Understanding Teachers' Perception on Organizational Support in Tanzanian Secondary Schools

Coletha Cleo Ngirwa

The Open University of Tanzania

Abstract: *In attempt to predict the significance of highly Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on employees and organization outcomes, this study examined the perception of teachers on the extent to which their employer cares about their wellbeing and values their contribution to education sector. The study was grounded from organizational support theory and employed cross sectional research design through a sample of 99 secondary school teachers in Tanzania. Results from descriptive analyses and interviews revealed low POS and dissatisfaction of teachers. Results call for managerial attention especially on energizing POS through ethical leadership and effective human resources management practices. This study calls for empirical integration in respect to mediators (fulfilment of teachers' rights and needs) in the relationship between POS and teachers commitment to teach in secondary schools.*

Keywords: Perceived Organization Support, Teachers' Rights and Needs Fulfillment

1. Introduction

Performance of any education system is an ideal of any nation. This is due to the importance of education to socio-economic development of a nation. Besides, it is an engine for eradication of societal problems such as ignorance, diseases and poverty. Accordingly, education has been tabled on the World wide agenda like Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the current performance of education sector in Tanzania is not good (see Certificate of Secondary Education Examination [CSEE] results, 2012- 2017). There has been a societal complaint about the inefficiencies of education sector (see Ngirwa, 2016). For instance, students have been completing secondary schools with academic failures whereby majority of students have been scoring division IV and zero (e.g., 61% of students scored Division 0 in 2012) (MOEVT, Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST), 1998-2012 in Twaweza, 2013, p.2). The majority of public secondary school graduates have been finishing their studies without getting the expected basic skills. Sorry to say that when students fail in their Certificate of Secondary School Examination (CSSE), they are left in dilemma. Many of them seem to have no difference with the primary school leavers. In this respect, the academic results have been causing frustrations not only to students but also to their parents who have sacrificed financially for their children education. The problem seems to have been grounded on both the Government (i.e. the employer) and teachers' low morale and counterproductive behaviours (Ngirwa, 2016).

A number of initiatives (e.g., Big Results Now- BRN, Primary Education Development Plan- PEDP, and Secondary Education Development Plan- SEDP) have been put in place by the Tanzanian government to rescue the situation in education sector. For example, through SEDP, Tanzanian government aims to:
- Provide capitation grants to students in secondary schools,
- Buy text books,
- Improve secondary schools' infrastructures (e.g. hostels & laboratories),
- Construct teachers' houses (URT, 2010: SEDP II).

The objectives seem important in improving teaching and learning environment and supporting teachers (e.g., the construction of teachers' houses). This is important in enhancing teachers' motivation to teach. Teachers are a central resource that makes other resources such as financial resources, teaching and learning materials in schools, useful. Hence, their wellbeing, and teaching morale seem crucial in ensuring that education resources function effectively towards goals attainment and effectiveness of education organizations.

To attain the teachers' job morale however, we believed in this study that would base on the notion of "norm of reciprocity". This is the extent to which teachers favorably evaluate their employer as being valuing their contributions to the organization (i.e., education sector), fulfilling their needs, and caring about their wellbeing; and thus hold higher POS (see Blau, 1964; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997). Studies of this nature might be common in the Western world but are rare in Tanzania, especially in education sectors. Therefore, this research asks: *What is the perception of teachers on the extent to which their employer cares about their wellbeing and values their contribution*?

2. Literature Review

A Theory of Organizational Support

The theory of organizational support is based on employees' tendency of attaching human behaviours to organizations (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). The tendency of humanizing organization is influenced by "the organization's legal, moral, and financial responsibility for the actions of its agents; by organizational policies, norms, and culture that provide continuity and prescribe role behaviours; and by the power the organization's agents exerted over individual employees" (Levinson, 1965 in

Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p.698). The organization humanization thus, makes employees judge the treatments and make conclusions on the organization caring about their wellbeing and valuing their contribution (Giorgin, Dubin & Perez, 2016; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2015; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The current study thus assumes that teachers would also humanize education sector (i.e., employer) by assessing the extent to which it cares or does not care about their wellbeing in schools. Grounded on the "norm of reciprocity", teachers' perceptions-POS level (high/low) would determine their job performance level in schools. Thus, the current study wishes for higher POS rather than low POS due to the significant link of POS to organizational productivity (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990).

