

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Motivating Zimbabwean secondary school students to learn: A challenge

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Motivating Zimbabwean secondary school students to learn has been a daunting task for both parents and teachers. The economic and social situation obtaining in Zimbabwe has not encouraged secondary school students to take education seriously and prepare themselves for service and contribution to nation building and self- development. Thus the study sought to understand factors that militate against student motivation and what can be done to motivate secondary school students to learn, soliciting views from teachers, parents/guardians and students themselves. The research was a case study of five Masvingo urban secondary schools; employing qualitative data collection methods. These participatory data collection methods were used to get insight and tap into the experiences and views of these three stakeholders on how students could be motivated to learn. The research found that the motivational level of secondary school students was at its lowest ebb mainly because of limited employment prospects and other militating factors. The research recommends that each school establishes a tripartite supervision and communication arrangement involving the parent/guardian, teacher and the student to monitor the student's school work, behaviour and development. The other recommendation is that Zimbabwe as a nation should seriously embrace student empowerment initiatives by having professionally trained school – based counsellors and increased availability and access to career guidance services thus motivating students to drive their energies towards goals.

**Key words:** Motivation, curriculum relevance, teacher morale, parental involvement, peer pressure.

## INTRODUCTION

Motivating Zimbabwean secondary school students to learn has become one of the major challenges for both teachers and parents. Gone are the days when children longed to go to school and learn as well as prepare themselves for service in the community and the nation. The mere thought of going to school, to those going to school for the first time, was fascinating, generated hope for a bright future and was seen as the only honest prospect for decent future survival. Today, the motivation has fizzled out with very few genuinely interested in learning. A lot that learning has promised has not materialised. A great number of those who have gone to school and have passed are either in a thankless job or are at home irking out a living through the most difficult

means. Ironically, a lot of the school dropouts have 'made it' after all. Young minds are gullible. In the eyes of the young minds success is measured by having money to visit a fast food outlet, buying new clothes, having the latest cellphone handset and other transient things. It is these small seemingly interesting things that easily attract them and matter to them. The here and now is more satisfying to them than preparing for a future that they are not sure about. Adolescence should be a time for education and growing up.

The great economic melt down of 2001 to 2008 in Zimbabwe did not help matters either, with unemployment rate estimated at over 80%. Compared to the early 1980s, Benneli and Ncube (1993) observed that none of the traced secondary school graduates were unemployed and virtually all of them were doing jobs that were appropriate given their level of education and or training. Now the situation has changed drastically. According to Smith and Cowie (1995) many school leavers in

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developing countries experience unemployment at some stage in the 16 to 19 year age group. According to Gottfredson and Chui (2001) even in the United States of America and other developed countries a significant percentage of school leavers face unemployment. Munowenyu's (1999) research showed that in Zimbabwe in 1996, 167 937 candidates wrote Ordinary level examinations in vocational subjects, compared to 682 090 in academic subjects. There was a national pass rate of about 20% in academic subjects and 10% were absorbed by industry and commerce and a small percentage proceeded to advanced level and the rest of the students were unaccounted for or they roamed the streets. Farrant (1980: 238) comments:

The recognition that the output of such schools exceeds the capacity of the job market to absorb such qualifications has prompted a number of countries to revise the curriculum of secondary education so that pupils leave school with qualifications that are of immediate and practical use.

Failure to realise and implement curriculum change and innovations as suggested by Farrant has created the present scenario in Zimbabwe of a nation of workers with no one to work for. Students are more likely to want to learn when they appreciate the value of the classroom activities as translating to and making real-world connections (Sasson, 2007; Ainley, 2004). Students take great motivation from the realisation that the skills they acquire at school can be applied to the real world.

