

Effects of Occupational Stress on the Provision of Quality Service in Manzini Primary Schools, Eswatini

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini. The study was qualitative in nature and utilised the phenomenological research design. Data were collected from seven teachers, four principals and 16 learners in four primary schools using interviews, observations and document analysis. Findings from the study indicated that primary school teachers mainly conceptualized occupational stress as the emotional strain they suffered due to work related challenges. The study showed that teachers exhibited stress through absenteeism, headache, anger, and aggression directed learners and to other stakeholders. The study established that work related stress negatively interfered with the provision of quality service. Consequently, the participants reported that they were truant, vented their anger by being violence to the learners and were less committed to their professional responsibilities. Stressed teachers said that counselling, recreational trips and professional development programmes could be mediatory strategies that could be used to arrest their situation. The study concluded that stressful situations in the workplace inhibit teachers to fully deliver their professional obligations. Thus, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should consider revisiting their deployment policies and also pay teachers according to their qualifications.

Index Words: *Occupational stress, quality service, issues of trustworthiness, phenomenology*

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I. Introduction

1.1 Background and setting of the study

This study investigated the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini. This was prompted by the researchers' observations that many primary school teachers in Manzini exhibit symptoms of stress; hence it became imperative for the researchers to find out if this did not interfere with the provision of quality service in their work places. The prevalence of stress among teachers in Eswatini is a topical issue in the Swazi community. In the recent years, stressed teachers dominate headlines in the newspapers. Dube of the Times of Eswatini (6, 03, 2015) for instance, reported that a certain teacher at one of the primary schools of Eswatini was reported to have died due to stress. A family member who was interviewed by Shongwe of the Times of Eswatini (17, 01, 2015) confirmed that she had problems with the school administration and they were always at loggerheads regarding work and also experienced complications at work. A post mortem from a medical doctor confirmed that the teacher died of stress.

Empirical evidence has shown that 75 per cent of the teachers in Eswatini experience stress (Hamid, Bisschoff & Botha, 2015). Hamid et al. (2015) also state that the education sector in Eswatini has been under massive strain during the last 20 years. However, literature is silent on whether the prevalence of stress among teachers affects the execution of their professional responsibilities diligently. Hence, the researchers were interested in finding out if stress among teachers was affecting the provision of quality service among primary school teachers in the Manzini region of Eswatini.

The Ministry of Education and Training expects teachers to provide quality service to the stakeholders. According to a statement made by the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) Secretary General, stress for teachers is rooted in organisational causes related to the way teachers are expected to work (Khumalo, 2013). Teachers are expected to educate learners in all aspects of life; academically, physically, spiritually, morally, culturally and the like. Moreover, parents and administration hold the teachers accountable learners do not perform well in public examinations. If these students underperform, for whatever reason, teachers are held responsible and are not spared from the criticism. The teacher, under whatever circumstances including occupational stress, is expected to see his/her class through.

The researchers observed therefore that, although there are studies conducted on teacher stress in Eswatini, there is still a gap in literature on the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service among primary school teachers in Manzini region of Eswatini. Hence, investigating the provision of quality service by the stressed teachers became the primary concern of this study.

To ascertain the prevalence of stress among primary school teachers; the researchers conducted a situational diagnostic survey in the schools where the study was carried out; and its prevalence was confirmed. Thus, it became imperative for the researchers to target the affected teachers and find out if stress affects the provision of quality service among primary school teachers in Manzini region of Eswatini.

1.1.1 Definition of stress

A number of scholars have come up with several definitions on what stress is. From a psychological point of view, stress is defined as “the body’s reaction to perceived emotional pressures and threats from the environment” (Engle & Snellgrove, 1984, p. 312). Stress is viewed as the end result of the failure of a person to positively react to emotional or physical dangers, whether actual or imagined. Kaur (2011) also defines stress as a feeling of anxiety over failure to manage a certain predicament and that directly affects the emotional condition of an individual. From the above definitions, it can be concluded that stress is a situation that arises when one is unable to cope and manage overpowering situations and this subsequently may have a bearing on one’s psychological health and work competence.