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is grounded on the idea of 'reciprocation' of employees to employers in work organizations. This is a state whereby employees believe "that their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p.698). It is basically about fair treatment of employees (Ciulla, 2004), providing support and ensuring good working conditions (see Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Studies in management have revealed positive relationship between POS and employees' commitment to organization (see, Eisenberger *et al*., 1986, Kim *et al*., 2005, Tansky & Cohen, 2001; Riggle, Edmondson & Hansen, 2009). More specifically, it has been empirically revealed that when employees learn that their organization is supportive, cares about their wellbeing and values their contribution to the organization, they feel obliged to remain in the organization.

> *Employees who perceive the organization as caring for their well-being are, therefore, assumed to be more likely to reciprocate not only in engaging in various forms of pro-social behaviour directed toward the organization, but also by developing a stronger sense of organizational commitment* (Ucar & Otken, 2010, p.86).

Thus, organizations of all kinds (education sector inclusive) would benefit if they invested on supporting employees for their productive behaviours. In this context, the employees' strong belief (POS) benefits both the organization and employees. On the side of employees in work organization, there will be employees' wellbeing, "job satisfaction" and working under "good mood"; while on the organization side, it is easier to lessen employees' withdrawal behaviours (e.g., absenteeism) and enhances performance through employees' citizenship behaviours (Eisenberger *et al*., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p.698). Referring to the main focus of this research on the perception of teachers on the extent to which the employer cares about their wellbeing and value their contribution, we assume that teachers holding high POS would promise productive behaviours to the organization. This is due to the fact that with high POS, teachers believe that their employer has fair treatment of them, fulfills their needs, improves their working conditions and values their contribution on the development of education. The teachers would reciprocate to that

organization by working hard, and devoting much time in teaching.

Conditions of Perceived Organizational Support

The act of an employee perceiving cared and valued has its base. Specifically, employees should hold positive feelings of leaders' behaviours and practices, and perceive that employer fulfill their needs.

Leadership Behaviour

Leadership is crucial in attaining organization's desired results. It has been defined as a process of influencing others so that they can willingly participate in performing organization tasks (Mullins, 2005, Yukl, 2010). Thus leadership is associated with employees' performance and organization performance in general. Hence, leaders' behaviours affect, in many ways, employees' performance in work organizations. They would inevitably affect employees' belief on POS.

Contemporary studies on ethical and transformational leadership have revealed a need for cultural changes whereby leaders demonstrate fairness and care in their management endeavours (see Ciulla, 2010; Ngirwa, 2013; Stouten, Baillien, Van den Broeck, Camps, De Witte, & Euwema, 2011). While, previous studies associated democratic leadership with employees' motivation to organizational tasks (Cummings & Worley, 2009; Mullins, 2015, Ngirwa, 2013, Yukl, 2010); this study suggests a reciprocal relationship in which organizational leadership which is based on fairness and caring influence teachers' positive perception as being cared and valued (POS). Moreover, an employee's feelings of 'unrest' have been linked to autocratic leadership behaviours (Ngirwa, 2013) which in this study seem unfavourable for employees perceiving high POS. In this study thus, we put forward an assumption that teachers' feelings of being cared and valued would be a result of fair and considerate leadership behaviours in organizational endeavours. Thus, leadership behaviours seem important in enhancing teachers' perception of being cared, and valued.

Teachers' Needs Fulfillment

A number of theories (e.g., Alderfer's *Existence, Relatedness, Growth* (ERG) theory, 1969; Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory) have linked employee's needs fulfilment to motivation in work organizations. Similarly, various studies have revealed positive effect of employees' needs fulfilment on work motivation (see Ngirwa, 2013). The employees' needs however, would differ based on the organization businesses. For instance, we would expect differences between teachers' needs and engineers' needs. It has been contended that if an employer fulfills employees' needs, it would escalate employees' POS (see (Eisenberger *et al.,* 1986). Therefore, in order for teachers in secondary schools to develop high POS, their employer is expected to be ready to rewards extra efforts, reduce workload and improve working conditions (see Eisenberger *et al*., 1986). In Tanzania, there has been a claim of teachers working under poor environment. There seems to be inadequate teaching and learning facilities, poor infrastructures, and overcrowding classes. Initiatives have been in place to improve quality of education through focusing on improving

working environment (see Ndabise, 2008). The initiatives (e.g., the budget for building of teachers' houses) may be perceived positively by teachers as support (care) and value (by their employer) of their contribution to education sector. Albeit, when the plans are not implemented as planned, it would bring negative perception on the side of teachers. However, there are challenges (e.g., inadequate teaching and learning facilities, and poor infrastructures) that have been consistently noted in Tanzanian education sector (ref. Bryant, 2014). Thus, the level of POS can be reduced in some way. Therefore, the current research aims to find out the current perception of teachers on their employer's support.