Gottfredson (2001) observed that the size of the school influences school's microclimate, the bigger the school, the more students who do not want to learn, the colder the relationship of teachers and students especially with a high teacher-pupil ratio, resulting in more negative emotions and conditions related to learning. This situation has been worsened by the fact that at secondary level in Zimbabwe, teachers are grouped according to subject specialisation and perceive themselves as subject specialists and less subject to feel responsibility for other processes which are not related to the subject they teach, that is the behaviour and concentration levels of their students. While some students have their own intrinsic motivation or external motivation, other students need to be motivated to learn. Researches and articles on student motivation (Maphosa, 1999; Brophy, 2004; Sasson, 2007; Adeyemo, 2007) indicate that many of our present pedagogical practices effectively crush most students' desire to learn as they fail to connect the cognitive and goal-oriented features. Brophy (2004) says that it becomes incumbent upon the teachers to show positive attitudes in approach, feelings, sensibility, awareness, alertness and understanding when dealing with students. The most important aspect on student motivation is that teachers' attitude makes all the difference (Sasson, 2007) and if they are satisfied with

their job their confidence to make positive impact on student motivation is enhanced (Adeyemo, 2007). In Zimbabwe, teacher efficacy has been the biggest challenge with Ainley (2004) describing learning conditions and environment as failing to trigger, support or change student motivation to learn.

Now the promise and the old adage, 'with school you will not go wrong' becomes an empty cliché devoid of sense, meaning and wisdom to the generality of secondary school going students. Real examples from their localities of those school leavers who have been failed by school are the daily live stories to tell. According to Mooney (1994) when the situation is like this, motivation for academic achievement is of little significance if schooling has no purchase on the future. The question is, how do you hold the child in school when there is little to gain from staying in school? Motivation to learn has been seen as a means to an end, which is a good life and if this does not happen education would have failed in its highest end leading to frustration. A number of research studies now point to the personal consequences of youth unemployment in terms of psychological distress, anxiety, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, stigma and lowered self-esteem (Smith and Cowie, 1995). With this scenario, children are literally driven to school. Teachers at school have not made their situation any better. Sternberg (2000) observed that teachers in their well-meaning attempts to help less motivated students often strike a fatal blow that damages young lives with negative labelling, relentless reprimanding, nagging and punishments. Teachers, according to Ainley (2004) need to harness students' dispositions they bring to their learning such as interests, responsibility for learning effort, values and perceived abilities to uplift motivational levels.

However, at secondary level one would expect that children are now more focused, career driven and forward looking in terms of opportunities learning would avail to them. A lot has been done by both schools, tertiary institutions and industry and commerce to educate secondary school going children on various career prospects through career guidance and integration of work related skills in the classroom (Hardy, 1999; Munowenyu, 1999). It should be noted that secondary level is when these children are at their crisis period, the teenage 'syndrome'. This is the time when they are conscious that the world is looking at them in all respects. According to Nelson-Jones (1996) it is a time when youth and sexual attractiveness often appear more valued than wisdom and maturity. Hardy (1999) notes that it is hard and challenging to be a teen parent. It is also evident that the demands of school weigh heavily on them and the question of choice becomes more visible and pronounced. Choices arise, to be in school and remain focused or follow the teen pressure and treasure hunt and become a 'man of the world'. This is not an easy choice for secondary school going students and the

balance is tilted towards the latter. Researchers have tended to support the view that adolescents become more peer oriented and less parent oriented hence peers have considerable influence on choice (Smith and Cowie, 1995).

Parents and guardians still look up to school as the only viable option for their children. They struggle through the most difficult moments to raise school fees, buy uniforms, books and all other school requirements hoping to reap from that investment and also secure a future for their children. Some even dispose their hard-earned properties to fund their children's education. They are spurred on by the intrinsic value that they attach to education. Parental involvement is, thus, critical in determining student motivation. Thus, Brophy (2004) has seen parents stimulating their children to learn most directly through modelling, communication of expectations and direct communication or socialisation hence creating a supportive environment and establishing a trusting bond. It is against this background that the study sought to find out what can be done to motivate students to learn given the challenges that Zimbabwe is facing, especially given the fact that both teachers and students are having motivational challenges.

