

Exploring the Competences of Rural Primary School Heads in Financial Management: A Case Study of Primary Schools in Mudzi District, Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The study explored the knowledge, skills and competencies in financial management demonstrated by heads of Rural Day Primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by the increase in cases of financial mismanagement and misappropriation of school funds evidenced by several reports of school heads arraigned before the courts. The study adopted the Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method research design. Data was generated from a random sample of sixty rural day primary school heads through a close ended questionnaire and ten heads through in-depth personal interviews. Data was also collected from schools' financial management books and records through document analysis. Data was analysed using NVIVO computer packages. Findings were thematically presented and discussed. The findings revealed that the competences of rural primary school heads in Zimbabwe were negatively affected by a number of factors that included the following: a) Most rural primary schools in Zimbabwe operated in poor environments that negatively affected school heads competence in the collection of school fees and levies, budgeting and expenditures. b) Most rural primary school heads in Zimbabwe lacked college training and qualifications in financial management. c) Rural primary school heads in Zimbabwe worked with school development committees with very little knowledge, training and experience in school financial management. d) Rural primary schools in Zimbabwe were poorly resourced and could not afford to hire qualified school bursars and most schools operated without school clerks. The majority of rural primary school heads doubled as school bursars and some financial management procedures were overlooked resulting in serious cases of financial mismanagement and misconduct. e) There was poor internal and external financial management supervision and auditing in rural primary schools in Zimbabwe and this negatively affected school heads' competence in financial management. The study concluded that the competence of rural school heads in financial management was negatively affected by two major factors: School heads' lack of training and qualifications in school financial management and the poor economic environment in which the schools operated. The study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should recruit school heads with good financial management qualifications and regular staff development training workshops should be conducted to enhance school heads' competences in financial management.

Keywords: Financial competencies, expenditure, income, budgeting, financial management, quality education

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently Zimbabwe's literacy rate stands at **90.9 percent**, and it is the only country on the African continent with a literacy rate of over 90 percent. This has been partially attributed to the government's educational policies that have led to unprecedented quantitative expansion of the education system. However, the quantitative expansion of the education system has been littered with some challenges that are threatening the quality of education in the country. (Zvobgo 1997). Several cases of financial mismanagement have been reported in the local newspapers (The Herald 16/11/2009; The Manica Post 13/11/2009; The Zimbabwean Mail 31/03/ 2018; The Financial Gazette 14/05/14: News Day 31/08/2017), Local research (Zvobgo, 1997; Caldwell 1993; UNESCO 2017; Chikoko, 2008; Ndlovu 2011) has also identified financial challenges. These cases are a clear indication that school financial mismanagement in Zimbabwe has become an issue of public concern. The fact that a significant

number of school heads have been convicted of financial mismanagement and some have been discharged from the service, has raised some questions about the competences of primary school heads in financial management. Do primary school heads hold the right qualifications as school financial managers? Are primary school heads adequately trained and prepared in their capacity as school financial managers? What are the factors influencing school heads' effectiveness in financial management? These are critical questions about school heads' competences in school financial management. The present study was motivated by the increasing cases of financial mismanagement in our schools and the need for local research into the financial management challenges bedeviling Zimbabwe education system.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In order to provide the present study with an appropriate contextual background, a brief look at educational provision and management in pre and post independent Zimbabwe is necessary. Financial management challenges experienced in the Zimbabwe Education system today can be traced back to the dual colonial system of education which was characterized by the segregation of black and white learners. Colonial governments were concerned with European education but left Missionaries to establish schools in the remote parts of the country and provide an education for the indigenous African black population. (Chatiza 2011; Masuku 2010). The issues associated with financial mismanagement in European schools were a preserve of the government and financial management issues in mission schools were handled by the churches. Thus, the consumers of African education - parents and learners had no say in financial management issues.

