. In order to identify what Patton (1999) named information-rich cases and optimise selection of the best people for informing an understanding strategies employed to maintain high performance in high schools, we used the purposive sampling approach. This sampling method is used where the researcher handpicks the participants based on specific attributes being looked for (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The sample composed of people who had been with the school for more than ten years and were experienced in teaching. Purposive sampling allowed concentration on lived experiences of participants who had been in the environment for a while. The study focused on those head-teachers who are instructional leaders in high performing high schools in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

## Data analysis

Data analysis is the classifying, taking stock of, and clarification of data; it is noting data patterns, themes and categories (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). This above statement is echoed by Boeije (2010) who posits that qualitative analysis is the segmentation of data into relevant categories and the naming of these categories with codes while simultaneously generating categories from data. These are then related to each other to get theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study in terms of research questions. Similarly, in this study data were tape recorded from interviews and focus group discussions then transcribed into text and grouped into identified themes before making descriptions.

## Understanding the organisational structures of the selected schools

One of the characteristics of high performing schools is their flexible structure. School structure portrays how leadership functions, therefore to understand more on leadership and management in the selected schools, we explored their structures, analysed documents and had focus group discussions with the teachers, individual interviews with head-teachers and HoDs. We managed to extract from the participants' knowledge how they perceived the operational structures in their schools. Documents provided substantial evidence on how these schools operated, some of which were not mentioned in interviews.

Like other organisations, schools are structured for coherence in operations and flow of information, whether from top to bottom or bottom up. We began by asking the head-teachers to describe the organisational structure of their schools. In this regard, head teacher from Light High school had this to say:

*The structure of this school is like any other government school. We have the head, deputy and HoDs at the helm of the school. The uniqueness of it though is the teamwork practiced here.*



We further asked the head teacher how efficient and effective the structure of his school was, he explained that due to effective departmentalisation, the structure was the best. He put it like this:

*You know, in my school, we have well managed departments, because that's where we felt we should be strong. We have capable people heading each of those and we have confidence in them. The leadership of those departments report directly to me. I work together with them to make sure the direction is clear towards one goal and our goal is academic excellence.*

The head teacher was asked to unpack the operational structure in the school, which he claimed was a well-oiled machine. He had this to say:

*As I said before, the school is structured like any other school except that here we have professionals working as a team. We have an open-door policy with flexible rules. Our office secretary is a graduate, the grounds man is trained, coupled with academic staff these makes an effective team.*

Seeing that their structure was not different from any other school structures around, we probed him further to explain their uniqueness. Head teacher number one asserts the following:

*Yes, every school has this structure but the difference is on the enforcement and implementation thereof. Here there are consequences of noncompliance. The diagram clearly outlines reporting hierarchy, if anyone bypasses, I personally take offence and at times ask the concerned person to go back and bring his/her HoD. Meaning to say teachers are expected to respect and uphold what we agreed on.*

The HoDs from Light high school echoed the same as their head teacher that the structure was like any other school structure, the only difference with their own was on the flexibility the school management practiced. One of them put it this way:

*The structure that we have here has over the years created a conducive working environment for all of us including learners. We have clear lines of communication and a clear reporting structure. If you not sure of what to do, the manual is your guide. The structure is not rigid but very flexible.*

The group further expressed that the prevailing school structure promoted connectivity and collaboration. Another member added that:

*We are privileged to have such visionary leadership here, everything moves smoothly. As HoDs we do not push people to do their work because all duties are clearly spelt out and people [ 's] responsible are known. If work was not done at all or not done well, we know who to ask. Besides the structure has made us connect well with our superiors as well as subordinates as it fosters respect for the position and not the person purser, we work together in collaborative efforts.*

Another member of the group added that:

*Our school structure provides guidance and clarity on specific human resources issues, such as managerial authority. Even if one is younger than you but holding a position of authority, one has to listen to them and do as told.*

He further explained that:

*Responsibilities are clearly defined. Each person has a job description that outlines duties, and each title occupies its own position on the school organisation chart. This has reduced or completely eradicated frictions among staff members, besides these, duties are rotated. Each one of us if well qualified will at some point occupy them as our administration is grooming everyone to be a leader.*

HoDs from school two had varying views on the independence of the school structure as some felt it could easily be manipulated by their management team to achieve their own agendas, but the consensus at the end was that there was transparency in all activities of the school, even the appointments to positions were done through consultations with everyone concerned.

We asked the head teacher from Zondle High school to describe the organisational structure of their school. In this regard, he said:

*This is a big school, as you can see. We have the head teacher who is assisted by three deputy heads and several HoDs manning the different departments. We also have a pool of support staff, as this is a boarding school.*

We further asked him how he managed such a big school structure, he explained that:

*You need to be tactful in managing a school of this magnitude. I use Corporate Governance Principles.*

*Firstly, I look at the capabilities of the staff members before assigning them duties, there is no favouritism here we look at the skill one has before assigning them duties. This is called matching skill with the task to be done. Secondly, we demand and advocate for honesty among staff members. This should be displayed here at the school and outside, teachers should lead by example, this though has to start with me as the head teacher. If one is able to achieve these two then the last three principles are easy.*

We further asked the head teacher to explain the other principles, he had mentioned above and he went on to say:

*There is accountability, meaning when given a task to do, you are in total control whatever happens to it you are answerable. The other two principles are sustainability and leadership, anyone in a leadership position should display these qualities.*

The HoDs at Zondle expressed that the hierarchy to them was not important as it was overridden by teamwork and collegiality. One of them said:

*The hierarchy here is not important, ours is like a flat structure because of teamwork and collegiality the hierarchy is not important here we pay much attention to collaboration, creativity and good workmanship.*

This view was also echoed by the focus group for teachers where there was consensus that the school had an open-door policy where one could go to any office any time without fear and get whatever they needed.