### Statement of the problem

Challenges faced by Zimbabwean secondary schools in motivating students to learn. The sub- problems covered by this study were:

- (1) What are the factors that militate against student motivation to learn at secondary school level in Zimbabwe?
- (2) How can secondary school students be motivated to learn?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Motivational theories

Motivation, according to Brophy (2004) is a theoretical construct used to explain initiation, direction, intensity, persistence and quality of behaviour, especially goal directed behaviour. He further notes that motivation is rooted in students' subjective experiences especially those connected to their willingness to engage in lessons and learning activities and their reasons for doing so. Furthermore, Owens (1995) says in educational terms, motivation deals with the question why some students go to school every day and do as little as necessary while others are full of energy and ideas. Motivation explains the attitude of students towards their work and their willingness to apply themselves at the highest level to achieve set targets. Chindanya (2000) say the motivation process consists of the identification or appreciation of an unsatisfied need, the establishment of a goal, which will

satisfy the need. It should be understood that when motivation is low, performance suffers as a result.

This study is, thus, informed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs motivational theory which underlines that people are driven from within to realise their full growth and potential. According to Owens (1995) human needs are hierarchically ordered in a four stage system which are physiological/ survival, safety and security, belongingness and esteem needs. It is the first order which is the concern of this study. The physiological/ survival needs consist of the need for basic necessities such as clothing, food, water and shelter and these are only made possible if money and employment are there. Furthermore, cognitive models and behavioural reinforcement theories of motivation which emphasise cognitive, goal oriented features and reinforcement are important to this study. The availability of a reinforcer (anything that increases or maintains the frequency of a behaviour when access to it is made contingent on performance of that behaviour) help students develop subjective experiences such as their needs, goals or motivation related thinking (Brophy, 2004). According to [www.kidsource.com](http://www.kidsource.com) (2009) the degree to which task engagement can be motivated by reinforcer availability depends on the degree to which learners value the reinforcer, expect its delivery upon completion of the task and believe that doing so enables them to gain access to the reinforcer which is worth the cost in time, effort and foregone opportunities. In order to successfully motivate secondary school students to learn the reinforcer should be the need to meet the lower needs according to Maslow along with their higher needs. Students need to see the meaningfulness, value, and benefit of any academic endeavour. Thus, most secondary students are motivated to learn if they realise that after school they can increase their employment prospects and meet these physiological needs first before they can think of other higher order life desires.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

The case study was used employing the qualitative paradigm. The design helped bring perspectives, in-depth vision and experiences of students, teachers and parents through informed participation. The aim was to understand what motivates students to learn from the insider's perspective and appreciate participants as they view the problem and ascribe meaning to their life world (Ary et al., 1996; Hoberg, 1999). In addition, qualitative design allowed the use of high level critical reflective dialogical strategies (Shipman, 1985) and in this case, the study used focus group discussions in respect of students and interviews in respect of teachers and parents. Focus group discussion, which was discussion based, allowed multiple research participants, that is secondary school students to simultaneously produce data on what motivated them to learn. The student groups discussed and described their experiences in their own vocabulary and local terms, grounded in their lived experiences and ways of perceiving reality (Chilisa and Preece, 2005). Furthermore, focus group discussions checked for data

accuracy as group members questioned, complemented and collaborated what was said.

Interviews, the interaction between the researchers and participants, that is teachers and parents complemented and cross validated findings from group discussions. The interview was chosen as it allowed dialogue, a two way communication between the researchers and the interviewees (Weirisma, 1995). This allowed clarification thus making responses more authentic and comprehensive. Thus, the two interactive data collection methods enabled the researchers to dialogue with participants and recording what they said about what motivated students to learn. These research techniques yielded descriptive rather than statistical data. Thus, the research did not convert lived social life of participants into variables or numbers (Neuman, 2006).

### Population and sampling

The population comprised the five Masvingo urban secondary schools. It was from these secondary schools that participants were drawn from consisting of teachers and form four secondary school students and parents / guardians of participating students. The sample was five form four teachers purposefully sampled from each of the five secondary schools that is (25 teachers); ten form four students from each of the participating schools that is (50 students) and fifty (50) parents/ guardians of the sampled students. The selection of form 4 ('O' level) students was mainly motivated by the consideration that form 4 is one of the most important exit points in the Zimbabwean education system. At this point students would either proceed with their education to 'A' level or become part of the statistics of unemployed youths or prospective job seekers. It was important to record their views on the eve of entering the socio-economic jungle as at this point, there are so many questions they ask themselves about their future.