Studies have shown that stress manifests itself differently in individuals. Some people develop high blood pressure, others become diabetic; some develop heart problems while others suffer variations of stroke (Miller, 2000). However, to some, stress is temporary and the symptoms of temporal stress include factors such as fatigue, headache, indigestion, ulcers and several other ailments (Kaur, 2011). Failure to manage stress may result in physiological, psychological and behavioural problems leading to chronic stress related problems. According to Hamid, Bisschoff and Botha (2015) physiological symptoms may include changes in physical appearance. This can manifest itself through deterioration in tidiness, sanity and medical problems leading to absenteeism from work thereby compromising the provision of quality service. On the other hand, psychological problems include depression, boredom, frustration and hopelessness. Behavioural symptoms may manifest themselves through drug and/or substance abuse, serious depression, burnout, domestic violence or being suicidal (Miller, 2000).

1.1.2 Occupational stress

Kaur (2011) defines occupational stress as the stressful situations that an individual experiences in a work-related environment. On the other hand, Park (2007) defines it as the occurrence of damaging and emotional reactions which result from situations where the job prerequisites are not aligned with the worker’s abilities, skills, needs and resources. This study views occupational stress as a feeling of tension that arises from a work-related situation and it is also viewed as the inability to cope with work-related pressures.

1.1.3 Quality service

Quality service is defined as the ability of an organization to meet or exceed meeting its intended goals and customer expectations. It is the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service (Qualtrics, 2007). Qualtrics (2007) came out with five dimensions of quality service which are: tangibles; reliability; responsiveness; assurance and empathy. These have been constantly ranked by customers to be most important indicators of quality service. These dimensions are also important in the teaching profession as well as the provision of quality service in the work environment. These dimensions are explained in detail below.

Tangibles can be defined as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications materials (Qualtrics, 2007). Teachers are role models to the learners in a school environment; hence they need to be smartly and professionally dressed.

On the other hand, reliability means the ability to perform the promised service dependably, constantly and accurately (Qualtrics, 2007). The assumption is that a teacher with less stress performs better than a teacher who is stressed. That calls for the teacher to get to work on time and being subordinate to his superiors.

On another note, responsiveness is the willingness to help clients and provide prompt service to the clients (Qualtrics, 2007). In the teaching profession, the teacher’s attitude towards his/her work determines effective teaching and learning.

On the other hand, assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence (Qualtrics, 2007). This means, in this context, stakeholders should have trust and confidence in the teachers.

And finally empathy is the caring individualised attention the organisation provides to its clients (Qualtrics, 2007). This implies that full attention towards students is key as teachers are expected to observe professional ethics if quality service is to be realised. The study, as indicated in the preceding discussion, sought

to establish the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini.

1.1.4 The global picture on the causes and effects of stress on teaching

Research has shown that there is widespread concern over the high levels of work-related stress, job dissatisfaction and psychological distress associated with teachers the world over (Sprenger, 2011). According to Bolton (2015), the effect of stress on teachers' well-being and their willingness to stay longer in the profession, is also a professional predicament.

In Eastern Europe, a study conducted in Kosovo showed that 33% of the teachers reported high levels of stress (Shkemi, Melonashi & Fanaj, 2015). The most frequently reported stressors that were identified in that study included; inadequate wages, poor working conditions and undisciplined students. Similarly, in their study, Kerr, Breen, Delaney, Kelly and Miller (2011) noted that pupil indiscipline was the single biggest cause of stress exacerbated by increasing levels of aggression among both boys and girls in Kosovo. Participants in this study said that teacher training courses had not prepared them adequately to deal with indiscipline of pupils. Hence this became a source of stress.

Research shows that the African continent is not immune to occupational stress. School principals as well suffer from stress. Studies done in Kenya for instance, by Ngari, Ndungu, Mwonya, and Ngumi (2013) showed that levels of stress among secondary school administrators are high and this had implications to education management. A total of 54.5% of the respondents who participated in that study reported that they experience high levels of stress which they attributed to stressful situations from their school workloads and other responsibilities. Similarly, a study also done by Juma, Simatwa and Ayodo (2016) indicated that 52.9% of female principals experience stress in that same country. The respondents in this study cited that the sources of stress emanated from the working environment, pursuit of excellence, conflicting demands from stake holders, lack of time to teach and also attending to administrative tasks as well as undisciplined teachers.

Available literature also showed that occupational stress in the teaching profession is also prevalent in South Africa (Matla, 2014). Factors such as workloads, overcrowded classrooms, lack of parental support, learners' misbehaviour, job dissatisfaction and lack of professional support are among other factors which contribute to occupational stress among teachers in South Africa (Matla, 2014). In line with this study, Bowen (2016) conducted a qualitative study among Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teachers in South Africa which also revealed the prevalence of stress among teachers. The study cited three major sources of stress for teachers and these included; the nature of the teaching profession, interpersonal relationships at work places, organisational and TESOL - related issues. The study showed that stress has a negative effect, not only on teachers but also on the students and the school at large.

