

## Factors contributing to low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region, Namibia

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### **Abstract**

*This study sought to explore the factors that contribute to low teachers' morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region, Namibia. The study was guided by the following research questions: What are the factors that contribute to low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region?; How does teachers' low morale influence their execution of duties in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region?; How does low teacher morale influence the academic performance of learners in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region? And which strategies can be put in place to raise teachers' morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region? A qualitative exploratory design was used to explore the lived contextual experiences of teachers, in order to determine the factors contributing to low teachers' morale. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) teachers from four (4) selected secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region. The study used an interview with open-ended questions to collect data from the participants.*

*The qualitative data from open ended questions were organised into themes and sub-themes. The majority of the participants revealed that there was low morale amongst teachers in secondary schools in Oshana Educational Region. The factors contributing to low teacher morale in secondary schools were: work environment, school leadership, learners' interest in their education, parental involvement in education and admission policies. The study concluded that as a result of the above-mentioned factors, teachers suffer from low morale therefore, influencing the academic performance of learners in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should recognise the efforts of teachers, improve the work environment for teachers, as well as to strengthen personal and professional development programmes for teachers and school principals.*

**Keywords:** *teacher morale, factors, environment, performance, learners*

### **Background**

After Namibia attained its independence in 1990, education became a focal area for the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN). The Government paid attention to education, ensuring that there were enough funds allocated to the education sector. Education is considered a priority for every citizen of the Republic of Namibia, and it is clearly stated in Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution that "all persons shall have right to education" (Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2015, p.12). The then Ministry of Education and Culture (1993) placed emphasis on access, equity, quality and democracy within the Namibian education system to ensure that citizens not only receive education as their constitutional right, but that which is of quality and is significant in life.

However, with increased access, as one of the major goals of educational reform (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993), the education system expanded rapidly. This led to an increase in the number of learners, consequently resulting in a shortage of teachers.

Although a large number of teachers graduate from tertiary teacher training institutions, there is also a high number of teachers leaving the profession, and more who intend to leave the profession in anticipation for such an opportunity (Janik & Rothmann, 2015). The shortage of teachers is not attributed to the lack of supply but as a result of retention problem. Recruiting more teachers is not the solution to filling the vacancies that schools are experiencing; instead the Ministry

should attend to the issues that are influencing teachers to leave, thereby finding solutions that will effectively solve the problem of low teacher morale (Haukongo, 2016). Mackenzie (2007) notes that teacher morale has become a widely discussed phenomenon; it is a multidimensional concept that includes the influence of the job situation, the attitudes of individuals, the spirit of the organisation, and the managerial climate (Devi & Mani, 2010). Although the topic of teacher morale is not discussed directly in schools, the day to day activities of schools show that there is a growing concern about low teacher morale. George, Louw and Badenhorst (2008) explain that morale is the concept determined by a person's perception that treatment has been fair and consistent, opinions are valued, and work is meaningful.

Steyn (2014) opines that teacher morale can have a positive effect on learner behaviour and learning; raising teacher morale levels makes teaching more pleasant for teachers, and it also makes learning more pleasant for the learners, creating a favourable learning environment. In addition to these, Govindrajana (2012) confirms that where morale is high, schools are likely to have an increase in student achievement. Equally, low levels of satisfaction and morale can lead to reduced teacher productivity and burnout, which is associated with a loss of concern for, and detachment from co-workers, reduced quality of teaching, depression, greater use of sick leave, efforts to leave the profession, and a cynical and dehumanised perception of learners. DeAngelis and Presley (2011) assert that compared to most occupations, teaching has a relatively high turnover rate. It is also an occupation that loses many of its newly trained members early in their careers. In fact, as many as 39% leave teaching altogether in the first five years due to job dissatisfaction, or the desire to seek better jobs or other careers, making the overall amount of turnover accounted for by retirement relatively minor. There is a number of reasons why teachers decide to change schools, teaching assignments – or in some cases, leave teaching completely. Haukongo's (2016) survey found that teachers in Oshana Region were not motivated to teach, thus resulting in low morale.