### Data collection procedure

Both the interviews and focus group discussion were administered by the researchers. Teachers and parents were interviewed using semi- structured interview schedules covering how secondary school students could be motivated to learn. Form four secondary school students at each of the participating schools were organised into discussion groups. Interviews and the focus group discussion were recorded using notes. It was this qualitative data that was coded into themes used in this study.

### Data analysis

Data was analysed qualitatively and descriptive analysis technique was employed and enabled researchers to highlight consistencies and inconsistencies that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions. In this study, analysis was closely related to data collection consistent with qualitative researches. With the volumes of data from focus group discussions and interviews, data had to be organised in a way easy to retrieve for use, through breaking it into themes resulting in a good case for credibility and conformability of findings (Chilisa and Preece, 2005). In order to cross check reflected positions and sentiments, theme verification with participants was done during data collection.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the qualitative data collected from the focus group discussion and interviews yielded five

themes namely; the economic environment/ job market, teacher morale, curriculum relevance, peer influence and parental involvement.

### The economic environment

Economic factors have contributed to general motivational problems among secondary school going students. The diamond rush at Chiadzwa, the quick money from exchanging the Zimdollar to foreign currency or the so called cross rate (the rand to US dollar or vice versa), the sale of fuel on the black market, the rand rush to South Africa, the general chikorokoza (selling anything at the highest possible prize), the list is endless of how people made a lot of money within the shortest possible time in the absence of formal job opportunities on the market. The research was carried out during this depressed economic environment in Zimbabwe.

From the focus group discussion and interviews, students, teachers and parents were generally agreed that the attitude of students towards school has been adversely affected by what is happening on the job market where a lot of school leavers are without formal employment. The biggest motivator to learn for the students has been the prospect of getting a job and helping themselves and their parents/ guardians meet their financial obligations. This is consistent with Maslow's hierarchy of needs motivational theory (Owens, 1995) and cognitive models and behavioural reinforcement theories of motivation (Brophy, 2004; www.kidsource.com, 2009) employment prospects act as a reinforcer and motivation to complete an educational process should enable students to gain access to the reinforcer which is worth the cost in time, effort and resources. Students, in focus group discussion, acknowledged that there were very few job opportunities today and there were so many examples of school leavers and even university graduates without jobs and their question was, 'What guarantee is there that we will get a job after school?'. Their argument was that those who have not gone to school or have gone but failed and are either vendors or makorokoza (doing some menial jobs/ buying and selling anything) are getting much more than educated professionals especially civil servants. A very interesting example given by most students was of mahwindi (touts) who for loading one vehicle they get one passenger's fare and if they load ten vehicles, for example, from Masvingo to Harare per day, at \$5-00 per vehicle, they end up with \$50-00 a day which is one third of a civil servant's monthly salary. They said these touts often sing mocking today's professionals and the so called educated, '*Dai ndakadzidza dai ndiri rombe*' (Education leads to destitution). Some even cited a good number of their friends and relatives who did not go up to form four and trekked down South Africa, and whatever they are doing, they are better off than most professionals

in Zimbabwe. To students these examples have demotivated them to apply themselves fully in their studies. But Yair (2000) emphasises the need for students to be intrinsically motivated and they are likely to be lifelong learners, continuing to educate themselves outside the formal school setting long after motivators such as employment prospects are removed.