According to a report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2017), teaching is also one of the most stressful occupations in the United States of America. The high level of stress among teachers is affecting their well-being in that country. As a result, teachers suffer from burnouts, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance and some of the highest turnover rates ever. In the United States of America, stress among teachers was reported to be negatively impacting on the teachers and contributed to poor results for students and higher costs for schools. Elitharp (2005) puts forth that special education teachers in the USA have a documented history of high staff turnover. They leave the profession partly because of professional stress. According to a longitudinal study carried out in elementary schools in the US, there are teachers who experience a high level of stress and moreover show symptoms of depression. These teachers consequently create classroom environments that are less conducive to learning, and this leads to poor academic performance among the students (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2017).

These effects of stress on teachers may include lack of enthusiasm and motivation, increased absenteeism, a decline in work performance, poor interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues, lower tolerance for classroom disruptions, inadequate preparation for classes and an increased dogmatic personality and resistance to change (Bowen, 2016). While Matla (2014) and Bowen's (2016) studies mostly focused on the sources of stress among teachers in South Africa; this current study looked at the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service at primary school level in the Manzini region of Eswatini.

According to the Eswatini's Ministry of Education and Training (2015) effective delivery is key and teachers are the major tools of ensuring efficiency in the education context. However, the high teacher turnout and frequent participation in industrial action show that there is a common concern of discontentment among teachers in Eswatini. In one of the interviews a certain teacher had with *The Times of Swaziland*; a teacher identified as Dlamini, revealed that, "a teacher with a primary teaching certificate earns E5000 while a diploma holder earns around E8000 and a degree holder ranked slightly above E12000. The expectation is that a teacher should not be earning a salary of E5000 due to the cost of living these days" (Ngwenya, 2012).

According to Sibisi (2014), although teachers get their monthly salary, they fall within the 63% of the Swazi population living below the international poverty datum line and find it difficult to support their immediate families. Similarly, Shange (2016) revealed that a certain primary school teacher gave up his child for adoption on reasons that he could not maintain this minor. This shows the extent to which teachers are desperate and the researchers in this study were interested in finding out whether this discontentment was not responsible for the prevailing occupational stress and its impact on the provision of quality service to the stakeholders.

In Eswatini, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health have introduced wellness programmes and other health educational programmes to help civil servants including teachers cope with stress. However, work-related stress in the teaching profession remains a challenge. Dlamini (2014) also observed that teachers in the Hhohho region of Eswatini were living under stressful conditions. In his study, Dlamini (2014) found that teachers in the Hhohho region attributed their stress to contractual problems, performance related incentives, poor salaries and lack of accommodation. However, he did not indicate if these stressful conditions impacted negatively on the provision of quality service among teachers in that region. This is the concern of this study. In addition to that, the preliminary literature review done so far, shows that literature on the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini remains scanty. Hence, it became the primary concern for this study to find out if stress impacted negatively on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In Eswatini, literature on the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service among primary school teachers is scanty. However, stress in the teaching profession in Eswatini has been reported as one of the commonest health related predicaments (Hamid, Bisschoff & Botha, 2015).

To verify this claim, the researchers carried a situational diagnostic survey in the Manzini primary schools and the results showed that this ailment was rampant among primary school teachers. The researchers therefore assumed that stress could be impinging on the provision of quality service in the primary schools of Manzini. However, it remains unprofessional to judge the validity of this proposition without sufficient empirical evidence to support it. It is against this backdrop that the researchers' interest has been triggered to embark on this study to ascertain the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini.

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in Manzini primary schools of Eswatini.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

- 1.4.1 find out how primary school teachers conceptualise occupational stress on the provision of quality service in their workplaces.
- 1.4.2 examine how occupational stress affects the wellbeing of teachers to hinder or promote the execution of their professional responsibilities.
- 1.4.3 ascertain how occupational stress affects teaching and learning.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In order to put this study in to context, Abraham Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs was adopted as the theoretical framework informing this study. According to Maslow (1954) the hierarchy of needs are needs in the development of a human being which are arranged in their order of importance. Maslow (1954) theorised that human beings are 'wanting animals'. He views them as organisms that keep on craving to achieve a higher order need. According to him, once a lower order need is achieved, a higher order need surfaces. Thus, individuals seek to pursue high order needs as they crave for self-actualisation. The needs are hierarchically ordered such that if the lower levels needs are not satisfied first, the higher levels will not be pursued. From that, he came up with certain basic human needs which he then arranged in order of importance. According to him, "the need gratification" is the most important single principle underlying all human motivation and development. Once a need is fulfilled, there is a tendency for a new and higher order need to emerge. To clarify his theory, Maslow developed a diagramme which summarized his hierarchy of needs.