When Zimbabwe got its independence in 1980, the government abolished the dual system of education and allowed education in independent Zimbabwe to be provided and financed under a five - tier system which constituted five categories of schools under five responsible authorities namely, (1) government schools, (2) urban council schools, (3) rural district council schools (4) church schools and (5) private schools. Financial management issues in each type of school were then placed in the hands of the responsible authority. Whilst Government schools are fully funded by the state, financial management in urban and rural council schools and church - run schools adopt a partnership model in which the schools receive a per-capita tuition, grant-in- aid for construction and full teachers' salaries from government. Council and church- run schools, on their part, are allowed to charge fees and levies to parents of students enrolled in their schools (Education Act 1987:215). However, the fees and levies have to be approved by the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education. Thus, the Zimbabwe government and parental involvement in the provision of public education has raised the question of financial accountability and transparency. The government which pays school fees and teachers' salaries and the parents who pay school levies are keenly interested in financial activities that take place in the schools.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The increasing cases of school heads being convicted of embezzlement of school funds is an indicator that all is not well in financial mismanagement in Zimbabwean schools. The present study is an investigation into the competencies of rural primary school heads in financial management issues in their schools.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by three critical questions.

1. Are rural primary school heads in Mudzi district fully aware and understand all the financial management documents, processes and procedures that constitute the legal framework that guide financial management in Zimbabwe?
2. Do rural primary school heads in Mudzi district possess the right knowledge, training and skills required for effective financial management in their schools?
3. What are the factors affecting the competence of rural primary school heads in Mudzidistrict in the financial management of their schools?

5. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is part of a doctoral thesis the authors are undertaking at the Zimbabwe Open University in

Zimbabwe. The study explores the financial management competences of school heads because these issues directly affect effectiveness, efficiency and the quality of education provided in our schools. Although the study was conducted in Mudzi, a remote rural set up in Zimbabwe, publishing the findings will enable educational administrators, planners and policy makers to increase their theoretical knowledge and understanding of complex issues of financial management in their own field of work. The study stimulates a more informed academic debate and further research in the financial management of educational institutions elsewhere.

6. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Competence is the possession of and ability to use some knowledge and skills in performing some specific tasks effectively. In reviewing literature for the present study, we were interested in three areas of financial management in which competence is required of a school head. Firstly, we wanted to identify the legal framework that guides financial management in Zimbabwean schools and school heads competence in understanding and applying this legal framework in financial management issues in their schools. Secondly, we wanted to understand how a school head's qualification, training and experience impact on competences in financial management. Thirdly, we wanted to identify and examine critically, findings of global, regional and local research studies on factors affecting school heads competences in financial management in order to place the present study in the context of current studies so as to advance the frontiers of knowledge.

7. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN ZIMBABWE

The financial responsibility of school heads has changed significantly in the past few years. (Hansraj,2007). The management and administrative responsibilities have multiplied with the intensification of technology, new legislation requirements, and the pressures of the economy. Understanding the numerous responsibilities mandatory for financial management in schools may seem devastating. Some of the responsibilities a school leader must know include; Understanding the financial limitations and flexibility of the school; setting goals and formulating the right financial management strategies. These duties require the consideration of factors such as availability of school resources, background, and the needs of pupils

- Regularly approving and revising school budgets.
- Reviewing and analyzing income and expenditures on a regular basis, ensuring that resource allocation follows the school development plan.
- Understanding that the school income must be handled in accordance with relevant requirements, regulations and rules.
- Ensuring that other financial management bodies follow those guidelines.
- Establishing procedures for handling income and expenditure, procurement and quotation as well as rules on acceptance of advantages, and other financial management criteria and procedures. All procedures are carried out according to the relevant laws and regulations to avoid conflict of interest and the misuse of resources.
- Organizing controls of budgets, including accounting and reporting systems that will monitor finances.
- Appointing an accountant as an auditor for regular school account tracking and evaluations.
- Reporting the use of school funds to the relevant parties (Hansraj, 2007).

7.1. The Legal Framework that Guides Financial Management in Zimbabwean Schools

Financial management in Zimbabwean schools is guided by education acts, statutory instruments and circulars which include the following:

Public Finance Management Act Chapter 22:19

The current Appropriation Act

Treasury instructions

Accounting officers' Manual- Circular P70

Finance and Administration Circular No. 6 of 1994

Accounting Procedure Manual

Statutory Instrument 70 of 1993 respectively.

