

## Teacher Incentives: A Death Knell for Education in Zimbabwe?

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### **Abstract**

*Government is failing to pay teachers sustainable salaries. In an attempt to improve the teacher 's incomes and to check strikes and brain drain, The Government through circular minute number 5 of 2009, directed that ten percent (10%) of the levies collected by schools should go towards paying teachers' incentives. This led to an outcry in the media by both parents and teachers. This study set out to establish the problems that emanated from the payment of the 10% incentives at local level. One hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were distributed to teachers who were conveniently sampled among 1200 teachers who were marking the ZIMSEC November 2009 'O' level examinations at Chinhoyi University of Technology. Interviews were conducted with 30 parents who were conveniently sampled from 100 parents whose children attended school in three Gweru district secondary schools. The total sample was one hundred and eighty (180) participants. The findings indicated that the incentive payment programme has created disparities among the teachers' incomes, leading to discontent among many of them who were not receiving the incentives. Seventy (70%) of the teachers indicated that they had since stopped serious teaching in class and were running parallel activities that included offering private lessons within the school premises. Twenty percent (20%) of those who were receiving the incentive said they were working hard as continued payment of the incentive depended on the quality of results they produced. The study recommends that the payment of incentives should be lifted off the shoulders of parents and that government must take full care of its employees.*

**Keywords:** Incentives, teacher, school development committee, school development association.

### Introduction

The economic problems that bedevilled Zimbabwe from 2000 to date did not spare the education sector. Teachers' salaries diminished to paltry levels, in some instances they were virtually non-existent. After the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) the new Minister of Education, Sport and Culture, directed through a ministerial statement dated 4 May, 2009, that 10% of the school levies be channelled towards payment of teachers' incentives. This was further communicated to all educational institutions through the secretary's circular number 5 of July 2009. This was done in an attempt to revamp the education sector. The government's intention in directing that the 10% of levies collected by schools should go towards paying teachers' incentives was three fold: to retain qualified personnel, to motivate the personnel and to attract those who had since deserted the profession. Noble though the idea was, it brought with it a myriad of problems which caused imbalances in teacher distribution and brought about inequality of educational opportunities for learners (Coleman, 1997). This study sought to establish the problems associated with 10% school-based incentive for teachers in both urban and rural schools.

Coleman, a proponent of equality of educational opportunities contends that education must be sufficiently effective to prevent, for normally intelligent children, the disadvantages that result from their social and family circumstances from handicapping them severely in adult life (Giddens, 2001). Conflict theorists contend that learners come from different socio-economic backgrounds and so if they are to perform to their maximum potential equal educational opportunities should be availed to them at school level. The government's directive that 10% of the levies collected by the schools should go towards the payment of teacher incentives seems to be undermining the idea of equality of educational opportunities which is enshrined in the 1987 Education Act, item 4.1, which states that every child shall have the right to school education. The Deputy News editor of the Sunday Mail of May 2009 (p4) points out that there are problems emanating from the introduction of the ten percent (10%) incentives for teachers in Zimbabwe. The report goes on to state that parents have accused School Development Associations/School Development Committees (SDAs/SDCs) and school heads of 'milking' parents through charging unreasonable levies as a way of raising funds to pay teachers'

incentives. In a related issue, Jengeta (2010) claimed that payment of teacher incentives at school level was 'bleeding' parents. Furthermore, a school in Sunningdale suburb in Harare, was reported to have been asking pupils to pay five rands per pupil per day to cover the teachers' transport costs to and from work (Mazara 2009). This amount calculated against fifty pupils per class amounts to 225 rands per day which is an astronomical incentive. According to Mazara (2009) another school in Mufakose suburb in Harare, was reported to have closed its gate on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009, to bar students who had not paid the levies which contributed towards teachers' incentives from attending lessons. Jengeta (2010) echoed Mazara 's sentiments in an article entitled 'Teacher incentives bleeding parents'. Bwititi (2010) also quotes Raymond Majongwe of the Zimbabwe Progressive Teachers' union as saying there are approximately 10 000 different salary structures as each school could have its own set of incentives.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study seeks to:

- find out the extent to which the relations between parents, teachers and administrator have been affected by the 10% levy intervention.
- find out how the Ministry's directive is affecting the realisation of Zimbabwe's millenium development goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015.
- establish how circular minute number 5 of 2009 on teachers' incentives is being manipulated by school personnel.