According to (Tanner, 2017) the hierarchy of needs theory is a theory applicable to organizational orientation and employee motivation. He argues that the theory is able to suggest how managers can lead their employees or subordinates to become self-actualized. In this study, the researchers found out that Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs is more applicable in the education context as teachers as well, need motivation to

drive them meet their best potential. According to Maslow, one may not motivate someone with positive feedback (an esteem factor) if his basic physiological needs are not met. This is a point worth noting if applied to the workplaces of many of the primary school teachers in Eswatini. Ganta (2014) posits that if someone does not get paid enough to put food on the table for his or her family, he or she is likely not going to care much about the job

2.2 A review of empirical studies

2.2.1 Key factors impacting on teachers' conceptualization of occupational stress in the Workplace

A study done by Eres and Atanasoska, (2011) in Turkey revealed that poor collegial relations and learners' misbehaviour are responsible for the causes of stress among teachers in that country. Hasan (2014) also discovered that managing learners' behaviour was a source of stress as he pointed out that effective classroom discipline set a good standard for the teachers to provide instructions and be in control of his class. Bolton (2015) who did his study in Ireland found out that the main sources of stress were time management, indiscipline and lack of motivation. Sprenger (2011) in his study conducted in Chicago USA, declares disorganisation in schools as a significant source of stress among teachers, lack of support from school principals, deputy principals and the school leadership team as a whole. Studies in India have shown that low salaries that did not keep up with inflation have been found to be a contributory factor to stress among teachers in that country (Kaur, 2011).

2.2.2 Impact of stress on the teacher

A study done by Hasan (2014) revealed that disciplinary problems extend beyond the learner and involve teacher interactions with colleagues. Effective teaching and learning requires healthy interactions among teachers hence teachers who are stressed always absent themselves regularly from work, thus causing tension with their colleagues and administration (Koch, 2015). Similarly, a study done by Hamif et al. (2015) showed that stress can affect the physical appearance of a human being. Hamid et al. (2015) observed that a decline in grooming or deteriorating wardrobe is normally observed in stressed teachers. Some medical complaints such as headaches, backaches, frequent infections are also associated with depression that lead to chronic fatigue. In another study by Ngari et al. (2013) it was revealed that teachers who are stressed do not have time and money for professional development. Therefore, teachers who consider personal development have the ability to find solutions, bring new ideas and contribution to overall teamwork.

2.2.3 How occupational stress affects teaching and learning

Studies have shown that occupational stress leads to decreased productivity and inability to fully focus in the demands of one's job (Hamid, Bisschoff, & Botha, 2015). Park (2007) asserts that "stressed workers are more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. Their organizations are less likely to succeed in a competitive market" (Park, 2007, p.5). This observation agrees with the results of study done by Okeke et al. (2015) in South Africa where they established that teachers who suffer from occupational stress have higher chances of not performing well in the teaching and learning context. In their study Okeke et al., (2015) showed that occupational stress may lead to frequent absenteeism and this affects the way learners learn. Makasa (2013) in his study done in Zimbabwe, found out that absenteeism negatively affects learners' achievement as frequent absenteeism affects the time that a teacher could have spent in class to cover the syllabus under normal circumstances.

III. Methodology

This study is qualitative and used the phenomenological research design. The study targeted primary school teachers who were living with stress, principals of the stressed teachers and learners taught by the stressed teachers in the Manzini region of Eswatini. Four selected primary schools in the Manzini region participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools and the teacher participants were identified using a situational diagnostic survey which was done prior to the actual study. Those teachers who were positive to stress formed the sample. In total, seven (7) teachers, sixteen (16) pupils and four (4) principals were selected to participate in the study. Interviews, observations and document analysis were used for the collection of data. The instruments were prepared by the researchers and cross checked by experts to achieve trustworthiness of the results. Before the actual study was conducted, the instruments were piloted in one primary school in the Manzini region of Eswatini. Thereafter, the researchers those items of instruments which were not clear or vague were corrected. However, the school did not become part of the actual study.