Statutory instrument 87 of 1992

Education Act Chapter 25: 04

The Education Amendment Act 2020

Statutory Instrument 150 of 2015

Government Standing Security Instructions 1994

Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act Chapter 22:23

Statutory Instrument 5 of 2018

The indigenisation and Empowerment Act Chapter 3

The Prevention of Corruption Act Chapter 9:16

The 1992 Secretary's Circular Number 2

Customs and excise Act Chapter 23:02

Statutory Instrument 1 of 2000

Education amendment Act 1991

7.2. School Development Committees in Zimbabwe

MOPSE Handbook (2017) posits that School Development Committees were established in terms of Section 29 of the Education Amendment Act 1991, which states that "The responsible authority of every registered school to which a grant is made in term of section 29 shall establish a committee to be known as School Development Committees for Non-Government schools." It also states School Development Committee members as comprising five persons elected by parents, the head and the deputy of the school, a teacher at the school and a councillor (MOPSE Handbook 2017). Subsection (2) of the same Amendment Act states that operational guidelines for School Development Committees are detailed in Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 and Statutory Instrument 70 of 1993 respectively. School Development Committee is vested with control of financial affairs of the school for which it was established. It is a corporate body which ensures that all stakeholders participate in the development of education at the local level (www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/zimt).

School Development Committees' main objective is to promote, improve and encourage the development and maintenance of the schools. They are responsible for charging fees to and collection of fees, maintenance of school premises, provision of classrooms and teachers' houses, teaching and learning materials and provision of furniture (Chatiza, 2011). They are also responsible for the employment of non-teaching staff as clerks, night security personnel and general maintenance personnel. School Development Committees have been empowered to raise funds through other means and not school fees and levies alone so as to keep the fees low. (Government of Zimbabwe 1996a, Section six, and Item 5). They also have the overall control of funds through budget. According to Chatiza (2011) planning and control of funds and fund raising are imperative in financial management and should contain information on sources of funds, methods of collecting this revenue, accounting procedure, auditing and projects to be financed (Wushe Ndlovu & Shenje, 2014). Study carried out by Chikoko (2008) revealed that the parents measure the quality of the school head by financial management abilities. School Development Committees are also responsible for the establishment of school funds account with a commercial bank in the school's name in which all funds are to be transacted are to be done taking into consideration building fund, all examination fees, all practical subject fees, and money received from any source (Wushe Ndlovu & Shenje, 2014). Authority for proper management of financial matters in non-governmental schools is derived from the 1991 Education Amendment Act Number 26, The Education Act School Development Committee

(Non-Government Schools) Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 and the 1992 Secretary's Circular Number 2 (Wushe Ndlovu & Shenje, 2014).

In terms of Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 section 16 read in conjunction with Finance and Administration Circular no]. 6 of 1994, a school finance committee should be established in schools. The school finance committee is expected to be composed of:

- Head of the school chairing
- Deputy school head
- School Development Chairperson
- School Development Vice- chairperson and

The bursar or clerk can be the secretary of the finance committee but has no voting power.

8. BUDGETING AND BUDGETARY CONTROL

Budgeting is very critical in school financial management. A budget is an approved plan expressed in monetary terms of expected revenue and expenditure in an accounting period to meet the objectives and goals of the organisation. Kruger (2003) defines a budget as a management tool, by which the school leadership can estimate and plan, as well as utilise, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the allocated resources of the school in financial terms. Magak (2013) furthermore defines the school budget as an expression of the school plan in fiscal terms. The school head should be guided by the following budget processes that will ensure operating within the Government of Zimbabwe's legal framework.

9. REVENUE GENERATION

The school leadership composed of the head, deputy head, and teacher in charge, head of departments and senior teachers should be aware that revenue in schools means all taxes, fees and other forms of income from whichever source. Van Deventer and Kruger (2003) assert that education is mainly funded by the following two sources:

- Private or individual funding: this includes school fees contributed by parents and various costs paid by learners and parents, for example, transport, textbooks and school uniforms; and
- Public funding: This refers to the responsibility of the state to fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis (Wushe Ndlovu & Shenje, 2014).