Teachers leaving the profession in Namibian schools have become a national problem, reflecting significantly and negatively

on the quality and stability of the education system. According to Education Information Management System (2015) in 2015 alone 8.4% of teachers in Oshana Region left the profession while 0.1% transferred to other regions. Nationally, the teaching profession lost 10.4% of the teachers. Smith (2018) in a newspaper article wrote that the Ministry of Education was experiencing an acute shortage of teachers. All these shortages and high attrition rates can be a result of low teacher morale. In this study, the researcher explored the various factors that contribute to low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region in order to establish evidence-based strategies to improve and raise the morale of teachers.

### **Statement of the problem**

Over the past five years, there has been a notable increase in the number of teachers at secondary schools in the Oshana region leaving the profession to join other sectors of the economy. In 2015, more than 250 secondary school teachers left the profession or transferred to other regions (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). Haukongo's (2016) survey reveals that teachers in Oshana Region are not motivated to teach, thus resulting in low morale. Additionally, there has been media reports (Tjihenuna, 2016), claiming that secondary school teachers showed low morale, as they were no longer displaying eagerness to teach. Equally, it is observed that at several meetings, stakeholders in education raised concerns and complaints that teachers display some signs of low levels of morale compared to past years (Kambove, 2016).

Management of the region as well as the inspectorate organised several team building exercises and refresher workshops in an effort to boost teachers' morale. However, it is observed that, some teachers are still displaying some signs of low morale, which becomes worrisome to the management of the region as well as the schools. The management has been looking for a solution and searching for the contributing factors to the issue of low teacher morale. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the factors contributing to low teachers' morale at secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region.

**Research questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region?
2. How does teachers' low morale influence their execution of duties in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region?
3. How does low teacher morale influence the academic performance of the learners in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region?
4. What are the strategies put in place to raise teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region?

**Significance of the study**

This study is important because it might find ways to improve and maintain teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region. The study might provide insight into factors that contribute to low teacher morale in secondary schools in Oshana region. Moreover, this study is significant to teachers, parents, learners and the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. Teachers might benefit in the sense that if factors contributing to low morale are identified and remedied, their work environment will become conducive. Learners might benefit in that if teachers' morale is boosted, teachers will stay much longer in the profession, and this will make learners perform well in their studies. The Ministry will benefit in that if teacher morale is raised, more teachers will remain in the profession and teacher replacements will be reduced. It might also help the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to implement strategies in order to raise or maintain high teacher morale.

**Literature review**

Teacher morale is one of the factors that affect the realization of the teaching objectives, motivation and academic achievement of students. It is imperative to note that teacher morale is an important part of any school. Several studies have been conducted globally on teacher morale. Eger and Habib (2015) conducted studies in Singapore, Japan, Finland and Turkey and found that teacher morale has an effect on students' achievement. It was also found that school principals expressed a high

morale and motivation for their teachers in developed countries. The study also indicated that students' achievements were mostly affected in Turkey by low teacher morale (Eger & Habib, 2015). Santos (2012) noted that teacher morale and job satisfaction across America was at its lowest point in 25 years. Furthermore, Moris (2019) noted that education reform across America has a negative influence on teacher morale. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) indicated that education policies, mandates and technologies that promise to revolutionize teaching and education result in increased teacher stress. This led to a decline in teacher morale in Oklahoma.

According to Foster (2015), many countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) are facing difficulties in recruiting good quality graduates to take up roles as teachers. Teachers in the United Kingdom are faced with challenges such as increased testing, professional development and administration tasks which negatively affect teacher morale and retention rates. Furthermore, Foster (2015) noted that although the teachers are overloaded, remuneration for the extra burden is rarely forthcoming and therefore teachers suffer from low morale. Holden (2017) conducted a study in China on teacher morale that revealed positive and negative factors related to teacher morale at an international school. Positive factors included providing support to new teachers, such as language lessons and cultural orientation; benefits; a strong sense of mission; a sense of community; and opportunities for professional growth. Negative factors included lack of recognition for extra duties, personality of the leader, and leadership transition. A study conducted in South Africa by Shalem and Hoadley (2009) noted that low teacher morale, coupled with extremely poor schooling outcomes for students as measured on standardized tests have increasingly been reported in the media in South Africa. The systemic evaluation (Department of Education 2003 as cited in Shalem & Hoadley, 2009) and the educator workload in South Africa (Chisholm et al., 2005) have reported low morale, frustration and anger and a growing desire to leave the profession amongst teachers. Newspapers have also reported widely on teachers' inability to cope and low morale.