In accordance with the ethical principles, the participants were treated with high esteem. To ensure this, a formal written request was obtained from the Director of Education and Training. Consent was achieved

through a consent form provided to the participants as an assurance that the data collected would be treated with strict confidentiality and utilised solely for academic purposes. Those of the participants who were adults signed the consent forms on their own. Children who were under eighteen (18) had their consent forms signed by the chairperson of the Parents-Teachers Association and the head teachers of the participating schools.

IV. Findings

4.1 Research question 1: How do primary school teachers conceptualise occupational stress on the provision of quality service in their workplaces?

The findings revealed that teachers conceptualize occupational stress as the emotional strain caused by different aspects in the workplace. Such included low salary, a mismatch between their area of specialization and what they are doing at work, the expectations of the Ministry of Education and Training as well as pressure from the school administration. To support the above statement on the conceptualization of stress caused by low salary, some of the teacher participants revealed this:

Occupational stress for me is the emotional pain that arise as a result of a mismatch between what I am expected to do and the remuneration I get at the end of the day. In my case, the salary is not compatible with the work I am doing. I feel the work is too much as compared to the remunerations I get(Teacher Participant 5, School C).

These are conditions beyond my control that affect me and my work. For instance, the money that I am earning is very little. We are earning peanuts in this profession and it's not encouraging(Teacher Participant 1, School A).

Some other teachers concurred with this finding as one other teacher explained that occupational stress arise as a result of teaching at a primary school and yet she is trained as high school teacher. The teacher said:

Occupational stress is something that causes strong feelings of worry or anxiety at work. For instance, I am worried because I am a degree holder trained to teach in the secondary schools, but I was deployed to teach at primary school level and earning a salary which is not commensurable with my qualifications(Teacher Participant 6, School C).

The findings further indicated that the teacher participants associated stress with the pressure that come from the policies imposed on them by the Ministry of Education and Training. One teacher had this to say:

This is a feeling of constant pressure associated with the educational policies imposed on me by the Ministry of Education and Training. The introduction of positive discipline by the MoET without proper guidelines led to the development of untold indiscipline among learners. We have no formula on how to handle these disciplinary cases. Thus, pupils stress us and we can't perform accordingly (Teacher Participant 3, School B).

Some teacher participants in the study perceived occupational stress as emotional strain caused by pressure from the school administration which exceeded the potential and capabilities of the individual teachers to perform their every day activities. Another teacher said:

It is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the demands of the job exceed my capacity and capabilities. These are the demands of paperwork which consumes much of my teaching time. By this I mean that the administration demands official books to be well done and submitted on time. I do this at the expense of class attendance and it affects my effectiveness as a classroom practitioner (Teacher Participant 3, School B).

4.2 Research question 2: In what way does occupational stress affect the wellbeing of teachers to hinder or promote their execution of their professional responsibilities?

The study revealed that teachers who are stressed had difficulties in working with their colleagues. They indicated that they preferred working on their own than teaming up with other teachers. For that reason, they were failing to provide quality service to the stake holders. One teacher had this to say:

I don't like mingling with my colleagues. Each time when I am amongst them, I feel so uneasy and irritated because these people are unreasonable(Teacher Participant 6, School C).

Another teacher revealed that she feels irritated and temperamental when she is in her workplace. The same was echoed by the principal of the stressed teacher participant. This shows that occupational stress negatively affects stressed teachers in the workplace.

The teacher often shows worst behavioural attitudes when we are holding staff meetings. For instance, at times he bangs at the table or shouts loudly to show his displeasure of a given under discussion (Principal Participant 4, School D).

The findings of this study also revealed that stressed teachers lacked affection for the learners, colleagues and other stake holders. They stated that they found it difficult for them to pay attention to the needs of the learners, colleagues and stake holders. To echo the above statement, one learner revealed this:

What I don't like about my teacher is that if we are bullied and go to her to report, she doesn't attend to us but instead she refers us to other teachers or to the principal (Learner Participant 12, School C).

Generally, the symptoms of stress manifest itself differently from one teacher to the other. The results of this study revealed that some teacher participants regularly absented themselves from work and they sometimes fail to report the reason for their absenteeism (Going away without official leave). One learner participant said:

Our teacher is often absent from work. He just leaves us alone without even telling us that he will not be there the following day. He doesn't even have the courtesy of telling us reasons for his absence when he comes back (Learner Participant 16, School D).

The teachers revealed that their reason for absenteeism was due to the fact that they often suffer from chronic headaches. One teacher had this to say:

Most of the time I don't feel well when I'm in the work place because I suffer from headaches a lot (Teacher Participant 3, School C).