Parents and teachers, during interviews, also weighed in with the same argument that it has not been easy to motivate students to concentrate on school work as the world around them is all gloom and doom. Their arguments were that the great inflation and depression of 2008 had destroyed any hopes people had about any employment prospects with so many industries closing down and a few remaining either down-sizing or right-sizing. One parent said that the job market was so saturated that 'thinking that my school going child would one day get a job would be a miracle which I hope I would live to see'. In addition, another parent also said that there is nothing around these young minds to motivate them to learn and that we have since moved away from seeing education for the sake of it, it should be a means to an end. However, there were some parents and teachers during interviews who, while they agreed with these sentiments, thought that this is just a passing phase and sooner than later we are to wake up to the reality when education is going to count. One teacher remarked,

Schooling is always a fall back on issue and should be pursued despite the current depressed economic situation. Definitely things will change one day and it is those with education who will benefit. You are better off with it than without it. Parents interviewed, despite showing desolation and frustration about employment prospects for these students, said they would continue to make sacrifices to fund their children's education. They gave varying reasons for doing so. One of the reasons given was that it is difficult to keep children of that age at home; they need to be gainfully engaged so that they are not to some mischief. Another reason by one parent was more of fear of what the community would say if he does not send his child to school when he said, 'What would the community think of me as a parent, definitely they would think am irresponsible'. Some parents said that most of them struggle to make ends face let alone meet and this has seriously affected and stressed students as well and this leads to boys dropping from school in search for survival of the family. One parent despondently noted; *Kunyangwe zvazvo zvotaridza kuti hapana chinobuda pakudzidza kunyangwe mwana akadzidza kusvika kupi, isu savabereki tinongoita basa redu rekuendesha vana ava kuchikoro kuti vasazochema nesu kuti hatina kuvadzidzisa* (It is evident that one can not expect much from these children, but as parents we have to do our part so that they do not blame us later in life). Students are worried about the here and now and if things are not going on well they easily become

disillusioned.

### Teacher morale

The research found that teachers' low morale has negatively contributed to low motivation levels among secondary school students. At school, students in their focus group discussion observed that teacher enthusiasm and commitment has been at its lowest ebb and in most instances they (students) have been left to their own devices. Teachers have often given work without explaining it and it emerged from the focus group discussions that students were asked to help each other whenever they had academically related problems as well as mark their own work. Students also observed that practically teachers have resigned from their work only maintaining a physical presence. *Izita kunzi tine maticha vanongouya vogara votipa basa rokuita. Vanoti chitupa chavo vanacho kare asingade kudzidza oga ndezvake* (Teachers come just to give us work as they relax. They always tell us that they have their certificates and those who do not apply themselves is their fault). This in line with Adeyemo's (2007) research findings that when teachers are satisfied with their job, their confidence to make positive impact is enhanced. Furthermore, Brophy's (2004) findings indicate that in every class there are weak students, and teachers must realise that such students are accustomed to experiencing failure, hence teachers' task is to motivate and help them experience success. The blame on teachers was also that they spend more time engaged in some income generating activities to supplement their meagre salaries hence very little time spent on their core business, which is teaching. As a result, students enter the examination room ill prepared resulting in a high failure rate. Examples of these failures are what students see everyday which do not motivate them much to concentrate on their studies. The interviewed teachers confirmed that their morale was at its lowest considering the less than adequate salary the government was paying them. One of the teachers echoing sentiments of the generality of teachers said, *'Tinongoshanda zvinoenderana nemuhoro* (Commitment to work is commensurate with what we earn). This is in line with students' observation in focus group discussions that teachers have just maintained a physical presence. The current development where schools are encouraged to pay incentives to augment government salary has worsened rather than alleviating the situation. The tragedy here was that there was no standard figure that schools should pay out to teachers. The figure differed from one school to another depending on its capacity. These disparities have dampened the morale of teachers especially from those schools that struggle to pay and pay little. A lot of productive time is spent by teachers, administrators and responsible authorities fighting over payment of incentives and comparing with what other

schools pay. One interviewed teacher said, 'How can you put a lot of effort in your teaching when you are aware that at the next school teachers are getting twice as much in incentives than you get yet you have the same qualifications?'. This has seen parents overstretched as schools continue to demand more from them to pay these incentives. Despite the payment of incentives, which teachers say is not enough; teachers have not exerted themselves as expected, said by students during focus group discussions. It is this kind of attitude and lack of commitment to duty by teachers that has seen students failing their 'O' level examination, in the end demotivating students to learn. Students in their focus group discussion said that going to school was just fulfilling an expectation especially of parents. According to these students, because teachers do so little by way of teaching, school has become a place where students meet to share latest information on music, sports and general socialisation at the expense of their core business which is learning. *Kwava kungoendawo kuchikoro*, retorted one student during group discussion (The idea is just physical presence). Teachers have a mammoth task to build the confidence of both students and parents and to show that they have what it takes to help these children realise their full potential.

