

Defining an Effective Teacher: An Examination of Characteristics That School Heads Associate with the Concept

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to examine what characteristics primary school heads of Bindura District, in Zimbabwe associate with effective teachers, and to determine the degree of consensus among them on this parameter. A descriptive survey was preferred as the design and a sample of 30 school heads was drawn from a District population of 54. A questionnaire and interviews were used to gather data. Respondents were agreed that effective teachers provide maximum opportunities for all students to learn, build a supportive climate and learning environment, and frequently engaged students in active learning situations. There was also concurrence among school heads on the view that many circumstances combine to yield student success and therefore an effective teacher may not be measured or defined on the basis of production of high pass rates. Staff development programmes were recommended as a means to help school heads find common ground regarding what to look for as they supervise and evaluate teachers.

Keywords: *Characteristics of an Effective Teacher, Teacher Effectiveness, Effective Teacher*

1. Introduction

Education systems today demand accountability of its practitioners. Legislators are reluctant to increase educational funding without exacting a corresponding increase in accountability. This increase in accountability means that educational leaders, including heads of schools, must be able to assess and identify quality teachers. Research offers a plethora of definitions of an effective teacher and Clark (2009) points out that the definition of "an effective teacher" involves someone who can increase student knowledge, but the definition cannot not end there. There is wide-ranging debate over what constitutes good classroom practice. For instance, one recent report cited the lack of agreement by teacher colleges and other professionals on what constitutes good practices (Cochran-Smith, 2000). Besides this lack of consensus on what an effective teacher is or does, there is no generally agreed-upon method for evaluating teacher effectiveness. Commonly used methods include classroom observations designed to measure teacher practices against some standard of effective teaching and value-laden models that set out to measure the contributions of individual teachers to their students' achievement gains. This study was designed to examine what school heads consistently perceived to be characteristics associated with teacher effectiveness. The assumption taken is that school heads are key players in the evaluation of teachers and therefore are better placed to provide useful indicators of effective teachers than most stakeholders in education.

Towards a Definition of Teacher Effectiveness

Swank, Taylor, Brady, and Frieberg (2009) created a model of teacher effectiveness that is based upon teacher actions. For them, *effective* meant increasing academic questions and decreasing lecture and ineffective practices, such as negative feedback and low-level questions. The authors believed that these factors become easily identifiable in the assessment of performance. Million (2004) on the other hand bases effectiveness on the lesson design and method of delivery. If teachers met a pre-set list of criteria during their evaluation, they were deemed effective.

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Papanastasiou (1999:6) stated that “no single teacher attribute or characteristic is adequate to define an effective teacher”. He believes that the classroom practices are important to learning. In support of this Papanastasiou’s (1999) view, Wenglinsky (2000) found that what happens in the classroom is critical and that how a teacher teaches is important. Practices that promote higher order thinking and active participation are most successful. The problem is, he found out, to translate this knowledge into an acceptable evaluation procedure of a teacher. Clark (1993:12) pointed out that “One area that was avoided by most authors was the idea of using student achievement as a measure of teacher effectiveness”.

Clark (ibid), goes further to comment that researchers appear to have taken student achievement for granted; they have believed that effective teaching techniques would automatically yield positive student achievement. Only recently has research seriously begun to look at achievement data. As Clark (1993) points out, the problem is determining how best to measure student achievement. The research of Sanders, 1996, 1999; Sanders, Wright, & Horn, 1997 at the University of Tennessee and of Wenglinsky (2000) offered a possible solution to this question. Their work demonstrated that teacher effectiveness can be measured and may be critical to student success. Both researches asserted that teacher effectiveness is the single biggest contributor to student success. Teacher effectiveness outweighs all other factors, such as class size, socioeconomic status, and gender. But who is an effective teacher? The New Teacher Centre (2009) defines “effective teacher” as “a teacher whose students achieve acceptable rates of student growth as defined in pre-set standards”. An effective teacher is judged, in significant measure, by student growth according to this definition.