On the other hand, some principals of the teacher participants revealed that stressed teachers lacked commitment at work hence this affects the way they provide their services. One principal had this to say:
They do display a negative attitude towards everything they do. They do not commit themselves fully to the job. They get to work late and always leave early and at times they never come to work. They give petty excuses for their behaviour (Principal Participant 3, School C).

Apart from the lack of commitment, the learner participants revealed that stressed teachers physically and verbally assaulted them. For that reason they feared their teachers. One learner participant said:

She shouts and screams at us and we tend to get scared of being beaten... Sometimes she says nasty things about some of us. I am scared of her (Learner Participant 5, School B).

4.3 Research question 3: How does occupational stress affect teaching and learning?

The participants in the study revealed that stress negatively affected the way they carried out their professional duties. The provision of quality service is compromised. The teacher participants living with stress reported that they failed to attend to the learners' needs. One teacher participant cited that he shifts his focus to personal stuff than doing his work. This is what he said:

Sometimes I end up being absent from work and it's not like I don't like working but it's because I don't have the money at all for bus fare. So I stop coming to work. Even when I do come, I'm not in a good mood to execute my professional responsibilities because when you are stressed you are not in a working mood. Things won't be normal. So I end up not doing what I'm expected to do to the children (Teacher Participant 3, School C).

The lack of commitment to professional responsibilities was also echoed by the principal participants. One principal revealed that the stressed teachers failed to do and submit the official documentation at the expected time. This consequently impacts negatively on the teaching and learning. The principal participant said:

I have observed that a teacher who is stressed at work does not have the right attitude and mind set towards his/her work because he/she gets occupied with the stressful issues such that when I ask for their prep books, they don't bring them in time (Principal Participant 3, School C).

Similarly, some learner participants echoed the same sentiments when they revealed that the teachers failed to mark their work accordingly. One learner had this to say:

He takes a long time to give us feedback. We write a test and she takes weeks to give us feedback. When we get our test back, there is no evidence that there was proper marking. She just puts one big tick per paragraph (**Learner Participant 5, School B**).

Some teachers revealed that they lacked motivation as a result of poor remuneration and they thought that was the source of stress and this affected their execution of their professional responsibilities. The study revealed that de-motivation impacted negatively on the relationship between the stressed teachers and the learners. One teacher had this to say:

I am not motivated because I'm not earning much. As a result, there is no healthy relationship between me and the pupils. I am not inspiring the learners at all, especially the incapable ones. I have major financial problems so I tell the learners that I am moving with those who move in class. What can I do? (**Teacher Participant 2, School A**).

4.4 Findings from the non-participant observations

The researchers also made observations during the process of collecting data from the teachers suffering from stress in all the schools under study. The results showed that occupational stress affects the provision of quality service. There was lack of tangibles as a measure of service quality. The teaching profession is considered as a noble profession and hence teachers are expected to act as role models for pupils and this also included their deportment. On the contrary, the stressed teacher participants exhibited clumsy ways of dressing. Considering that these are highly trained professionals, the researchers expected the deportment that demonstrated professional elegance and refinement in the manner they dressed. However, the results of the study showed that stressed teachers cared less on their dressing and general deportment.

During the interviews the researchers noted that there was an explicit manifestation of stress displayed. The gestures, language and the tone of the responses during the interviews reflected that the participants were emotive and unstable. As they related their experiences and encounters, one could actually discern that they are undergoing quite an irksome journey. They would pause in between some of the statements and took a deep breath before they could continue in suppressed but visible pain and anger. Feelings of disappointment with oneself were also gathered in the statements made. For instance, a feeling of regret in the choice of career was constantly depicted in the statements made. Fatigue as a stress indicator was easily picked up through the observations. Other stress indicators like dragging of the feet to class and also ignoring the bell that marked the end and beginning of each lesson were noted during the day visits at the selected schools.

4.5 Findings from the document analysis

Document analysis was another method used for collecting data. Inclusive of this were documents like the daily preparation book, the clock book and pupils' exercise books, which were analysed in order to identify any anomalies pointing towards occupational stress for teachers. The analysed documents revealed that occupational stress affects the provision of quality service. The absenteeism rate from the Timebook reflected that a teacher could be absent at least once or twice on a weekly basis for the schools in the rural areas. The researchers noted that such behaviour constituted a critical case since it is contradictory to The Ministry of Education School Guide Procedures of 1978. The guide clearly records acceptable '3 days' absenteeism in a month for every teacher. Absenteeism or going away without official leave (AWOL) left the kids alone in the classrooms and thus jeopardizing the provision of quality service to the stake holders.

