

An impact of strategic plan on learners' academic performance: A case of selected secondary schools of Mwense district, Zambia

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Abstract

The academic performance of pupils in secondary schools in Mwense district has not been very good in recent years. These schools are Kashiba, Lukwesa, Sunshine, Musangu, Mutima, Mukumbwa, Mambilima and Mwense Secondary schools. In order to improve the academic performance of pupils in these schools, the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Early Education came up with a Strategic Plan. This research study sought to assess the impact of the Strategic Plan on learners' academic performance in these schools in Mwense District. Its objectives were to determine teacher's effectiveness in the implementation of the Strategic Plan; ascertain factors that act as barriers in the implementation of the plan and establishing possible measures aimed at mitigating barriers to an effective implementation of the Strategic Plan. Through the use of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, the findings showed that teachers were being effective in implementing the Strategic Plan while the absence of adequate teaching and learning materials was the major barrier to a successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. This barrier can be mitigated by allocating enough resources towards implementing the Strategic Plan. Teachers should continue providing guidance to learners for them to have interests in different subjects. There is need for head teachers to continue playing a supervisory role on teachers and to reviewing the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan on a termly basis.

Keywords: Strategic Plan, Pupils academic performance

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

Mwense District is a rural district that has eight (8) government-owned secondary schools. These schools have a lot of problems which are contributing to the poor performance of pupils. These schools have no adequate reading materials they are understaffed and have pupils that are from economically marginalised families. One typical example is Mwense High School which is a government owned co-education boarding school. The school has a total number of 1,047 pupils comprised of 813 boys and 234 girls. Of these 514 boys and 86 girls are borders, 13 are visually impaired. The school is located in a rural area and so the majority of the pupils come from rural areas with only few coming from urban areas. The school has a total of 28 classes with a visually impaired section. Of the 13 visually impaired pupils, 1 is a girl and the rest are boys. The passing rate in examination classes has been below 75%. For example in the year 2006, the passing rate was 42.3%, while in 2007 it was 61.5%, in 2008 it was 65.3% and 2009 had 73.6% (Grade 12 Luapula Province Results Analysis Report 2008-2011). Though there was a percentage increase of 8.3% from 2008 to 2009, this was insignificant. The situation at Mwense High School is symptomatic of what is happening in the rest of the schools in the district.

The performance of pupils is of great importance to any school particularly those that are located in rural areas. The government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, Vocational Training and Early Education came up with a Strategic Plan to improve on

the performance of the pupils. This plan was aimed at improving the performance of pupils in order to improve the passing rate of pupils who sit for examinations. One of the targets of the Strategic Plan was to improve the percentage passing rate. The Strategic Plan has eight (8) components that include Curriculum, Induction of new staff, Decision Making Assessment, Learner Preparation for Examination, Monitoring, Incentives and Records Management. In order to effectively implement the Strategic Plan, each of the eight components have been given a situational analysis, vision, policy statement, goal, strategic objectives, strategies, priority activities, an operation plan and a compliance plan. The effectiveness of this plan would contribute to an improved performance of pupils.

According to Warner (1984), ^[25] a strategic plan is the direction and scope of an organization over the long term. A Strategic Plan is thus direction or control mechanism for allocating resources in order to meet certain objectives. It is a way of determining how organizational resources, skills and competencies should be combined to create competitive advantage. It is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation is, what it does and how it does it with a focus on the future. Warner's definition of a strategic plan is helpful in understanding the value of setting up a direction to achieve an organization's objectives. Without a direction, it is difficult to know whether an organization is going and if it is succeeding or not. It is thus important that all organizations, despite their size and objectives, put in place effective strategic plans. The

value of Strategic Planning to any organization is that it determines the organisation's success or failure (Bryson, 1988)^[4] According to Wernham (2004),^[26] in the process of strategic planning, resources such as people, skills, facilities and money to implement the strategy must be adequate. Strategic Planning identifies where an organisation wants to be at some point in the future and how it is going to get there. It is the process of defining the direction of the institution and allocating resources to pursue this strategy (Mutuku & Mutuku, 2009)^[21].