Million (2004) prefers to focus on effective instruction or practices to define what an effective teacher is. He states that effective Instruction (also called Best Practices) may be most simply defined as teacher behaviours and practices which enhance the learning of all students. Notice that his definition refers to behaviours and practices, all plurals; effective teachers therefore do not believe in “one size fits all”. Note also that the definition says “all” students; effective teachers do not believe their effective teaching skills are limited by a student’s social class, academic ability, gender, or race. The definition also focuses on student learning; effective instruction is not, therefore, defined by how hard the teacher tries or how friendly the teacher is, but rather by how well the students achieve. Using this definition of an effective teacher, Million (2004) developed a three dimensional model of conceptualizing instructional effectiveness. The Three elements of an effective instructor are grouped as follows:

Effective teacher frame of mind

Million (2004) believes that most effective teachers approach the teaching-learning task with a common set of internalized views of the nature of the work that lies ahead. Further research has established that this frame of mind is considered as the foundation of effective teaching (Clark (2009; Tomlinson, 2000; and Bravmann, 2004). Many individuals who seek to enter a teacher preparation programme would have already internalized a number of these views. These views include:

- Teacher Dispositions – effective teachers believe all children can and have the capacity to learn, they see learners as valued individuals, and respond to each individual child in different ways. While this emotion is grounded in “liking children”, it goes beyond it. Many people, including politicians and parents, see teacher expectations as the key to achievement.
- Constructivist View of Students – effective teachers believe that learners play an active role in learning by making personal interpretations of their experiences. Thus, effective teachers strongly hold the belief that good teaching involves helping students to develop their metacognitive powers and therefore that their major role is to help students learn to think about their thinking . . . think about how they are learning.
- Active Teaching - effective teachers believe that as a teacher they must get directly involved in leading the class and personally overseeing learning activities. They have goals for their students

that extend beyond completing the day-to-day lessons. Effective teachers believe their teaching matters.

Effective teacher planning

Most effective teachers engage in extensive thinking about their lessons and programs before they deliver them. The time spent in planning most often exceeds the time spent in actual delivery. The elements of planning include:

(a) Specifying learning intentions or objectives

- Cognitive Domain - what do I want the learners to know?
- Psychomotor Domain – what skills do I expect the learners to develop?
- Affective Domain – what appreciations and dispositions do I want learners to develop?

(b) Match Lessons to Learner Characteristics

- consider difficulty level of new material vis-à-vis the ability levels found in the classroom
- consider the students' prior knowledge
- consider the current interests of learner

(c) Perform Task Analysis

- Scope - break the programme or lesson into smaller components. How much time do I initially allocate to each component, build in time to make adjustments.
- Sequence – Effective teachers determine the best starting point and order for instruction.
- Structure – They also decide which approaches or combination of approaches to use . . . direct instruction, discussion, cooperative learning (aka group work), independent problem solving, a competition, a game and so on.
- Space – The decision on how to set up the room to maximize learning and manage students is a critical issue to effective teachers.
- Resources – Effective teachers know and implement the principles of teaching and learning through the use of aids.

Effective teacher delivery

Goe (2007); Gordon, Kane, and Staiger (2006) observe that teacher delivery is what most non-professionals call teaching. It is what the students see. Three very important activities are identified in almost all research in the area of classroom behaviour of effective teachers and they are:

- Methods considerations – effective teachers choose carefully the method of delivery, to suit level of understanding of children, age, topic being taught and many other intervening variables.
- Questioning techniques - effective teachers ask a variety of questions, some questions are lower level questions (students will know the answers with a minimum of reflection) and some are higher level questions (students will have to think more deeply to achieve answers). Bloom's Taxonomy suggests six categories of question types that help effective teachers think about questioning techniques, and these are the recall/facts type, understanding type, application, analytical, evaluative, and synthesis type of classroom questioning.
- Reflection technique - effective Teachers observe, monitor, and reflect on their own practices as they teach. They often use journals, scripting or frequency counts to study their own instruction. This obviously helps them to learn from their own and other teachers' experiences.