*We have a good working relationship here; our administration has an open-door policy where you can approach anyone for help and get assistance. There are no strict rules as to say you report to so and so why are you coming to me etc.*

The two schools had the same structures, except that school two had three deputy heads responsible for three different functions within the school, as mentioned above. The findings show that the two schools had well organised structures that allowed learning to take place in different situations and settings including: flexible rosters, accommodative working environment, year plans and adapted schedules to suit both teachers and learners. It is also clear that they did not pay much attention to hierarchy but did what was best at that moment.

The school two structures, is represented below, along with a photo of one of the three deputy-heads' responsibilities

## Discussion of Findings

The results of the study revealed that the schools under study had well managed departments with well-managed, highly competent and dedicated staff. Analysis of the department staff complement showed that all departments had a very low turnover, and the teacher-learner ratio was as prescribed by Swaziland Educational Policy of one teacher to forty pupils (EDSEC, 2011). In terms of qualifications, staff in each department had at least a Diploma in Education with the highest having a Master's degree.

The study also revealed that there were well-defined systems in the target schools, which promoted collective decision-making and healthy communication flow (George and Jones, 2005). Through interviews, it became evident that workshops, meetings and seminars accorded staff the chance to deliberate and take part in-group decision-making procedures.

Cuthbert (2015) asserts that in well structured institutions teachers operate in small clusters and teams of manageable size. These are formed on the basis of initiating staff development and sharing of ideas and knowledge on the new trends, developments and possibly measures and skillsets relevant and in play at that particular team. The head teachers in this scenario really don't have to interfere much, his/her role simply becomes one of ensuring that the time and opportunity for creativity is availed to the subordinates. Information in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is very dynamic and the teaching methods and resources change very frequently so it is necessary to adapt and adjust very quickly to ensure that the institutions don't end up using or teaching their pupils obsolete and out-dated information. So these teams are very essential to continuously update each other. In so doing the inexperienced teachers also get exposed to how the system actually works and they gradually acquire skills of their own that they eventually perfect and this will lead to the development of the school.

Bush (2014) concurs with Cuthbert (2015) that the imposition of decisions on subordinates produces a counter-productive effect and is rather unethical and actually propels an atmosphere of hostility and silent rebellion. This reverses whatever progress could have had been made. To this effect Ncube (2017) asserts that imposed decisions may result in a school becoming less efficient and less effective.

The target schools had an open-door policy in terms of consultations and problem solving (George and Jones, 2005). Head-teachers revealed that individual teachers constantly brought issues to their attention directly without having to go through numerous bureaucratic systems, save for cases, which the HoDs would solve on their own.

Generally, the results revealed that teachers liked and respected the structure and were seen to be using either their HoDs or the head-teachers directly for the smooth running of the school. Relations therefore were seen to be flexible, as there was no evidence of red tape. Teachers confirmed that in all meetings they attended, they were free to air their views and a number of suggestions made during meetings were considered by the head-teacher. Furthermore, it was revealed that the working environment was motivating in itself as seemingly difficult tasks were easily accomplished as all members assisted each other either due to individuals being in executive or experts in various ways. The study also revealed that collegiality and teamwork enabled achievements, some of which were above the set targets.

The concept of collegiality plays a vital role in augmenting teacher professional growth and development, job satisfaction, organizational and professional commitment as well as improved quality of education on both teachers and students. Rothschild (2017) defines collegiality as the responsibility given to teachers to become an integral part of the management and leadership processes of the school that are guided by that school's shared vision. In this light it is safe to say it is a process of assimilation that involves encouraging personal visions to establish a vision built on synergy. This particular vision is both personal and congenial and hence inadvertently suggests that teachers should play a participatory role in the management of a school.

Simon (2014) asserts that rather than supporting a responsive reaction (transactional) form of leadership, collegiality places emphasis on being value driven and change directed (transformational). This can be translatable to mean that it encourages all teachers to be active participants in the development and metamorphosis and growth of their institutions. According to the SASA, (2015) schools will need to change their management strategies and adopt management styles that encourage innovation, transformational leadership and self-governance. To that effect, collegiality can be perceived as a style of management which is collaborative, transformational and based on shared objectives therefore indicating that educational institutions should be encouraged to adapt their management strategies to a more collegial approach (encompassing collaborative decision-making and transformational leadership) in order to achieve improved academic results. Achieving collegiality in a school can be regarded as a process rather than a happening. Bailey and Adams (1990), reiterate that if this is so, then various strategies need to be put into place to enhance the process of collegiality.

It is imperative upon the principal to set a conducive environment that allows the staff to see and realize how the practices of management are used appropriately. He/she Should foster the adaptation of management strategies to suit the organisational structure style of administration and this entails that various strategies should be adopted.

## **Conclusions of the study**

The main conclusions of the study were that flexible organisational structures enabled quick decision making and this positively influenced student performance. The study also concluded that success in schools comes when there is teamwork. It was a conclusion in this study that high performing schools had a well-defined organisational structure.

## Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are that even though school structures are pre-defined, school leadership redefine them to suit their schools for flexibility and creativity. The study also recommends that Structures should promote collegiality teamwork and team taching to enable compensation of lacking skills in some individuals.

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