There are various difficulties in a successful implementation of strategic plans. According to Johnson (2004)^[9] about 66 percent of organizational strategy is never implemented. The main problem is not with the development of a Strategic Plan but its implementation. Strategic planning in many organizations does not tend to be done well and what is often called strategic planning is actually focused at lower-level issues (Watkins, 2004;^[24] Buchanan, 2000;^[3] Kaufman, 1992)^[11]. Further, many organizations rely on a definition of a strategic plan that is too broad. The effect of this is that any planning performed is assigned somewhere within a vague definition of strategic planning (Meredith *et al.*, 1987)^[16]. The specificity of a good Strategic Plan has not however been explained in these studies. It is thus difficult to tell what exactly constitutes a broad and specific Strategic Plan.

There are various factors that affect the successful implementation of a strategic plan among which is the quality and commitment of its human resource to implement the strategy (Bitange, *et al* 2010)^[2]. This therefore means that no matter how well formulated a Strategic Plan is, if people are not committed to implement it for one reason or another, it cannot be successful. According to Mashhadi, *et al* (2008),^[14] among the factors that negatively affect the successful implementation of a Strategic Plan include organizational structure, organizational culture, information and communication technology, reporting systems, motivation and reward systems, the availability of adequate resources, decision making process, effective communication, education, capabilities and skills. The extent to which the human resource personnel affect the successful implementation of a strategic plan has not been brought out in these studies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There has been an overwhelming evidence of poor academic performance among pupils in Mwense District (Provincial Results report-2010-2013). The trend of pupils in schools performing poorly has continued even in recent years. In view of this, the government through the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education instituted an implementation of a Strategic Plan to curb the academic underperformance of pupils. Since the government started implementing the Strategic Plan, little research has been done to assess its impact on pupils' academic performance. There was need therefore to evaluate the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan to see whether it is working or not hence this research.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of the Strategic Plan in Secondary schools on the performance of pupils in Mwense District.

1.4. Study Objectives

The objectives that guided this study were:

1. To determine teacher's effectiveness in the implementation of the Strategic Plan.
2. To ascertain factors that act as barriers in the implementation of the plan
3. To establish possible measures aimed at mitigating barriers to an effective implementation of the Strategic Plan.

1.5. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How effective are the teachers in the implementation of the Strategic Plan?
2. What factors are hindering the smooth implementation of the Strategic Plan?
3. What measures can be used to mitigate the barriers to effectively implement the Strategic Plan?

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study proved very helpful in assessing whether the Strategic Plan being implemented in schools in Mwense District is helping pupils improve their performance. The result of the study will be helpful to the government in determining whether to continue implementing the Strategic Plan or to consider revising it. The recommendations of the report of the study are helpful to policy makers in the education sector to be able to come up with strategies for improving learner performance. The study is also helpful to all those who would want to carry out a similar research as part of their literature review.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

This study followed the transactional model of teaching and learning process as developed by Huitt (1995)^[8] According to this model, factors that affect learning are in four categories that include context, input, classroom and output. Contexts are factors outside the classroom that may influence teaching and learning. These include the social and economic status including government policy. They also include the home environment. These form an environment that has an influence on pupils. Children are known to model behaviour which they observe from people around them. The way the family at home act and behave therefore has a direct effect on how a child will model viewed behaviour and subsequently display similar behavioural traits. As a result the child then replicates such behaviour at school. This means that children who misbehave at home are likely to misbehave even in the classroom. Peer pressure has an influence on pupils. As children grow older their role models become members of their peer group. The adult influence including parents and teachers becomes less important. Peer pressure is thus a leading cause of classroom misbehaviour. These factors have an influence on the academic performance of pupils. The policy that the government puts in place also has an effect on pupils and their academic performance. Inputs on the other hand are qualities that teachers and pupils bring into the classroom such as prior knowledge. The classroom includes behaviours of both teachers and pupils in class and variables such as classroom environment and teacher-pupil relationships. Output measures the pupils' learning apart from normal instructional process. These too affect pupils' academic performance.