3. Methods

Sample and Procedure
Research design implies the logical and coherent procedures of handling a research problem (see Creswell, 2014). This study employed mixed research approach and cross sectional research design whereby the data were collected once through questionnaires and written interviews. The study sample comprised teachers (n= 99) from six (6) secondary schools in Dar es Salaam region (i.e., a region that has 6 among the 10 worst performing secondary schools in the CSEE results 2016/2017). Initial contact with the Regional Administration and Districts Administration was made in February, 2018. Thereafter, individual teachers were contacted on basis of voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality. Accordingly, the data were reported and presented in cases and groups (see Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2006). In the schools, 106 questionnaires were distributed to teachers; at last 99 teachers filled in and returned the questionnaires on POS. Moreover, the respondents were involved in the written interviews (the data are presented in Table 2).

Measures
The scales were translated from English to Swahili in order to make them easier for the participants to fill. Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the scale. The scale seems satisfactory due to its internal consistency shown by Cronbach's alpha that exceeded lowest level (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) (see Cronbach's alpha in bracket, Table 1). POS was indexed with Eisenberger *et al*.'s (1986) 36 items on Perceived Organizational Support scale. Sample items were "If my employer found a more efficient way to get my job done they would replace me" and "Even if I did the best job possible, my employer would fail to notice" (α = .893). The respondents rated the items on Likert-type scale ranging from 1= Strongly Disagree to 6= Strongly Agree. All items assessed teachers' perception regarding the extent to which their employer cares, considers, appreciates and values about their contribution in education sector. This study also asked (i.e., through written interview) the respondents to give opinions on the appropriate ways of supporting teachers in secondary schools (Table 2).

4. Results

This study has two kinds of data, quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive

statistics. In order to avoid bias against the results, the mean was tested for each school before testing it to all six (6) schools. Before conducting the analyses, all *reversed* items were reversed to be in the same direction. The qualitative data were recorded, categorized and themes indentified from the narrations of teachers (Table 2).

The demographic information of participants indicated that most of respondents were female (n= 53) compared to male (n= 46) and many teachers were of age between 30-39 years (n= 66). Majority of respondents held 1ˢᵗ degree (n= 63) compared to teachers with master's degree (n= 06) and diploma (n= 30). The results revealed that teachers slightly disagreed with the statements regarding the extent to which their employer cares, considers, appreciates, and values their contribution (mean 3.052). There was a small deviate (0.806) of data which reveal consistency of perception on the POS among the respondents (Table 1).

Table I: Means, Standard Deviations, and Reliabilities
(Cronbach's alpha) (N=99)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Organisational support	99	1.36	4.86	3.0522	0.80685	(0.893)

Note: N= number of respondents

Hereunder, we present the qualitative data, Table 2.

Table 2: Opinions on the Appropriate Ways of Supporting
Teachers

Categories	Themes	Explanations
Ways of supporting teachers	Caring	• Improve teaching environment • Provide teaching and learning materials, tea, food, and water at work • Provide housing and transport allowance.
	Valuing	• Value teaching profession and contribution of teachers. • Respect and avoid bullying behaviours to teaching profession.
	Considering	• Provide teaching allowance and overtime allowance. • Reduce working hours. • Improve teachers' salaries, promotions, trainings, leave allowance.
	Recognizing	• Teachers' performance
	Involving	• Involve teachers when inducing changes

The data in table 2 revealed that participants indicated low POS. Teachers perceived that the employer was inconsiderate, not caring, not recognizing, and not valuing their contribution. The 90% of participants lamented about resilient efforts to make their working environment attractive. A teacher (no.31) from school B said:

> A teacher should be cared by enriching the teaching profession so that it is attractive as much as possible. This is through the availability of all teaching and learning facilities. Teachers should be provided with "in-service training" so that they are

updated with all necessary changes in this era of science and technology.