### **Methodology**

This paper adopted a survey design. Bless and Smith (1995:45) define survey as "the collection of information on a wide range of cases being investigated only on the particular aspect under consideration." The population comprised of one thousand two hundred teachers who were marking the ZIMSEC 'O' level 2009 examinations at Chinhoyi University of Technology and one hundred parents whose children attended three different schools in Gweru district. One hundred and fifty teachers were conveniently sampled from the teachers who were gathered at Chinhoyi University. This sample did not include college and university lecturers who were also marking the ZIMSEC O' level examinations. Thirty parents were also conveniently sampled from three Gweru district schools where they were

gathered for their schools' Speech and Prize Giving Days. The researchers felt the group of teachers who were at Chinhoyi University of Technology came from all categories of schools in Zimbabwe and so taking a sample from this population would give a full picture of what was obtaining in the whole country with regards to teacher incentives. The total sample was one hundred and eighty (180) respondents. The survey design was deemed to be appropriate because of its capacity to collect data for describing populations that are too large to observe directly (Chiromo ,2006). Convenience sampling was used(Borg and Gall ,1996) because it ensured that researchers picked up participants who were practising teachers and so they had an in depth knowledge of problems that were associated with the payment of teacher incentives. Parents were also included because they were the ones who pay the levies from which teachers 's incentives were being raised. Including parents in the sample gave a balanced view of the nature and scope of the problems associated with the payment of teacher incentives. One hundred and fifty teachers responded to questionnaires. Out of the sample of one hundred and fifty teachers ten school heads were conveniently sampled for interviews to further consolidate responses to the questionnaires. Interviews were also held with thirty parents for purposes of triangulation.

## Results and Discussion

### Effects of the implementation of circular 5/09 on teaching and learning.

From the teachers' responses to the questionnaire the study established that teacher incentives vary from school to school. The variations in the net incentives are given in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1** Teacher incentive ranges for three school categories where n=150

Status of School	Head/Deputy	Senior Teacher	Teacher
Mission school	USD400-450(per month)	USD400-420(per month)	USD350-380(per month)
Govt Low density school	USD350-450(per month)	USD300-320(per month)	USD200-250(per month)
Govt High density school	USD100-120(per month)	USD 80-100(per month)	USD80-100(per month)
Govt rural day school	USD0-30(per month)	USD0-30(per month)	USD0-20(per month)

The incentive ranges depicted on Table 1 indicate that mission employees and government employees in low density schools are well paid whereas their counterparts elsewhere receive paltry incentives in comparison to the poverty datum level in Zimbabwe which according to Bulawayo 24 News, currently stands at four hundred and sixty seven dollars (US \$467) for a family of five. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents from high density and rural schools also indicated that the monthly payments were not constant as they were heavily dependent on the availability of funds. All the rural school heads interviewed indicated that parents did not want to hear about teacher incentives. In some instances school heads in the rural areas were even asked to leave the school by parents if they dared ask them to pay levies towards teacher's incentives. Sixty percent (60%) of the teachers agreed that the variations in the amounts of incentives being paid and the fact that some teachers were not receiving any incentives at all had heavily polarised education delivery, with the poor getting a raw deal as teachers felt that they could not work for nothing. All respondents agreed that the morale among the teachers was very low. This resulted in them neglecting their official duties of teaching as they were forced to engage in other income generating activities that ran parallel to the core business of teaching. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the respondents said that they often dismissed pupils at three o'clock in the afternoon and embarked on private lessons within the school premises thereafter. The parallel activities included teachers conducting extra lessons with students who would have paid for these private lessons. In the end the paid tuition fees twice, one official payment to the school and another private payment to the individual teachers. The above situation resulted in what Coleman cited in Giddens (2004) described as unequal educational opportunities for learners. The study also found that there was a high teacher flight from poorly funded schools to more affluent schools in search of higher teacher incentives. This is because schools charge varied amounts of levies depending on the socio-economic backgrounds of the majority of its clientele. Table 1 also indicates that the ten percent (10%) incentive translates to paltry amounts in some schools while it translates to substantial