### Curriculum relevance

The curriculum in operation in schools has not motivated students to learn as it has very little to offer in terms of skills that can be used after school, the research found. The curriculum has largely remained academic with emphasis on regurgitating and reproducing read concepts in the examinations and very little application of read concepts. Focus group discussion results indicated that the slow learners are also not motivated to learn because of the curriculum which emphasise too much on academic subjects. Their argument was that as less able students they should be allowed to concentrate more on practical subjects where they enjoy the hands on experience and not the difficult academic subjects like mathematics, science to mention a few. In this spirit, Sternberg (2000) says that knowledge in basic subjects is not sufficient to help students become well- rounded and productive members of society. Furthermore, from interview results one parent observed, '*Vana vedu vanoverenga chose mabhuku, asi zvemubato wemaoko havazvigone uye havazvide*' (Emphasis has been on reading and nothing on practical skills). A great number of secondary school graduates have had no skills of immediate use. Focus group discussion and interview results revealed that the secondary school graduates have been schooled and myopically directed towards job hunting than coming up with their own work and employment initiatives. Thus, Yair (2000) is of the opinion that students must take a balanced curriculum, leading to

a holistic education taking into account content and practices that develop the whole child. Such type of curriculum expands rather than restricts choices. Students in their focus group discussions and from interviews of parents revealed the great desire and expectation to be employed after school. As one parent put it; *Vana vedu havasi kuwana mabasa kana vapedza chikoro mushure mokunge tashandisa mari yakawanda kuvadzidzisa. Hurumende ngaione zvokuita* (Our children are not getting jobs after completing their education and after having spent a lot of money. The government must do something). This is to echo Ipaye's (1986) research observations that most pupils and parents do not want education principally as an end in itself but as a means of getting better employment and improved conditions of living. These statements summarise the feelings of parents about what they expect from secondary school graduates; they should simply get jobs.

### Peer influence

Learners have had a serious influence on each other as peers. This observation is consistent with McNeil (2008)'s view that relationships between peer groups are quite different from relationships with family members, they are likely to be symmetrical, involving an exchange of problems and advice and they are a powerful source of identity and motivation. Interviewed teachers confirmed that at this age and level, students are usually caught up in peer pressure and if they are in wrong company, they might not find schooling motivating. In the same spirit Ritzer (2008) adds that usually students at this level have very little creative capacity in their concept of the definition of the situation and at times have had situations defined for them by their peers. As remarked by one teacher during interviews: 'Students who associate with individuals pursuing positive goals and commitment have a far less chance of being less motivated to learn'. The majority of the parents interviewed concurred with the teachers that students who spend more time with less motivated peers undergo a great deal of pressure to adopt the same behaviour. To quote the words of one parent: '*Vana vedu vanofuririka nezvinhu zvisina basa rese ndokusaka uchiona voitiswa pamuviri nemadhara vamwe vove vasvuti vembanje nezvimwe zvinodhaka* (Our children are gullible no wonder why they end up being impregnated by old married men (sugar daddies) and others are drug abusers). Both teachers and parents, during interviews, agreed that the lack of motivation to learn on the part of students was primarily the influence of peers and seemingly absolving their secondary students as responsible beings who have a choice.