Another approach of evaluating teachers in order to determine who among them is effective involves measurement of inputs, processes and outputs. According to the National Comprehensive Centre for Teacher Quality Report of 2008, *inputs* are what a teacher brings to his/her position, generally measured as teacher background, beliefs, expectations, experience, pedagogical and content knowledge, certification and licensure, and educational attainment. Literature sometimes discusses this dimension of measures as 'teacher quality'. *Processes* refer to the interaction that occurs in the classroom between

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teachers and students. It also may include a teacher's professional activities within the larger school and community. *Outputs* represent the results of classroom processes, such as impact on students' achievement, graduation rates, students' behaviour, engagement, attitudes, and social-emotional well-being. Other outcomes may involve contribution to the school and community in the form of taking on school leadership roles, educating other teachers, or strengthening relationship with parents.

A five point definition of an effective teacher emerged from this systemic approach and it includes the following:

- Effective teachers have high expectations for all students and help students learn as measured by value-added or other test-based growth measures, or by alternative measures.
- Effective teachers contribute to positive academic, attitudinal, and social outcomes for students such as regular attendance, on-time promotion to the next grade, on-time graduation, self-efficacy, and cooperative behaviour.
- Effective teachers use diverse resources to plan and structure engaging learning opportunities; monitor student progress formatively, adapting instruction as needed; and evaluate learning using multiple sources of evidence.
- Effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms and schools that value diverse and civic-mindedness.
- Effective teachers collaborate with other teachers, administrators, parents, and education professionals to ensure student success, particularly the success of students with special needs and those at risk for failure.

No matter how one defines an effective teacher, there is an understanding that teaching involves a complex set of knowledge, abilities, and personal attributes in dynamic interplay (Davey, 2007). Davey (2007) goes further to explain that evaluating teachers is different from evaluating labourers or assembly line workers in that there is no easily and immediately discernable end product to assess. Because there is no simple way to evaluate teachers, multiple methods have evolved. The most common method is classroom evaluation. One study found that 99.8% of public schools use school heads' classroom observations as the primary source of data for teacher evaluation, and consequent ranking as either effective or ineffective (Sullivan, 2001). Other methods include teacher portfolios, student evaluations, value-added assessment, and peer evaluations. A number of criticisms of approaches to teacher evaluation have been raised and some them are discussed here.

Critiques of the Dominant Teacher Effectiveness definitions

Increasingly, policy conversations frame an effective teacher as one with the ability to produce higher than expected gains in students' standardized test scores. This focus has a number of strengths in that measurement using statistical data collected is possible and there is high credibility in the results obtained. Most teachers and stakeholders in education would agree that an effective teacher should help students learn more. However, the definition has serious limitations. First, teachers are not solely responsible for students' learning. Richardson (2005) illustrates this problem with the following scenario:

If we pre-suppose a blank, receptive mind, encased within a compliant and passive learner, then we need travel only a very short logical distance to infer that teaching produces learning, and hence that what teachers do determines whether students learn. In the passive recipient view, it makes some sense to think of successful teaching arising solely from the actions of a teacher. That is, learning on the part of the student is indeed a direct result of actions by a teacher. Yet we all know that learners are not passive receptors of information directed to them. Assuming that the formulation offered above has merit, then it follows that success at learning requires a combination of circumstances well beyond the actions of a teacher.

Secondly, it has been argued that students' learning is more than average achievement gains. Teacher effectiveness is more than only students' achievement and therefore, it would be narrow and a misnomer to refer to it as teacher effectiveness. Lastly, Campbell et al (2003) advocate for a drive towards building consensus on what should constitute the qualities of an effective teacher rather a current obsession with measuring teacher effectiveness. They criticize educationists' undue concentration in developing measuring mechanisms to evaluate teacher effectiveness when there is wide disagreement on what it is that makes an effective teacher. This study, therefore, aimed at examining the perceptions of school heads regarding characteristics they consistently concur to constitute an effective teacher.