Low teacher morale and teacher attrition are related. This is noted by Quartz (2008) who wrote that teachers are demotivated by a perception of little control over their posting, transfer or promotion and hence leads to lower teacher morale and increases attrition. A study conducted by Amutenya (2016) on teacher attrition in Khomas Region, Namibia found that there were a number of factors that contributed to attrition. The factors identified include ill-disciplined learners, heavy workload of teachers, poor school leadership practices, too much administrative work and lack of professional development. Few studies have been conducted in Namibia that address the issue of teacher morale therefore this study is important and will provide useful information regarding low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region.

### **Theoretical framework**

The researcher used Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivation Theory (Two Factor Theory) as the theoretical framework of the study. Islam and Ali (2013) highlighted that this theory is important for explaining the factors that may influence staff morale. Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivation Theory explains more strongly that there is a difference between factors causing job satisfaction and those causing job dissatisfaction. Factors such as lack of support from administration, dissatisfaction with salary and benefits, dissatisfaction with job responsibilities, heavy teaching loads, and frustration due to poor results and problematic student behaviour could be factors causing job dissatisfaction and lead to teachers' low morale (Barnett, Kenhoo, Menarch, & Washington, 2008). The researcher's choice of Herzberg's theory emanates from the fact that if teachers' growth needs to know and understand their working conditions and their responsibilities are not satisfied and supported, the teachers will not feel comfortable to remain working for the same school or even the whole Ministry (Mukayi & Malefu, 2012). Studies have found that growth needs are never completely satisfied. In fact, the more the person is able to meet the need to know and understand the world, the greater the motivation (George, Louw, & Badenhorst, 2008).

### **Methodology**

This study followed a qualitative exploratory research design. Mason (2010) noted that qualitative research design is based on methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context. In this study, it was necessary to have a deeper understanding of the complexity, detail and context of the different factors that have a bearing on the level of morale amongst teachers. Therefore, this necessitated the employment of a qualitative research design. The study followed an exploratory design to explore the lived contextual experiences of teachers to try to ascertain those factors which have lowered their morale. Through the qualitative exploratory design, the researcher was able to dig deep and generate rich data from the lived experiences of the teachers, and how they have interacted with the various factors which have influenced their morale.

The population of this research consisted of fourteen Secondary Schools in Oshana Educational Region. This study used purposive sampling to select four (4) out of fourteen (14) Secondary Schools in Oshana Educational Region. Furthermore, this study used stratified purposive sampling where the researcher located five (5) individual teachers who had taught for one year and above at each of the four (4) Secondary Schools. Data were collected from twenty (20) secondary school teachers in Oshana Educational Region.

This study used an interview guide for teachers as a tool for data collection because interviews are the main mode for data collection in qualitative research. This study only used the structured interviews because the researcher had a specified set of questions that would elicit the same information from the participants. For this study data were analysed by means of content analysis. According to Creswell (2012), the method of content analysis involves the comparing, contrasting, and categorising data in order to draw meaning. This method was helpful to the researcher in identifying patterns, ideas and themes that emerged from the data (Neuman, 2011). The data were first transcribed verbatim and coded, and then analysed using identified themes from the participants' views. The researcher then divided the text data into meaningful inductive categories guided by the research questions and the interview themes.

## Findings

### *Factors contributing to low teacher morale in secondary schools*

The main question of this study sought to find out about the factors that are contributing to low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Education Region. The participants' views on the factors contributing to low teacher morale are summarised into the following themes with their sub-themes: work environment, admission policies, and learners' interest in their education, school leadership and parental involvement. According to Sharma (2016) a healthy school environment and high teacher morale tend to be related. The findings from the study revealed that the environment under which teachers work was one of the factors affecting teacher morale. Teacher P14 explained that:

*The classrooms are not motivating; some look very old they look like places that have been abandoned thousands of years back. We also have a lack of laboratories and libraries that can be resourceful to both us and our learners.*

The school environment of the schools which participated in this study can be described by Eboka (2016) as threatening and non-supportive for teachers to carry out their work. The findings of this study highlighted that the participant noted an uncompetitive salary for teachers as one of the factors demoralising them. Teacher P3 stated that:

*I am always on the lookout for better paying jobs because I am not motivated by salary to remain as a teacher. Sometimes you want to live a good life like other people in other professions but you cannot just afford.*