There was a split when students were asked in their focus group discussion about the influence of peers in motivating them to learn. Some agreed that the presence and company of antischool peers result in some

abandoning their visions and dreams to be accepted by their wayward peers. *'Wakada kuita serious nechikoro uchitamba nevasingachide unogona kushaya shamwari nazvo'*, said one student in one focus group discussion, to the approval of many (Being serious with schooling in the company of antischool peers may result in you being ostracised). The general feeling among these students was that one should belong to a group and the need to be careful about the group cannot be overemphasised. On the other hand there were the other students who acknowledged that the bond between friends is often so strong but one can always influence them to be positive about learning and education. One of these students said, *'Zvokuinfluentswa zvinoenderana nemunhu uye nokuti how weak you are, wakawana vanokubatsira muchikoro, kunyangwe usingachide unozongopedzisira wava mutune nevamwe'* (To be negatively influenced depends on an individual's mental strength, but if encouraged by peers you end up motivated). These students underplayed the influence of peers and that being negatively influenced to learn is a sign of lack of vision, direction and maturity. They said that despite the general economic gloom and few job prospects, it is every child's wish that they pass at every exit point in their academic journey. They said that their parents often reminded them of their expectation.

While the two positions showed that some students can cope and survive negative influences of peer pressure, others can succumb. The onus is on both teachers and parents to break and model students who are in negative peer associations to harness and excite their energies towards learning. Therefore peer influence has a strong bearing towards students' motivation to learn or not.

### Parental involvement

The research found that family is the central institution in the control of motivation for students to learn especially with their encouragements, keen interest in the student's work and provision of basic learning materials. Some parents have shown very little concern and interest about their children's academic progress. Parents, during interviews, were generally agreed that it is their responsibility to send their children to school and motivating them while at school but they had different reasons for doing so. Some thought that at school their children will be exposed to important life information about culture, HIV/AIDS issues and useful skills and competencies through practical subjects, skills which they would use after school. The consensus among parents was that in Zimbabwe today basic education is now 'O'level and every child must attain that level. One parent had this to say about their reason for sending his child to school; *'Chikoro ndicho chava vanatete vamazuva ano uko vana vanodzidziswa kurarama kunyanya mukore uno wechirwere chemukondombera'* (Schooling has taken the

role of aunts in educating students about life in general and more specifically about HIV/AIDS). Another parent also indicated, *'Hazvigone kugara nemwana asingaende kuchikoro, asingagone kuverenga nokunyora mukore uno, zvinonyadzisa'* (One cannot afford to have an illiterate child in the home in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's a shame).

From the study it was refreshing to note that parents knew their responsibilities albeit to a limited extent. Parents, the research found, were motivated to send their children to school because of perceived benefits but were ignorant of their other important role of motivating their children to apply themselves while at school. Some of the interviewed parents saw their contribution as ending at paying fees and making available other basic educational provisions and anything beyond that was seen as the function of the school and teachers. One parent had this to say; *Kana ndabhadhara mari yechikoro neyemaintentives, uye ndatenga zvole zvinodikanwa seuniform nemabhuku, zvasara ndezvematacha kuti vaone kuti vana vadzidza. Handide kupindira mubasa ravo, ivo vanozoitei?* (After paying fees and incentives and buying all other school requirements, the rest is now in the hands of teachers to ensure that students learn. I do not want to interfere with their work, what will they do then?). Parents with such attitudes have resigned everything to the school and may not even attend school development meetings, open and consultation days and sports days to see and motivate their children to be committed to school activities. Such parents according to Sasson (2007) do not create a supportive and motivating home environment and may not be keen on helping out with homework and help the teachers may need.

General sentiments by most parents interviewed were that teachers had let them down miserably as teachers themselves lacked direction and commitment hence parents were not impressed by their work ethics no wonder why students fail in their examinations leading to general apathy towards education. Teachers were described by parents as greedy, inconsiderate as they always asked for higher incentives, did very little by way of doing their core- business which is teaching. One parent had this to say about today's teachers, *'Maticha amazuva ano angakurudzire sei vana kudzidza ivo vakatoresigner vari pabasa, vanongoshevedzera maintentive akati kuuya mazuva ano, vasiyana nevekare'* (The present crop of teachers cannot motivate our children to learn as they themselves look resigned while still at work and are concerned about incentives, they are different from the old generation of teachers). From this the research found that teacher- parent – school relationship seem to have broken down and boarded on mistrust, was distant and cold and the unfortunate victims were the students. From this, it was evident that teachers and parents struggled to connect in a meaningful way that helps improve student motivation.