Statement of the Problem

There are divergent views and definitions ascribed to the notion of teacher effectiveness. Heads of schools have a responsibility to evaluate teachers basing their decisions on policy guidelines. The problem is how agreeable are school heads on the characteristics that make an effective teacher?

Research questions

The following sub-questions were considered:

- What definition of an effective teacher is used in schools?
- How agreeable are heads of schools on definition of an effective teacher?
- What characteristics of an effective teacher are common to schools?

Purposes of the Study

The study sought to achieve these objectives:

- Identify viewpoints on the definitions of an effective teacher from school heads.
- Establish the level of consensus among school heads on how they define an effective teacher.
- Extrapolate the common characteristics of an effective teacher as perceived by school heads.

Significance of the Study

The findings are expected to make further contribution to literature on teacher supervision and evaluation. School – based staff development programmes and teacher education in particular should benefit through the use of the results as instructional material. The ultimate beneficiaries of the results, it is hoped, are the learners because clarity of conception of teacher effectiveness is likely to translate into improved strategies of staff development.

Delimitations of the Study

The study focused on Bindura District of Mashonaland Central Province, northeast of Zimbabwe. The district has 56 schools, situated in urban, communal, resettlement and commercial farming areas.

2. Research Design and Methodology

There are basically two major research orientations that focus on how knowledge is developed. They are the positivist paradigm and the interpretive paradigm. According to Evers and Lakomski (2002), the twentieth century has witnessed the conflict between these two main paradigms employed in researching educational problems. The one is modelled on the natural sciences (Quantitative) with an emphasis on empirical quantifiable observations which lend themselves to analysis by means of mathematical tools. The task of research under this orientation is to establish causal relationships, and to explain phenomena. The other paradigm is derived from the humanities (Qualitative) with an emphasis on holistic and qualitative information and to interpretive approaches. Quantitative research emphasizes objectivity and statistical analyses while the qualitative one focuses on subjective multiple realities. Given the nature of this study's research questions that primarily focused on school heads' perceptions of characteristics that they concur constitute an effective teacher, the study could not be situated in the interpretive paradigm

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but rather in the positivist one. The research tools chosen, however, ensured that both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained to answer the research questions.

The Research Design

A descriptive survey design was primarily used to carry out the study. Cohen and Manion (2001) describe a descriptive survey as an approach to research where data can be gathered at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared. Data can also be used to determine the relationships that exist between specific events. Thus, in this study the data was required to determine the degree of consensus among heads of schools on characteristics that constitute an effective teacher and to identify definitions of an effective teacher as perceived by school heads.

Study Population

There were 54 primary schools in the district and all the heads of these schools formed the target population of the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

A question that has often troubled researchers, according to Cohen and Manion (2001), is just how large their samples should be in order to conduct an adequate descriptive survey. This study benefited from the authors' advice that a sample of thirty (30) is held by many to be the minimum number of cases if the use of some form of statistical analysis on the collected is planned. Thirty school heads were proportionately selected using the stratified simple random sampling technique. The strata were defined by school location.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used and they are a self-completion questionnaire and a structured interview. The questionnaire consisted of four sections; bio-data of the head, definitions of effective teacher, and head's perceptions of an effective teacher. The questions included both open-ended and closed-ended items.

The interview was structured to enable better management of collected data. It would have been an unstructured interview requiring transcripts of responses from school heads had this study taken the interpretive paradigm.