2. Methodology of the Study

The study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection, analysis and interpretations

2.1 Research Design

A descriptive sample survey design was used to collect data from respondents who were head teachers and teachers in selected Secondary Schools in Mwense district. The design was used because the study was carried out on all secondary schools in Mwense district which are few. A sample survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (White, 2005) [27]. This design was used in order to solicit the desired descriptive information (Kombo and Tromp, 2006) [13]. This study was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative data was done by including in the questionnaire questions that allowed respondents give their personal views. Quantitative data was collected through the components of the questionnaire which allowed the respondents to choose from the provided answers. Quantitative data would allow the standardisation of responses.

2.2 Data Collection

Data was collected by having respondents fill in and select answers on the questionnaire. There were open-ended and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions allowed for qualitative data where respondents gave their personal opinion, while close-ended questions brought out quantitative data

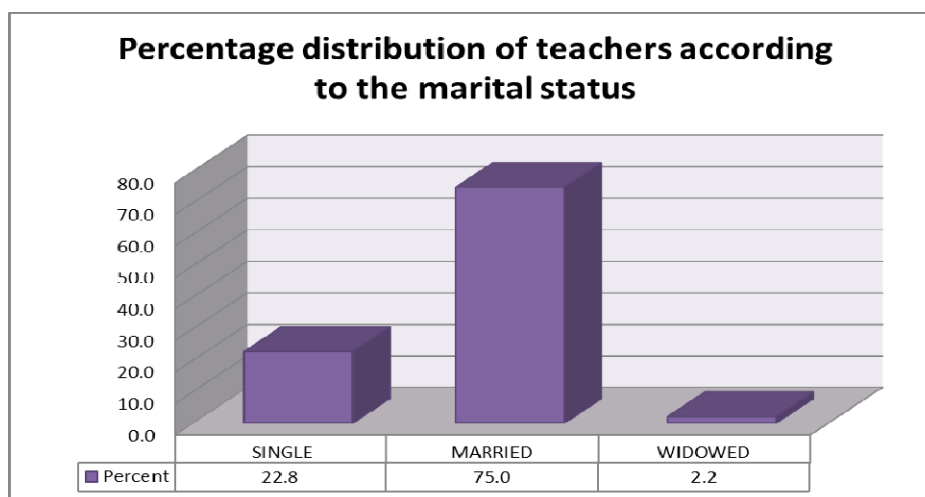
which allowed for a high response rate.

2.3 Data Analysis

After the hundred (100) questionnaires had been collected, they were checked for accuracy, consistency and uniformity. This process of Quality Control ensured that the data that was eventually analysed was accurate. The collected data was then entered into computer software of MS-Excel and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis produced Frequency Tables, Cross Tabulations and Graphs. After that data was presented into a final report which contained recommendations.

3. Findings and Discussion

The demographics findings showed that the majority of respondents were married. This was largely because the majority were of a marriageable age and was working and so settled to start families. Mambilima Secondary school provided the highest number of respondents as most of the questionnaires distributed at that school were well responded to. Further, it is a big school with many teachers. Teachers who responded to the questionnaires have been in the teaching service for more than a year and were there when the Strategic Plan was implemented. Most of the teachers interviewed were diploma holders who graduated from colleges. Few had college certificates and many were yet to attain university education at degree level. These findings are as shown in the following figures below:

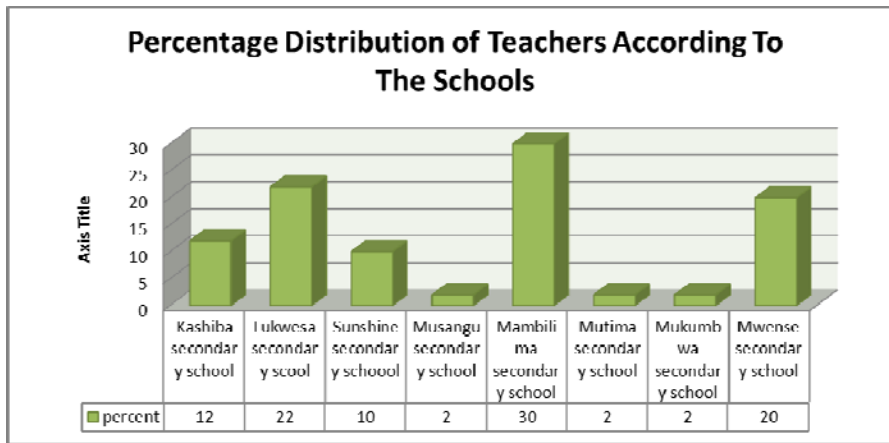


Source: Field Data 2016

Fig 1: Percentage distribution of the teachers accordingly to their marital status

The table above shows the frequency and percentage distribution of teachers according to their marital status. The table reveals that the majority of the teachers interviewed (69 out of 92 representing 75.0%) were married and the least

number interviewed were widowed (2 out of 92 representing 2.2 %) at the time of the survey. The teachers who were single at the time of interview were 21 representing 22.8% of the total population.

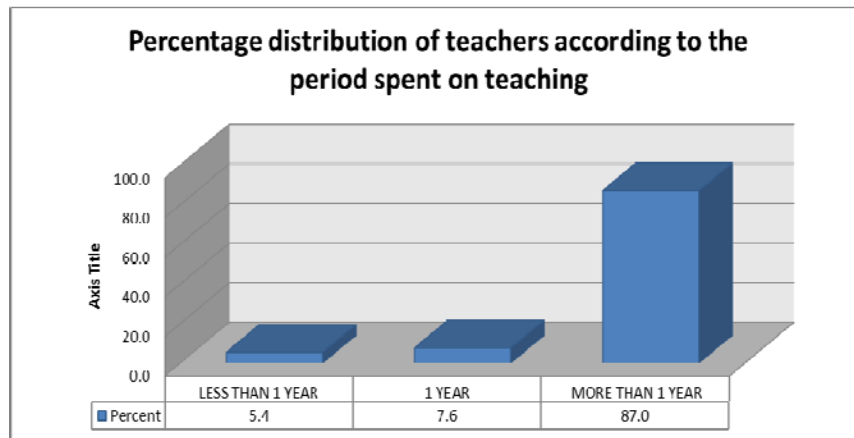


Source: Field Data 216

Fig 2.0: Percentage distribution of the schools been interviewed

The graph above shows the percentage distribution of teachers interviewed according to the 8 schools. The graph reveals that the majority of the teachers interviewed came from Mambilima secondary school (30%). Teachers from Lukwesa and Mwense secondary schools were 22% and 20%

respectively of the total population. The teachers from Kashiba were 12% of the total population sampled. The least number of the teachers sampled came from Musangu, Mutima and Mukumbwa secondary schools with each 2% interviewed of the teachers from the total population

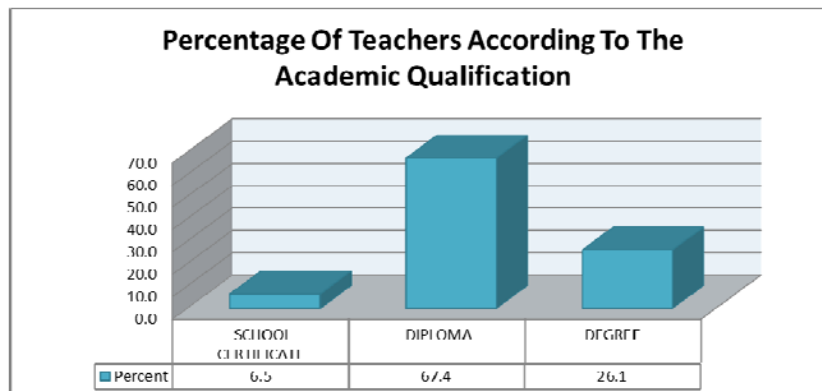


Source: Field Data 2016

Fig 3: The frequency and the percentage distribution of the teachers according to their period of service.