According to Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) teachers' salaries in most countries do not cover basic household needs. The study found that salaries motivated teachers to stay in or leave the profession. Furthermore, the participants in this study identified lack of promotions as one of the factors contributing to low teacher morale. Teacher P1 indicated that:

*I have been teaching for more than fifteen years and always applied for promotions yet I am never selected. This has led me to feeling unrecognised and therefore I becoming demoralised as a result.*

Blackwell (2009) and Govindarajan's (2012) studies highlighted that the lack of teacher recognition year after year was one of the factors which had resulted in poor morale among teachers. Another factor that this research found to contribute to the low teacher morale in Secondary Schools in the Oshana Educational Region was the admission policies for Secondary Schools. Teacher P2 mentioned that:

*I do not know what to be done but admission requirements should not allow some schools to select only the best performers. Teachers at some schools are forever blamed by society for poor results but I do not think they are always at fault.*

Robertson (2017) found that the school character is built through the morale of the teachers. As a result of the admission policies, some schools were labelled as "poor performing schools" thus, not allowing them to attract and admit the best learners. In the end, teachers may suffer from low morale thus negatively affecting the character of the school. The low interest of learners in their education was indicated to contribute to low teachers morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region. Participants in this study also indicated that learners portrayed indiscipline and they lacked commitment to their school work. Teacher P6 said that:

*Some learners do not do their exercises and homework which shows that they are not committed to their school work.*

Whereas, teacher P2 stated that:

*In worst cases of bad behaviour, some learners have threatened to beat up teachers. Such incidences of extreme bad behaviour by learners towards teachers would negatively affect the teachers' love and motivation in the profession.*

A study done by DeAngelis and Presley (2011) concludes that learners related problems such as poor discipline, laziness and high absenteeism contribute to low teacher morale. Participants in this study lamented the lack of proper leadership and supervision from immediate supervisors and school principals as

one of the factors which demoralize the teachers. Teacher P3 alluded that:

*There is poor communication between school management and teachers. Teachers feel like they are not part of it all but just to implement guidelines put in place by school management.*

Bogler's (2005) study concluded that the leadership style of the school principal has a powerful influence on the environment of the school, the attitudes of the teachers and staff, and the achievement of the students.

Lastly on the factors contributing to low teacher morale identified by this study was involvement of parents. Teacher P4 narrated that:

*Most parents are not very supportive of their children's education. This is demoralizing to teachers because without parental support, it becomes difficult for teachers to control learners at school.*

Whereas, teacher P16 indicated that:

*Most of the learners admitted in Secondary Schools do not come from the surrounding areas therefore most of them are either accommodated in the hostels, live with relatives close to schools or even rent. And parents are just seen in the first day of school and disappear.*

It is clear from the findings of this study that parents of learners schooling in Secondary Schools in the Oshana Educational Region were not fully involved in their children's education which then made it difficult for the teachers and therefore led to low morale for teachers. A study by Erlendsdóttir (2010) on the effects of parental involvement in education in Namibia concluded that when parents stay involved with their children's education, it impacts positively on the academic achievement of the learners.

#### ***The effect of low morale on teacher performance***

The second question for this study sought to find out how low morale for teachers influences their performance and execution of their duties in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region. The effects identified by the participants of this study were: withdrawal

from tasks, poor assessment and lack of proper lesson preparations. This is what teacher P14 said:

*One can tell that teachers have low morale because most teachers do not want to be involved in school activities. Those that used to take part in extramural activities such as sports and others no longer take part.*

Similarly, teacher P1 narrated that:

*Whenever there are school events or school activities taking place, most teachers will always have an excuse for them not to attend or else some teachers will come and even leave earlier.*

The results of the study indicated that as a consequence of low morale, teachers were unhappy at school. The study also found that poor morale among teachers had negative effects on the way they handled their duties. Teacher P9 stated that:

*Teachers with low morale do not give feedback on assessments to the learners on time and they give much less work to their learners and in most cases they make use of learners to write summaries for others.*

Steyn (2014) wrote that organizations with a higher staff morale display improved productivity, improved performance and creativity, reduced number of days taken for leave, higher attention to detail, a safer workplace, and an increased quality of work. Rowland (2008) revealed that when teachers have a positive morale then they have an unbelievable positive influence on the pupils and the school environment. The quality of lessons they deliver will impact the pupils in a way that learners will love school and be motivated to study hard.