The researchers also observed that marking of assessment exercise books was erratically and aberrantly done and the preparation book was not done accordingly. This agreed with the reports given by the learners during individual interviews. The analysis of the pupil's work in all the schools revealed the marking was not consistently done. In School B for example, a student was awarded very low marks in a SiSwati composition accompanied by unsatisfactory comments. A very low mark ($\frac{4}{20}$) was awarded for a certain pupil yet there was just one comment made by the teacher participant at the bottom of the page 'Gcwalisalikhasi' which when translated to English would mean 'Use the whole page for your composition'. The pupil had written up to three quarters of the page, which could have been enough for a good mark had that been the only error. The other comment written below had no connection with the assessment exercise in question. Therefore, the comment was not meaningful to the child.

The daily preparation books which the researchers checked at the four schools were not done accordingly by the stressed teacher participants. Documents analysis revealed that lesson preparation was not properly done. Four of the seven preparation books for the stressed teacher participants were not up-to-date and they were not signed by the school principal. The rationale for this could be attributed to the lack of commitment on the teachers who do not submit these books to the administration at the specified intervals as the school policy stipulates.

V. Discussions

The findings of this study revealed that the stressed teacher participants conceptualised occupational stress differently. Some conceptualised occupational stress as an emotional strain caused by different aspects in the work-environment. Others viewed occupational stress as the emotional strain caused by low salary as a result of wrong deployment. Thus some secondary school trained teachers were deployed to teach in the primary schools. They were thus remunerated according to the post they were occupying and not their qualifications. The researchers noted therefore that wrong deployment compromised the provision of quality service because the teacher does not provide the service dependably and accurately due to stress caused by low salary which is not commensurate with their qualifications. The findings concur with a study by Tanner (2017) who states that low income demotivates workers and are a source of stress in the work force. Other participants viewed stress as pain caused by a mismatch between what somebody specialised in at college and the nature of work s/he is currently assigned to do. These are the teachers who are trained to teach at high school but they are employed at primary school. These findings concur with a study by Baraza and Simatwa (2016) by indicating that wrong deployment undermines the confidence of the teacher and it affects many people than it is imagined. Baraza and Simatwa (2016) did their study in Kenya while this study was done in the Kingdom of Eswatini. On another note, some teacher participants associated occupational stress with a feeling of uncontrollable and mounting emotional pressure which arises as a result of policies imposed on them by the Ministry of Education and Training. They also indicated that some of the pressure came from the school administration. One teacher indicated that it was strenuous for her to do the daily preparation book for every lesson. Sprenger (2011) also asserts that participants believe that having to document every lesson was stressful for primary school teachers.

The teachers stated that as a result of the stress, they found it difficult to work with their colleagues. They often preferred solitary life than being in the midst of their colleagues. This finding indicates that lack of team spirit is one symptom of stress which is not in congruent with the provision of quality service in the primary schools. The stressed teachers were often easily irritable and highly temperamental. Consequently, they lacked affection for the learners, often physically and verbally assaulting them. The findings of the study show that occupational stress affects the provision of quality service. Learners are harassed and are never given care and individualised attention.

The findings agree with Okeke et al's. (2014) observations who state that a teacher's character or personality often changes for the worse as a result of psychological/emotional effects of stress. They lack commitment to their professional responsibilities. The finding of the current study also corresponds to a study by Gebrekirstos (2015) who states that the consequence of this growing occupational stress adversely impacts not only on the health of the employed individuals but also the society in general by declining the amount and quality of work and productivity when its level is high.

The findings of the study further showed that teacher participants resorted to absenting themselves from duty as a result of the emotional strain owing to poor remunerations in the profession. The participants pointed out that they could not go to work every school day because they cannot afford the bus fare to go every day since their salaries were meagre. Thus, they sometimes left the learners unattended. Thus, syllabus coverage is affected in every subject. According to Qualtrics (2007) absenteeism is seemingly the key factor associated with the 5 dimensions of quality service which he proposed in that by some latitude, through absenteeism, the teacher is not reliable, responsible, lacks assurance and empathy for the stake holders; learners included. The findings also mirror with a study done by Eres and Atanasoska (2011) in Macedonia which showed that increased work-related stress may result in absenteeism and that it can prevent teachers from carrying out their job responsibilities.