The graph above shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the teachers according to the time they spent in their teaching service. According to the table above, most of the teachers have spent more than one year in teaching service and these in total are 87.0 percent of the total population

sampled. Those who spent 1 year period of service in teaching were 7.6 percent of the total population sampled. The least of the teachers spent less than 1 year in teaching service and these were 5.4% of the total population sampled.



Source: Field Data 2016

Fig 4: Frequency and percentage distribution of the teachers according their academic qualification.

The graph above shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the teachers according to the academic qualifications. The table reveals that the highest number of teachers are diploma holders (62) representing 67.4 % of the total population sample. The teachers who had degrees at the time of survey were 24 representing 26.1% of the total population sampled. The least number of the teachers had school certificates and these were 6 out of 92 representing 6.5%.

On the effectiveness of teachers in implementing the Strategic Plan, the study revealed that teachers were qualified and experienced enough to successfully implement the Strategic plan. The demographics revealed that 87% had been teaching for more than a year. Further they were academically qualified. While 67.4% were diploma holders, 26.1% were degree holders. This is in agreement by the study conducted by Bitange, *et al* (2010) ^[2] which showed the connection between teacher qualifications and academic performance of pupils.

According to the findings, most teachers encouraged pupils to attend all the classes including those classes that the pupils may wanted to avoid. For example, some pupils avoided attending classes for Bemba lessons because they thought that learning such a language had no meaningful career benefits whilst others especially girls avoid attending science classes and prep. However, teachers encouraged such pupils on the importance of each subject they avoid. These findings are similar with the findings of Drever (1991) ^[6]. According to the study, he carried out in Scotland, he discovered that effective schools emphasize on high intellectual expectations of teachers, a professional attitude towards school and staff development, the use of rewards rather than punishments, an emphasis on teacher involvement in development. According to his study, the encouragement to pupils is more beneficial than punishment because the people of Scotland believe in rewards rather than punishment.

Contrary to the above study done in Scotland, the findings of this study revealed that the teachers punish the pupils for absconding and missing the classes. The reasons the teachers could reach an extent of punishing the pupils could be that the pupils sometimes go into extreme in their bad behaviours. Another reason could be that it could be the only appropriate thing they could do to help them come to learn the importance of following the Strategic Plan.

These findings tie into the theoretical framework that has been used in this study as developed by Huit (1995) ^[8]. In this theory, factors that affect the performers of pupils include what is termed as the input which includes the qualities of pupils and teachers that they bring to the classroom together with their prior knowledge. In line with this, this study has revealed that teachers are well qualified and experienced and so they have brought a vast knowledge to the classroom. As found by Fagbamiye (1977), ^[7] schools with stable, experienced and qualified teachers had pupils who performed well because such teachers effectively delivered their lessons. Besides professional qualifications, teacher's dedication to teaching is another factor that has an influence on lesson delivery. According to the Ministry of Education (2001), ^[17] lack of teacher dedication has an effect on the manner in which learners benefit from lessons. Schools where teachers could not adequately prepare for their lessons and were not very dedicated to their job led to inadequate execution of their functions and that had a negative effect on the performance of learners. In order to improve their lesson delivery, high school

teachers were expected to prepare what they had to teach in class. These included schemes of work, records of work, and lesson plans to guide the teaching process. A study that was conducted by the Ministry of Education (1996) ^[18] found that coming late and knocking off early by teachers negatively affected the extent to which learners benefited from lessons and this badly affected learners' performance.

As part of the inputs in Huit's theory, learners do have an effect on their own performance. Studies that have revealed in this research show that the level of knowledge that a pupil brings to the class has got an effect on his/her performance. Copper (1989) ^[5] explains that pupils who went on to do their homework benefited more from the lesson and this was reflected in their improved performance. Similarly, a study that was conducted in Asia revealed that doing homework greatly contributed to benefiting from lessons and in turn led to a high pupils' performance (Beattie, 1987) ^[11]. A study that was conducted by the Ministry of Education (1996) ^[18] found that late coming and knocking off early affected the extent to which learners benefited from lessons.