In the same vein, the interviewed teachers were



defensive and blamed the level of education of parents as the reason why they do not find it important to motivate their children to learn. One teacher remarked, 'the more educated the parents, the more they are likely to discuss the advantage of learning and encourage their children to be more proactive and productive in school'. *Unofunga mubereki asina kufunda angawanepi simba rokukurudzira mwana kuti adzidze, haatonzwisisi kukosha kwechikoro, ndivo vanorovhesa vana chikoro nezvisina nebasa rose* (Illiterate parents do not see the value of education and often want their children absent from school on flimsy reasons). Some teachers during the interviews attributed this lack of motivation among secondary school students to some dysfunctional families as they contributed towards the creation of fertile learning environment. However, some teachers felt it was nothing to do with the education levels but parents having what Holmes et al. (2001) call lack of interest to attend parent-teacher meetings, to check homework, or to respond to school discipline problems for their children leading to weaker parent-teacher-school social bond. All in all the research discovered that parents who are involved in their children's academic life have a positive effect on the child's motivation levels to learn and help create an appreciation for learning that can last a lifetime.

Research strongly supports the benefits of having parents involved in their children's schooling. According to Pape (1999) students whose parents remain involved make better transition, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future and students whose parents are not involved experience low motivational levels. Pape (1999) concluded that parent involvement, all that means all kinds of parents, improves students' motivation and achievements. Parents should get interested in seeing for themselves what their child knows and is able to do hence creating a support team with the teacher for the student. Disappointing, at times, is that parents shrug off their responsibility, they become hard to reach parents and this consequently negatively affects their children's motivation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings and discussion it can be concluded that Zimbabwean secondary school students have experienced serious motivational problems during their learning periods as a result of, chief among them, the depressed economic environment offering few employment opportunities, an academic curriculum that has failed to impart survival skills and demotivated teachers leading to a high failure rate to name a few. The academic journey of students has been frustrating. The study, thus, recommends the need for parents, teachers and students as cooperating partners and support team members to build a mutually beneficial and trustworthy relationship which would help students remain motivated

to learn. The blame game between and among teachers, parents and students may not help confidence building exercise where all dialogue on academic work of students. The research also concludes that parents have weighed in, in a big way, in financing education through payment of incentives though the need to standardize the incentives can not be overemphasised as this has divided teachers as well as creating hostilities between parents and teachers. Doing away with incentives is a noble and sensible action. The study, therefore recommends that government seriously adopts appropriate strategies for enhancing teacher job satisfaction and commitment as necessary ingredients for teacher efficacy in Zimbabwe. This can be achieved through paying above inflation salaries, coming up with non-monetary benefits like provision of residential stands, free duty on imported vehicles, and free education of their children as a way of uplifting teachers' motivational levels. The current salary regime has produced demotivated teachers and has had a rub on effect on students as they remain less focused on academic work and with no one to assist them.

The future of any nation depends on how it harnesses the potential and energies of its youths. The research observed that the future manpower and skills base has not been well nurtured and there has been serious wastage as most of the secondary school going students have not realised their full potential. The repercussions of this wastage will be felt later with shortages of critical manpower in various sectors of the economy as secondary school students, the hope of any nation, remain dejected and demotivated to learn. Zimbabwe as a nation should, therefore, seriously embrace student empowerment initiatives by having professionally trained school based counsellors and increased availability of career guidance services. Creating the much needed employment opportunities and to ensure that school leavers participate and contribute meaningfully in national development could be another sure way of motivating secondary school students to learn. Education should make use of appropriate technologies connecting students to life experiences. Education should, therefore, be an empowerment tool which makes students realise that the knowledge and skills they are learning today can be applied to the real world tomorrow.

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