Wushe Ndlovu and Shenje (2014) identify the sources of funds available to schools to include: school fees, government grants, proceeds from school activities, community efforts, donations from individuals and charity organizations, endowment funds and petroleum trust fund. Examples of revenue at school level in Zimbabwe, include levies, tuition fees and boarding fees, building fees, grants, examinations fees sports fees, practical subject fees, and donations. All such revenue collected on behalf of the school shall be accounted through the school fund account. Challenges of financial management start to exist in revenue collection in schools.

9.1. School Bank Account

Schools should have a bank account. The authority to open at least a double current account should be granted by the Finance subcommittee by a resolution passed in the committee's first meeting following approval of the respective fund by the accounting office or designate. In opening a current bank account, a copy of the minutes containing the resolution and its accompanying letter of approval should be produced before the bank as proof that authority was granted to open the account. The bank should be authorised to only accept the signatures of only specified signatories on cheques and real time gross settlements against the school fund account or any other account thereof (Circular P6 of 1994).

Payments of expenditure and deposits should be signed by the School Head and any other member of the panel of signatories. Whenever it is necessary to change the panel of signatories, the Head authorised by the finance committee shall always and on request produce minutes containing resolution as proof to that authority.

9.2. The School Finance Committee

The school head should be acquainted to the duties of the finance committee. The duties are listed as ensuring that proposals made by the school development committee in respect of education facilities are pursued in light of uncommitted funds available for the purpose. The second duty is to authorise expenditure arising out of these activities and record such authority in minutes. Thirdly, assigning the evaluation committee to initiate procurement processes. The evaluation committee is chaired by the deputy head. The fourth duty is to approve all payments from the fund by signing the relevant documents. As a fifth duty, the school head should ensure that all members of the committee sign the documents. The sixth duty is confirming in the minutes all expenditure incurred since the last meeting. The seventh duty is to keep the bank account in credit and last but not least the eighth duty is to hold monthly meetings where decisions must be taken unanimously or majority through a vote where difference occur (MOPSE report 2019).

10. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THEORY OF FINANCIAL CONTROL

The theory of financial control advanced by Ostman (2009) prefaced this research. This theory holds that existing and possible functions of financial tools for organizations are important. It states that, payments, financial instruments, accounting, control models, economic calculations, and related considerations, both within and outside of the organization, ought to be discussed in regard to inner characteristics and possible effects (Ostman, 2009). The first regard is the organisation's activities and output. The second is about the structure of the organization and activities, and of transactions that various parties have with each other. The third area covers the control systems in the sense of recurring procedures and methods that are employed to relate present and future functions to resources both externally and internally. The aforementioned financial control tools are crucial from individual perspective of organizations and also for larger economic systems. The fourth area illustrates the specific processes of individual organizations for certain issues. The theory states that structure and financial control system works together (Ostman, 2009). The financial control theory is very pertinent to the present study in that it enables the understanding of financial competencies of school leaders that are an aspect of financial management in public primary schools in Mudzi.

11. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design adopted for this research was the Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method research design. In this design, one begins with an exploratory, qualitative phase and progresses sequentially to a quantitative phase. The design is divided into three stages. The first step is qualitative, and it concludes with analysis that produces coded or conceptual ideas. The findings of this analysis are utilised to guide the second step, which might include a survey or another type of quantitative data collecting. In the third stage, is the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark 2018). The requirement to initially examine the research problem before identifying what variables needed to be measured inspired the use of the Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods research design in the current study. The research needed to first investigate these concerns qualitatively, using in-depth interviews and document analysis. The data was then examined, and the results were utilised to formulate questions that would lead the next quantitative step. Data on internal efficiency and competency of school heads was collected from various school documents. The data was presented using tables and percentages. Data from interviews and open-ended questionnaires were transcribed verbatim, categorised into themes and discussed.

12. POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The proposed respondents entailed Mudzi District primary school heads. Mudzi had sixty public primary schools during the research period. The main trait of the school heads was that they all worked in a rural setting. Mudzi District was chosen because it is one of the largest districts in the

country and has a high number of documented incidences of financial mismanagement. Mudzi District was also picked because it has the greatest number of rural public primary schools.

12.1. Data Collection Procedure

The researcher first sought a formal letter from the University as an official introduction to the District Schools Inspector given that all public primary schools under study fell under Mudzi District. This was followed by a formal letter from the office of the District Schools Inspector issued to the school heads of the targeted public primary schools. Then, the researcher formally introduced himself to the school leadership of the aforesaid schools in order to be allowed to collect the requisite data. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents. Most of the filled questionnaires were collected on the same day of their issuance while the interviews took a few days.

12.2. Data Collection Instruments

The present study collected quantitative data through a closed questionnaire in the form of a checklist and qualitative data through interviews. Interview guide provided a response format that gave respondents the freedom to provide any answer which they cared to give. The researcher then had to take into consideration all the responses given, construct suitable categories and then code the categories so that the data could be analysed.

12.3. Document Analysis

Documents are an important source of data in many areas of investigation. When document analysis is used in descriptive research, current documents and issues are given attention (Knox & Burkard 2019). In this research document analysis was used to examine the financial record books, audit reports, related news bulletins, SDC minutes, financial policy documents that relate to challenges of financial management and the suggestion of a public-school financial management model.

12.4. Researcher as an Instrument for Data Generation

The role of the researcher is non-existent in quantitative studies. The researcher is an outsider and detached from the subjects of his investigation (Griffith Shelton & Gengler, 2017). However, in Qualitative studies, the researcher is considered an instrument of data collection (Griffith Shelton & Gengler, 2017) Data are mediated through the researcher. In qualitative studies it is critical for the researcher to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, any expectations and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the study (Greenbank, 2003). The qualitative researcher should also explain his role as emic- an insider or etic- an outsider's view of a specific culture. In the current study, the researcher is a schools' inspector and during the course of his duties interacts with schools. This motivated the researcher to want to know more about the challenges of financial management and the need for a new model.

12.5. Data Analysis Approach

Data was analysed using NVIVO computer packages. data analysis involved descriptive statistics. Findings were thematically presented and discussed. Results of the study were presented in tables, percentages and also recorded verbatim.

13. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study sought to establish heads' competencies in following the laid down accounting procedures in all their financial transactions. The accounting procedures include the following: Ensure that the financial system runs properly in order to process financial information and generate accurate reports; Ensure that internal controls are enhanced and maintained at an acceptable level, - Manage risks affecting the organizations assets and make sure risks are maintained at a lower level; Ensure that financial policies, procedures and donor compliance requirements are adhered to expected standards; Ensure that internal and external financial reports are prepared and disseminated within deadlines.

To collect data on competencies of school heads in abiding by accounting procedures, the present researcher used a checklist to establish the extent to which accounting procedures were being followed in the schools studied.

Table1. Checklist of School heads' compliance with financial management accounting procedures N=60

No.	Procedure	Yes	%	No	%
1	Is the school budget properly presented	52	86	8	14
2	Are all learners properly billed and invoiced	11	19	49	81
3	Are cases of pupils defaulting fees payments recorded	8	14	52	86
4	Does the school bursar have relevant knowledge in bookkeeping	3	5	57	95
5	Is the SDC properly constituted	59	98	1	2
6	Is the SFSC properly constituted	60	100	0	0
7	Do all requisition forms bear the authorized signatures	23	38	37	62
8	Is the procurement committee properly constituted	34	57	26	43
9	Are vouchers properly completed	34	57	36	43
10	Availability of Comparative schedule of Quotations	46	76	14	24
11	Applications for fees review	47	79	13	21
12	Is the Cash book properly done	42	70	18	30
13	Is receipt book available, with duplicate receipts and counterfoils	60	100	0	0
14	Is banking properly done?	60	100	0	0
15	Quotations, comparative schedules, official order forms, invoices attached to vouchers	34	57	26	43
16	Is Safe and strong room available.	48	80	12	20
17	Does the school hire a private auditor to audit school books of accounts	0	0	60	100
18	Was the reconciliation of cash book and bank statement done at the end of each month	31	52	29	48
19	Does the school produce income and expenditure statement	31	52	29	48
20	Does the school have a balance sheet	34	57	26	43