amounts in other schools .This teacher flight , therefore, creates imbalances in teacher distribution which results in inequality of educational opportunities among learners. The existence of parallel classes in the schools as reflected by responses from interviews conducted with school heads is compromising the quality of tuition in schools. Seventy- five percent(75 %) of the school heads indicated that teachers who are in the schools where parents are failing to pay the required levies are now leaving strategic knowledge gaps in their teaching so as to lure students to their private lessons. The quality of learning for those who are unable to pay for this extra tuition is compromised.

**Effects of the implementation of Circular 5/09 on relationships among parents, school heads and teachers.**

The study also found out that the directive to pay 10% of the levies collected by schools was beset by problems. Table 2 (a) shows a summary of the teachers' problems.

**Table 2(a)** Problems cited by teachers. n=150

<b>Problem</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Victimisation of teachers, school who threaten to withdraw the incentives.	65	43.3
Parents 'expectations of teachers are too high and unrealistic	100	66.6
Teachers suspect that school heads are short changing them as they do not know how much levies are collected	75	50
Teachers feel that school heads are side stepping them and paying their favourite teachers behind their backs.	75	50

Table 2 (b) illustrates a summary of the parents' interview responses on problems concerning collection of levies and payment of teacher incentives.

**Table 2(b)** Problems cited by parents n=30

Problem	n	%
Parents are being handed over to debt collectors for defaulting without being given notice of intention to take such action	20	66.6
Parents complained that the payment of incentives was being prioritised by school heads at the expense of other developmental plans in the school.	15	50
Parents complained that the teachers were milking them and were at the same time not exerting themselves fully to their duties	30	100
Parents said that the ministry was not doing much to protect them from teachers who they said were extorting money from them.	28	93.3

The responses in Table 3(a) indicate that there was a lot of victimisation of teachers in schools. Teachers were reported to be victimised by SDCs/SDAs if they asked to be paid as per government 's directive. The study also established that parents whose children were in schools where such incentives were paid to teachers were reported to be giving all sorts of threats to teachers whom they felt were not executing their duties well. Sixty –six percent (66%) of the teachers indicated that parents now expected them to suddenly perform miracles even on their uneducable children by expecting every child to pass because they were paying an incentive to teachers. This implies that parents expect teachers to exert themselves more on their work and the blame for failing students is placed squarely on their shoulders without considering other variables that could have hindered the child's learning. This has put a lot of teachers under stress because naturally some of the students they teach can never pass any academic examination.

Sixty-six percent (66%) of the teachers also said that they had no mechanism to check whether the school heads in collaboration with SDC/SDA executives were not short changing them. They argued that it was only the head of the school and the SDC/SDA executives who could verify

how many students had paid and how much had been paid. The National Advisory Board on Education noted in their report on the state of schools ,that the government's decision to ask SDCs/SDAs to pay teachers 's incentives without spelling out the procedures 'exacerbated the conflict between teachers and parents' (Chakanyuka et al,2009).

Seventy -five percent (75%) of the teachers complained that sometimes they were being side stepped in the payment of incentives by unscrupulous school heads who paid their favourite teachers behind closed doors. It appears relationships among teachers and parents, and between teachers and heads of schools have been strained. There is a high degree of mistrust and suspicion among these people whose corporation is a must if the education system has to achieve the educational goal set for 2015.