In line with Huit's theory, the behaviour of both teachers and pupils does have an effect on academic performance. Pupils' shunning certain subjects and teachers punishing them both have an effect on the academic performance of pupils. According to Mukherji (2001), ^[20] as children grow older their role models become members of their peer group. The adult influence including parents and teachers becomes less important. Peer pressure is thus a leading cause of classroom misbehaviour. According to Jones (1995), ^[10] the school environment does have an impact on children. What is thus generally obtaining in the school environment can cause misbehaviour on the part of students. For example, if the school environment is stressful with too much work load, students tend to rebel. If the environment further is dominated by rules that are very liberal, this can also cause misbehaviour on the aspect of the students in the classroom. The other reason is the presence of psychiatric problems in the students which have to do with learning disabilities. Students who have psychiatric problems may find it difficult to concentrate in the classroom and may thus exhibit unruly behaviour.

On factors that act as barriers to the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan, it was discovered that most head teachers found it a challenge to implement some components of a strategic plan such as creation of incentives due to the fact that the government did not provide some funding specifically for the creation of incentives to teachers. This made it difficult for the head teachers to implement this component of the strategic plan.

According to the response from the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) schools in Mwense District lacked adequate human resources staff. This response was echoed by the interviewed head teachers. This challenge has repeatedly been noted in many piece of literature. Accordingly one of them main factors that institutions fail to carry out effective strategic planning is due to lack of adequate institutional capacity. According to Bitange, *et al* (2010), ^[2] a successful implementation of a strategic plan depends on the quality and commitment of its human resource to implement the strategy. Hence, regardless of how well a Strategic Plan is formulated, if there is no adequate qualified manpower to implement it, it is not bound to succeed to the desired level. As far as the Strategic Plan to improve learner's performance is concerned,

Fagbamiye (1977) ^[7] noted that schools that had stable, experienced and qualified teachers had pupils performing better.

Teachers, head teachers and the DEBS all expressed lack of teaching and learning materials. In all the schools under review, there were no adequate study materials. This made it difficult for the Successful Implementation of the Strategic Plan to improve pupils' performance in the schools. According to many studies reviewed, lack of learning materials negatively affected the implementation of the plan.

The findings also revealed that some head teachers found it a challenge to implement some components of Strategic Plan that is to prepare pupils' for the examination. This was because most pupils were not able to attend prep since most of them were day scholars. In addition, books were not available to enhance their studies and this contributed to the challenge of implementing the Strategic Plan. The effects of not having books are negative as revealed by Mitter, (1991) ^[19]. According to his findings, lack of reading materials contributes to poor performance at examinations. In a similar study carried out in Zambia, Mbozi (2008:127) ^[15] found that limited textbooks are a factor affecting the performance of the learner. Researches done in Uganda and Ghana found significant effects leading the researchers to conclude that improving the availability of textbooks is of the most cost effective methods for enhancing learning achievement and fulfilling the strategic plan.

Contrary to the above studies, Kelly and Kanyika, (2000) ^[12] found that simply raising the number of books did not automatically improve learning outcomes and that teacher training must be improved in order to ensure effective teaching and use of textbooks. Ndoye (2007) ^[22] also noted that even if learning materials such as books, desks and teaching aids are vital, of more importance was the way these were managed and so it was not enough simply to have materials but their effect on learner performance was related to the way they are managed.

The findings also revealed that the head teachers found it a challenge to impletion the records management and the decision made due to the fact that the teaches were sometimes not willingly to follow the advice and the record books are not provided hence this makes it a challenge to keep a good record management. This is poor school management according to most studies. In line with these findings, in Madagascar, several studies revealed that poor implementation of a Strategic Plan was connected to the performance of the school management. The report showed that the leadership skills of a school principal and the degree of community participation were the major influence on implementation of a strategic plan (Ramandria, 1995) ^[23].