Table 1 presents a checklist of 20 procedures. It shows that 15 out of 20 procedures were being done properly in most schools. For example, the School Development Committee and the School Finance Sub Committee were properly constituted and operating effectively. Receipting and banking were also found to be properly done. However, in most schools the hiring of trained and qualified bursars was a challenge. All schools were not able to hire a private internal auditor

Although the study found out that most procedures were properly done, here are some challenges highlighted by an interviewed respondent:

Yes, we have a bank account but it's very costly to service. Banks charge huge rates and we are always in the red. (Respondent 4)

Our account is always in the negative because we rely on grants from the government. When that money is exhausted, charges accumulate. (Respondent 2)

We change SDC annually and that means we need to change the signing arrangement annually and of course it goes with costs (Respondent 5)

From the foregoing, schools have bank accounts but servicing the bank accounts and changing of signatories annually seem to pose as a financial management challenge for school heads.

Respondents were asked if they did bank reconciliation at the end of each month. The study found that 52 % of the schools did bank reconciliation monthly while 48 % did not do bank reconciliations. Interviewee 7 remarked;

At my school we make effort to do reconciliations but, it is far to go to the bank so that we get a bank statement and we do not have adequate funds for bus fares. (Respondent 7)

A worried respondent had this to say,

Bank reconciliation is not easy if you don't have a bursar to help with the books of accounts. Fund tracking is involved to come up with clean bank reconciliation. (Respondent 16)

A bank reconciliation statement must be drawn up at the end of every month. Failure to do bank reconciliations calls into question a school's administrative capability, its fiscal responsibility, and its system of internal controls. Reconciliation is a process in which financial records are compared and discrepancies resolved. Conducting reconciliation monthly can ensure that an institution is properly

exercising its fiduciary responsibilities to safeguard public funds and ensure that they are used as intended (Demba, G.A.2013).

Schools should review the procedures regularly to identify issues and make any necessary improvements. A school must meet all cash management and disbursement reporting requirements. Regular reconciliation can help identify and resolve discrepancies so that schools can stay in compliance. One respondent, in their capacity as accounting officer remarked, *“Updating books that you have no knowledge of is not easy. We end up doing what we think is right”*.

This indicated that the respondents do not update books because they lack knowledge on accounting principles. This has an effect on financial management in primary schools.

At school J, the cash book was not available and the school head said it had been misplaced. In some schools’ Eco- cash was being received as a method of paying fees. There was currently no policy on the receipt of eco cash into individual heads account other than school merchant code. According to Radjak & Hiola (2020), the use of individual accounts has the loopholes of being fertile ground for fraud.

The examination of financial records carried out in 10 schools under study revealed that there were financial management issues. Documents seen at School B revealed that receipts were not recorded in the cash book. These created chances of omitting received money since amounts in the money cannot be referenced. On subsidiary receipts, master receipts were not issued at school B giving room for embezzlement of funds. Receipts issued should be recorded in the subsidiary master receipt book recorded in the cash book as required by section 20(3) of Si 87 of 1992 as read together with section 7.1.7 of the Administration and Finance Circular Minute Number 6 of 1994 and Treasury Instructions. The statutory states that money collected through the subsidiary receipts should be issued with a master receipt and posted into the cash book.

Levying unauthorized fees was seen in 10 percent of the schools whose documents were viewed. School F charged an amount without an approval from the Ministry. This revealed no compliance to regulations, which is another challenge in financial management. Probing on the issue of approval letters for levies from the Ministry of Primary and secondary Education, the school leader at schools C, D and E said that they thought it was not mandatory to apply for approval since they had not increased fees for the past three years. The Education Act 2020 regulates that schools should not charge or levy any fees without approval, and that there is free basic education from lower primary to ordinary level.