The study also found out that parents /guardians are often being harassed for failure to pay the stipulated levies. A total of 66.6% of the parents who were interviewed indicated that parents /guardians are often handed over to debt collectors even for overdue amounts as small as \$10.00. This was done by the SDC/SDAs without prior warning in an attempt to raise the teacher's incentives. This practice was an attempt to circumvent /by pass the parent ministry's directive which states that no learner may be excluded from school for non payment of levies. So it appeared in most instances, when heads of schools were put under pressure by the teachers to pay their incentives while the money was not available ,they would invoke the powers invested in the SDC/SDA to take legal action against defaulting parents /guardians, and that they were handed over to debt collectors for paltry amounts. This is a clear indication of the fact that parents are being harassed for not paying levies so that school heads can pay their teachers. This echoes the same undertones as Jengeta (2010), who bemoaned that parents are in trouble as the teachers' incentives are bleeding them.

The interviews with parents also revealed that circular 5/09 was being manipulated by unscrupulous heads of schools and some SDCs/SDAs

for their benefit. This was done under the guise of boosting teacher incentives. It also emerged in the study that in order to boost the incentive amounts paid out school heads often diverted levies meant for infrastructure and acquisition of teaching and learning resources towards payment of teacher incentives while leaving school structures in a dilapidated state and without teaching and learning resources. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the parents who were interviewed complained that there was no significant development in the infrastructure of the school or on the availability of learning materials. Commenting on the manipulation of Ministry instruments that relate to SDC/SDA, Chakanyuka *et al* (2009) also noted in their research that the statutory instrument governing the operations of SDC/SDAs was outdated and could not be used effectively to work in conjunction with circular 5/09 on teachers' incentives.

**Effects of the implementation of circular minute number 5/09 on achieving universal primary education by 2015.**

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the interviewees indicated that there was a high drop out rate among learners who could not afford to pay the stipulated levies, some of which contributed towards payment of teacher incentives. They said that infrastructure in rural schools was lying idle because of the low enrolment. Interviews with school heads also confirmed that schools which used to have an enrolment of 1000 learners now only had 700 learners. This scenario obviously jeopardises the millennium goal of ensuring that all Zimbabwean children will be able to complete a full programme of primary education. (ZMDG 2004). The parents' inability to pay the stipulated levies implies that most children who come from poor backgrounds are forced to drop out of school especially if their parents are put under pressure to pay through threatening them with legal action.

The findings also indicated that the parent ministry is losing control of its power over the schools' administration as indicated by the varied

financial statuses of the different schools and the incentives they paid to their teachers. (See table 1). The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture seems to be slowly losing financial control of schools, leaving the schools to be run by SDC/SDAs, thus backtracking on the government's pronouncement of the provision of equal opportunities for all (Education Act, 1987). This way the ministry is slowly losing focus of the millennium development goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015, as only the children from financially stable families are currently attending school without disturbances.

### **Conclusion**

The study has established that the major problem associated with teacher incentives is the polarization of the education sector. Incentives have divided schools between the rich and the poor and this defeats government's goal of making education accessible to all. Mistrust and suspicion has also gripped most schools thus, jeopardising teaching and learning in the process. In reality, not much teaching is going on in schools where there are no incentives. The Ministry of Education is also fast losing its grip on schools and this does not augur well for a system that needs serious resuscitation after a long period of malfunctioning. It can be concluded from the findings that the ministry made the pronouncement which culminated in the Circular Number 5 of 2009 without having carried out research to establish the nature and scope of the problems that might arise from such an arrangement.

### **Recommendations**

- Sustainable salaries should be paid to teachers to create a semblance of uniformity.
- Payment of monetary incentives should basically be the Ministry's prerogative and not off-loaded on the shoulders of the SDCs and SDAs.
- If the incentive allowance is to be paid by schools there is need for transparency so as to destroy the air of mistrust that often characterises such practice.

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