In addition to that, the findings also concur with a study by Bowen (2016) who states that the consequences of stress are frustrating for both teachers concerned and their learners. One of the effects includes increased absenteeism which impacts on syllabus coverage thereby disadvantaging the learners who are, in the end expected to write tests or examinations.

The teacher participants also revealed that they failed to attend to the learners' needs including marking the learners' assessment exercises accordingly. The documents checked showed that marking was erratically done and the learners took time to get their feedback. Failure to mark the assessments in time and accordingly and taking forever to give feedback to the learners, is an indicator of poor provision of quality service to the stakeholders. Similar observations were made by Makasa (2013) when he observed that in Zambia, low salaries had a negative effect on the teachers' productivity.

VI. Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study.

6.1 Teachers' conceptualisation of occupational stress on the provision of quality service in their workplaces

The study revealed that teachers have different conceptions of occupational stress on the provision of quality service. They linked their concept of occupational stress to the emotional strain caused by unsatisfactory conditions of their employment. The participants concurred that the emotional strain arose as a result of

professional demands and lack of apathy from the MoET. Some alluded that they were lowly paid and that affected them in the way in which they executed their professional duties. This suggests that stress hindered them from the provision of quality service to the learners and other stakeholders.

The findings of the study also showed that some of the participants perceived occupational stress on the provision of quality service as the frustration caused by a mismatch between what they were trained to do and what they were currently doing. Some were trained to teach at high school yet they were deployed to work in the primary schools and therefore expected to teach all subjects; even those they never majored in at college. As a result, they were not effective in the way they taught those subjects and that was the source of stress. The implication of that is that the effects of occupational stress inhibited them from providing quality service to the learners and other stakeholders. These teachers fail to teach these subjects effectively and their situation was exacerbated by stress.

The study also revealed that the expectations of the policies from the school administration and the MoET were unbearable. Participants indicated that the expectations of the MoET involved the use of positive discipline as a corrective measure, submission of official books in time and teaching large classes. However, the participants indicated that they were failing to meet these professional demands and policy expectations. These demands were stressful to the teachers leading to failure in the provision of quality service to the learners, the administration, the Ministry of Education and Training and the parents. This also affected collegiality at work.

6.2 How occupational stress affects the wellbeing of teachers to hinder or promote their execution of their professional responsibilities

The findings of this study revealed that stressed teachers compromise the ethics of the teaching profession. The results of the study showed that stressed teachers are not mentally, emotionally and physically fit for work. This manifests itself through their poor handling of their own situations, learners and their peers. They indicated that they have poor communication skills hence they lack tangibles which is a dimension of quality service (Qualtrics, 2007). The findings of the study therefore revealed that the stressed teachers' daily attendance is compromised as they are always sickly. Therefore, the physical and financial wellbeing of these participants resulted in absenteeism which affected the overall performance of the learners since most of the time they were left unattended. Thus, service was erratically rendered. Hence the provision of quality service was at stake.

6.3 The effect of occupational stress on teaching and learning

The data collected in this study indicates that teachers who are stressed compromised quality service delivery. Their absenteeism affected syllabus coverage and conversely affected learner achievement. Absenteeism had a negative bearing on reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy for the learners. The findings reveal that work-related stress leads to increased absenteeism which has serious implications on the overall work performance which in turn, would affect learner achievement.

The finding of this study also revealed that the provision of quality service to the learners was significantly compromised. Teachers lacked motivation and commitment to their professional responsibilities as a result of occupational stress. The study found out that teachers who are stressed at work are sometimes listless and slow to apply themselves. Hence, they failed to attend to the learners which included their academic work and social problems. Work-related stress has proven to be so burdensome that it prevents teachers from carrying out their job responsibilities. The impact of stress is huge on the teachers such that they fail to do their job as expected thereby compromising the effective execution of their professional responsibilities. This would include among other things; attendance, planning, meeting deadlines, teaching, attending to learners' problems and cooperating with others and the administration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need for the MoET to review the remunerations of primary school teachers to be commensurate with other professions.
- The MoET, may consider identifying teachers who exhibit signs of stress and offer counselling service to them.
- There is a need for MoET to employ teachers in positions based on their qualifications and subject area of specialisation and also remunerate them according to the qualifications and not the post they are occupying.
- It is necessary for the MoET, to strengthen classroom monitoring to ensure that teachers adhere to the stipulated teaching responsibilities and other professional requirements.
- There is a need for the MoET to have a yearly schedule of teacher workshops and design strategies and incentives for teachers in order to motivate them.

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