Another teacher (no.27) from school B emphasized:

Motivating and encouraging teachers is the main tool for making them effective in performing their duties. This is contrary to force and disgrace we are experiencing..... Working environment should be improved as currently most of teachers work under very poor working environment...living in poor environment, poor working facilities, poor offices...let's allow teachers' voice and listen to them when they present their opinions or recommendations concerning their job rather than planning for them or taking them by force......

Another teacher (no.73) from school E lamented:

I am not satisfied with the services teachers receive. Teachers do not get their rights in time and most of us do not get our rights at all. For example, I started working in 2013 but I have never been promoted or paid my leave allowance... this is very discouraging....

The qualitative data reported above supported the direction of the quantitative data. There was a consistency of perception on the ways employer cares, considers, recognises and values teachers' contribution. Teachers demonstrated frustration, cynicism, and dissatisfaction (e.g., "I am not satisfied with the services teachers' receive………") with the ways the organization was handling their rights and needs.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the perception of teachers on the extent to which their employer cares and values their contribution to education sector. Results from descriptive analyses revealed low POS (mean 3.052) which was explained by results from content analyses that posited unfavourable job condition, unfulfilled rights and needs and leaders' behaviours based on force. The results cement Ngirwa (2016)'s results where unfavourable working conditions, delays in fulfilling teachers' rights, force and coercion were linked to teachers' job stress and consequently performance decline of secondary education in Tanzania (Twaweza, 2013). The current study predicts important link between POS and organizational productivity (Eisenberger *et al*., 1990) which mainly depends on satisfied and motivated work force-teachers (Dartey-Baah & Harlley, 2010). All these might come as product of social exchange between employees' favourable evaluation of being cared and valued; and their performance (Eisenberger *et al*., 1986). The findings also promote ethical leadership behaviours (fair and considerate) in escalating POS through improving teachers' working condition (Stouten *et al*., 2011).

Perceived organizational support has been linked to desired employees' behaviours such as willingness to perform their duties, and commitment to organizational tasks (Eisenberger *et al*., 1986, Eisenberger *et al*., 1990, Kim, Eisenberger & Baik, 2016). Likewise, POS lessens employees' counterproductive behaviours such as absenteeism (Eisenberger *et al*., 1986) and work stress (Baran, Shanock & Miller, 2012). Therefore, it is possible that the revealed POS is more likely related to the decline of academic performance of secondary schools in Tanzania (ref. 2012-2017's CSEE results). This is due to the fact that the learned POS and job conditions would influence teachers reciprocating counterproductive behaviours that might affect schools' productivity.

Managerial and Policy Implications

The results of this study (i.e., low POS and dissatisfaction) have both managerial and policy implications. They call for managerial attention especially on energizing POS through leadership and human resources management practices (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart & Adis, 2015). This is about enhancing effective management of teachers' rights and needs- leave allowances, promotions, training, and improving working conditions. It is about emphasizing ethical leadership behaviours based on fairness, caring, supportive and consideration of staff (see Ciulla, 2004, Kurtessis *et al.* 2015) for energizing POS and importantly escalating schools' academic performance.

The results also call for policy statements that would address teachers' motivation and wellbeing based on teaching allowance and working time that seemed crucial for energizing POS. This study adds to the literature of POS by investigating levels of POS in the ground of education organizations and that bring perspectives related to *care* (i.e. effective management of teachers rights and needs) and *value* (i.e. recognise extra efforts, respect and avoid force and bullying behaviours to teaching profession) in the context of teachers' working conditions.

6. Limitations

There is no study without limitations. This study aimed to investigate levels of POS, thus we cannot draw conclusions of the effect of the learned low level of POS in organization. However, we were able to further understanding of teachers' perceptions on the extent an organization cares and values their contribution. Likewise, an organization is informed on the ways they would energize POS. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be underscored.

7. Conclusions

Building on organizational support theory, this study furthers understanding of the substances that influence employees' perception on the extent to which an organization cares and values their contribution. It is concluded that employees-teachers who experience organization delays in fulfilling their rights and needs reveal low POS. This is consistent with the employees' perception that their organization does not care about their wellbeing and does not value their contribution. The employees would respond to the condition through counterproductive behaviours that affect organizational performance. Thus, this study offers avenue for further research through testing the following proposition:

Favourable working conditions mediate relationship between Perceived Organizational Support [POS] and teaching commitment, such that POS will be positively related to teaching commitment for teachers who evaluate

organization fulfilling their rights and needs than teachers who evaluate unfulfilled rights and needs.

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