Examination of records also revealed that petty cash reimbursements were recorded in the cash book as an expense. Probing on this issue revealed that school leaders were not aware of how to record petty cash in the cash analysis book among other recordings. They indicated the need for trainings on how to post recordings in books of finance. Petty cash payments were not recorded in blue under the petty cash column. A summary of payments made during the month should be transferred from the petty cash book and allocated to the appropriate expenditure column. Section (8-9) (8.9.1) of the Administration and Finance Circular Minute Number 6 of 1994 and Treasury Instructions

Payment vouchers were observed by the researcher. 20 percent of the schools were making withdrawals and making bulk payments vouchers and these were accompanied by various payees who were not recorded in the cash books. Minutes numbers authorizing payments were not recorded as well. 30 percent of the schools had no payment vouchers and were making recordings of expenditure in exercise books. It will be difficult to know the person responsible for the shortage if the payee is not recorded in the cash book. Unauthorized payments can be processed. This challenge, can be solved when payment vouchers are prepared for each payee, payment recording done in the cash book and authorization for payment forms signed.

Table2. *Petty cash compliance*

Schools with petty cash float	20%
Schools without petty cash float	80%
Schools using electronic money transfers	40%

It was noted that 80 percent of the schools had no petty cash float. This revealed noncompliance to regulations. Probing by heads indicated that cash was usually not available for withdrawals from banks. The other issue mentioned was that of Covid 19 containment regulations which encouraged use of electronic money transfers than use of cash. It was brought to the researchers' attention that schools agree on petty cash float but travel and subsistence arrears always accrue due to the demands in the new curriculum, Covid containment and need to upgrade school infrastructure and teaching materials. This made the schools withdraw more than the float. The Administration and Finance Circular Minute Number 6 of 1994 indicates that the maximum petty cash float should be maintained as required. (Section Administration and Finance Circular Minute Number 6 of 1994 section 8. (8.1.) (8.1.1).

The procurement record is an important financial document kept by schools. Procurement regulations S.I 160 OF 2012 section 5(1) provides that where a procuring entity requires the supply of goods, construction works or services the value of which is 10 000 United States dollars the procuring entity shall obtain at least three competitive quotations.

Section 6 (2) requires letters of quotation to be entered on a comparative schedule. Of the schools visited 30 percent did not have procurement committees in place hence all activities such as sourcing of quotations and the decision to buy was being done by the finance subcommittee contrary to the requirements of policy. (Sections Administration and Finance Circular Minute Number 6 of 1994 6(6.1) 6.1.2). This area was seen as a challenge for school heads which needed redress.

Schools' priorities were not met in 80 percent of the schools because of inadequate funds as parents were not paying levies. Radjak & Hiola (2020) avers that education is a non-material good that cannot be free because to provide it, funding is required for the training of human resources, employment of experts, land, buildings, and teaching and learning materials. As a durable good, education is expensive. However, it has a multiplier effect in that it aids the government, society and individuals. The school head also performs a greater part in the procurement process. It is also the responsibility of the school head to oversee financial statements. The school head performs the duty of internal auditing. School heads carry out a pivotal role in managing school finances.

The findings are commensurate with the results of the study by Mapolisa, et al (2014) that most of the SDC members were illiterate on financial matters and as a result just endorsed the school heads' decisions. The results of the study further confirm that some school heads are using school funds before banking and this has created problems in balancing off financial books in schools. Such practices are against financial management policies provided by Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Consequently, the finding corresponds with Bua and Adzongo's (2014) observation that poor management of finance results in financial misappropriation, embezzlement and diversion of finance for different projects.

The study revealed that 100 percent of the schools sampled mainly rely on support from grants and other donors. As a result, funds are utilized from non-budget items.

R8: Beam funding and Net one grants should be availed in time.

R100: Funding should be increased.