On measures that have to be taken to mitigate barriers to an effective implementation of the Strategic Plan, the findings found that most teachers suggested that head teachers and the deputy head teacher should intensify in monitoring the duties of the teachers. This may increase a good work culture among teachers and would also improve the implementation of the strategic plan. According to Ramandria (1995), ^[23] leadership skills of a school principal and the degree of community participation were a major influence on a good strategic plan and its implementation.

Other teachers suggested that the government should increase funds that go to schools as this would also increase the chances

of teachers receiving the incentives. In addition, the teachers suggested that the government should also increase on the supply of books to schools. The teachers also suggested among themselves that they need to intensify the teaching skills so that they help the pupils in reading and writing in English language. This was to enhance the preparation of the examinations.

The findings also revealed that the stakeholders should hold meetings for the implementation of the strategic plan. This would help the stakeholders to come up with ways in which they could improve the implementation of the strategic plan in schools. The value of stakeholder involvement has extensively been highlighted in the reviewed literature. As part of the decentralization process, the formulation and implementation of the strategic plan has to involve all stakeholders if it has to have meaningful impact. However, there is a challenge in this regard on the strategic plan being reviewed due to the bureaucratic nature of the Ministry of Education. While the strategic plan is mostly formulated at the headquarters of the education wing of the government, of course after wide consultation, the effectiveness of its implementation rests in the willingness and capability of the government and not the affected schools.

Teachers also suggested that the Strategic Plan should be revisited every term. This would avoid the hiccups and determine the strengths that can be relied on. This is line with various studies. Kaufman (1992) ^[11] explains that periodic review is the tenth stage of the strategic planning process. The importance of this stage is that it enables the institution to adapt to short-term volatility while maintaining the long-term strategic vision. The need for a periodical review is to identify and assess the impact in changes to internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats, assumptions and the original mission and goals. The institution must establish the time period for the review process. This can be aligned with existing cycles such as the annual budget or an academic cycle. Then, it has to determine how the lessons learned will be communicated and the modifications made to the larger organization. The challenge of this in the aspect of the strategic plan under review is that it may not be easy to quickly conduct periodic review due to the bureaucratic nature of the education ministry as a government institution.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study has revealed that the teachers have put much effort so that they could manage in implementing the Strategic Plan. Among the efforts that have been made is regarding the behaviors of pupils. Most teachers have encouraged the pupils on the importance of attending classes and in some cases have punished them for missing classes. Thus the impact of the strategic plan so far has been that it has changed the way teachers handle pupils as they have become more focused on improving the academic performance of learners.

Owing to their qualifications and experience, it can be concluded that teachers in selected secondary schools in Mwense district are effective in implementing the Strategic Plan. On the barriers to the effective implementation of the strategic plan, it can be concluded that the main ones include lack of adequate incentives and the absence of adequate funding, learning and teaching materials. On what can be done to mitigate the barriers to an effective implementation of the

strategic plan, it can be concluded that there is need for the government to provide incentives and to have all stakeholders having periodic reviews of the strategic plan.

From the discussion above, it can be established that all the schools in Mwense District schools have the strategic plans. However, most head teachers find it a challenge to implement them. One of the challenges is that schools do not receive enough funds for the incentive purposes for the teachers. Other challenges include failure to prepare pupils for the examinations and failure to have a proper record management. The formulation of the Strategic Plan has served as an incentive for the government to take seriously the issues of providing incentives and teaching and learning materials to schools especially in rural areas.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations emerged: 1. Teachers continue to play an active role in the learner-centered approach to teaching. 2. The head teachers need to be firm at implementing the decisions in the schools. 3. Head teachers should strongly implement the Strategic Plan components and review them every term as this will contribute to the higher chances of implementing the plan. 3. Governments should increase some allocation of money to the schools specifically for the teacher's incentives in order to motivate them implement the strategic plan.

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