#### ***Effects of low teacher morale on academic performance***

The third question of this study looked at the effects of low teacher morale on academic performance of the learners. One of the effects identified was that teachers with low morale failed to complete the syllabus. Teacher P7 revealed that:

*A teacher with low morale can hardly achieve the basic competencies; thus, academic performance for the learners will be low because the final examination covers the syllabus and not just what the teachers covered.*

Whereas, teacher P3 stated that:

*We have two years to cover the syllabi at senior secondary level but some colleagues still do not cover it fully. Is that not a sign that the teacher is not motivated to work hard. In the end learners suffer.*

A study done by Perumal (2011) suggested that teacher morale impacts directly on delivery of lessons, teacher effectiveness and leadership, student attitudes, behaviour and discipline, as well as student performance. The participants noted that as a result of low teacher morale the teachers lost interest in their learners, they also lost interest in their work and this affected the academic performance of the learners. Teacher P1 indicated that:

*Teachers with low morale ignore the needs of learners and cannot treat learners fairly thus affecting learners psychologically, leading to poor performance.*

The findings of this study supports that of Yong and Yue (2007) who found that a person that has low morale has internal reactions such as confusion, insecurity and frustrations. These reactions will influence how an individual behaves at work and carry out his/her duties. No one is able to work well if he/she has such internal reactions as a result of low morale.

#### ***Strategies to maintain teacher morale***

Finally, this study sought to find out the strategies that secondary schools use in order for teachers to have high morale. This study revealed that Secondary Schools in Oshana Educational Region had strategies put in place to ensure that teachers maintained high morale. Participants were asked to give some of the strategies used in their schools in order to maintain good morale for teachers at their schools. Chungsup and Jarrod (2012) concluded that teachers need to be motivated in order to be productive. The teachers indicated that award ceremonies organised by the

schools helped them to have good morale. Teacher P6 said the following:

*My morale after the award ceremony is always very high but after some days it starts to go down. Perhaps I do not know how to maintain a high morale. And people from outside really help us to build a good morale. The different strategies that they use are really helpful to our morale.*

All the schools that took part in this study held an award ceremony which was a good thing. It gives teachers new energy to carry out their duties. Some participants of this study stated that one of the strategies used in schools was motivational speeches from different people and team building exercises.

Devi and Mani (2010) wrote that teachers need to be publicly supported, provided with the right resources and minimize stressors in schools. Motivational speeches are a good public support that can raise teachers' morale. When the school environment is healthy, teachers have high morale, the relationship with colleagues and their learners is improved and this positively impacts on student morale and academic performance. Participants identified good communication as one of the strategies in the schools. This is what teacher P3 narrated:

*Good communication is one of the strategies to raise the morale for teachers and make them feel recognised. When teachers are well informed and allowed to get involved in the activities of the school it serves as a motivation and in turn raise their morale.*

The study further highlighted that most of the Secondary Schools maintained good communication through information sharing gatherings (briefings) and by holding staff meetings at least once every term. Chungsup and Jarrod (2012) in their study noted that if teachers were motivated they would all have a high morale which would lead to increased productivity. Although there were a few strategies put in place in Secondary Schools in the Oshana Educational Region to maintain good morale for teachers, some respondents indicated that these strategies were not very effective thus teachers still experienced poor morale in the secondary schools.

## Conclusion

The study revealed that the participants in this study believed that there was low morale amongst secondary school teachers in the Oshana Educational Region and that it was very important for secondary school teachers to have high morale. Added to this, the participants in this study indicated that the factors contributing to low teacher morale were: the unfavourable working environment which included lack of facilities, teachers' salaries and lack of promotions. Furthermore, admission policies, learners' interest in their education, school leadership and parental involvement in the education of their children were listed as factors contributing to low teacher morale in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region. Moreover, low teacher morale affects the performance of the teachers' duties and it also has a greater influence on the academic performance of learners.

Finally, the study revealed that there were a number of strategies put in place in secondary schools in the Oshana Educational Region to raise teachers' morale although participants felt that the strategies needed to be reviewed and new ones introduced to add to the existing ones because the existing ones seemed not to be effective. The strategies identified were: prize giving ceremonies that awarded performing teachers; motivational speeches; delegation of tasks to make teachers feel that they were part of the team and efforts to improve the working environment in the schools.

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