However, respondents noted that grants were becoming erratic and not coming on time to meet school budget's needs. This observation was noted by Griffins (1994:16), who observed that:

“Years have passed when schools were snugly and safely financed through grants. Nowadays the head must be both a fund-raiser and a public relations expert.”

A stock control register is an important financial management document. The researcher checked on the availability of stock control registers. It was noted that 70 percent of the schools used a counter book as a stock control register. The records seen had items issued without running balances. Using a counter book as a stock record and recording without running balances could give room for stock abuse. Probed on why the stock control register had gaps, respondent 3 indicated that

I have no training on stock management and request for training in record management. (Respondent 3)

Data collected from questionnaires and interviews was also triangulated by the use of document analysis. The researcher visited schools to check on the availability of legal documents, financial records, recordings, and to check whether schools were using and referring to legal documents in financial management, being audited or receiving financial management supervision from Ministry of education officials. Schools are expected to keep books of finance as required by the Education Act chapter 24: 04 as amended, 2006 section 8(5) in conjunction with section 80 of the Public Finance Management Act (Chapter 22: 19) which require audit of statutory funds. School internal management and accounting control systems are recorded in books or kept as a recording. The researcher's main objective in checking on documents in schools was mainly to: Verify compliance with the education act, statutory instruments, treasury instructions, procurement procedures and regulations accounting officers' instructions and circulars; observe whether assets of the school are safe guarded and recorded in the appropriate registers and that there is sound management of stock items purchased and issued; Ascertain whether cash collected was receipted, recorded and banked intact within the time frame stipulated in the Treasury instructions; Verify that payments were approved by the finance subcommittee and that they were supported by appropriate supporting vouchers and acknowledge in the minute book; To check whether the school is maintaining the school fees and levies' registers and that there were timeous collection of school fees and levies from parents to support 1.Security items and assets registers 2.Cash books and bank reconciliation statements 3. School fees and levies registers 3. Payment vouchers and supporting documents.4 Finance subcommittee minute book5. School fees and invoice books.

30% of the schools visited could not locate their cash books. Further probing on the whereabouts of the books showed that the books were not kept in security rooms but given to teachers or bursars who kept them in their offices separate from the head's office or strong rooms. Respondent from school 6 pointed that:

The bursar keeps our records but she lives in the community. She keeps the keys with her. We cannot access the books in her absence. We have no strong room.(respondent from school 6)

This means that there was room for the records to be manipulated, doctored or falsified. 40 percent of the schools observed had records which were not updated. Cash analysis books were not reconciled, and not updated among the books of finance seen.

Findings reveal that rural primary school heads in Mudzi district are not fully aware and do not understand all the financial management documents, processes and procedures that constitute the legal framework that guide financial management in Zimbabwe. It is also the research's finding that rural primary school heads in Mudzi district do not possess the right knowledge, training and skills required for effective financial management in their schools. The factors affecting the competence of rural primary school heads in Mudzi district in the financial management of their schools found include, training, experience, absence of policies, in adequate funding, untrained bursars, distance to banks, delayed uptake of electronic banking, low payment of school fees and inconsistencies in policy interpretation.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are given: 1. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should train school heads in all areas of financial management documents, processes and procedures that constitute the legal framework that guide financial management in Zimbabwe. 2.Workshops and seminars on adequate financial management should be mounted for serving school heads and deputy heads to improve their competencies and prepare them for efficient management of funds.3. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should supervise school heads financial management competencies and practices for early identification and avoidance of mismanagement of funds.4. the uptake of electronic banking and fund management in schools should be encouraged.

15. CONCLUSION

For the development of any country's educational system, there is need for proper school financial management. Without adequate financial management, even the most viable and effective schools are bound to crumble. The competencies of school heads in financial management are key. Non-adherence to financial policies, books of accounts which were not up to date, situations where school heads raised funds through several means but still fail to engage in proper disbursement of funds imply that ineffective funds management characterise most schools. Mismanagement of school funds, as a result of no training, means that the programme objectives of education would not be achieved. It is a major task for school heads to engage in trainings and practices that would enhance their competencies and enable effective financial management.

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