Data Collection Procedures

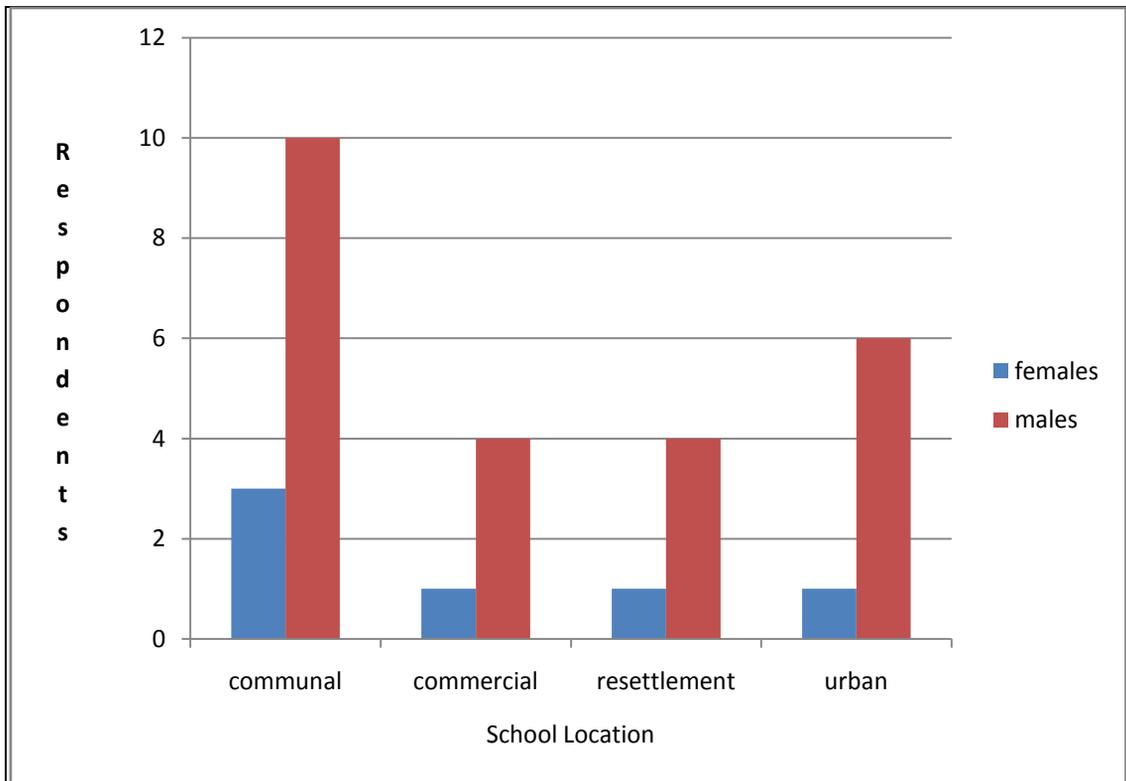
Permission to conduct the study was sought from the provincial Education Director, who directed the researchers to the relevant District Education office of Bindura. Heads of schools were informed and requested to participate in the study after due assurance of the confidentiality of their responses. An opening of schools meeting in January 2013 provided the research an ideal platform to administer the questionnaire to the sampled school heads. The opportunity ensured 100% return rate as the respondents were at the same venue.

Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

Tables, pie-charts and bar graphs were preferred as means of presenting data. These methods enable the readers of the report to quickly grasp the information, unlike verbal presentations which tend to be elaborate and often unclear. Percentages of totals, means, and ratios were computed to add to the understanding of results.

3. Presentation of Results

The data presented in this section is based on responses from 30 questionnaires and eight interviews. The distribution of the final sample by gender and school location is given in Figure 1.



N=30

Figure 1: Distribution of the Final Sample by Gender and School Location

It was expected that there would be fewer female heads of schools than male since it is still the general pattern obtaining in the education system. Sampling was done from communal and resettlement areas only where there were more than one female heads. Otherwise commercial farming and urban each had one female head who automatically became respondents.

Heads of schools were asked to indicate their highest professional qualifications and the table below shows the distribution of their responses.

Table 1: Highest Professional Qualifications

N = 30

Qualifications	Number of Respondents	Percent (%)
Certificate/Diploma in Education	8	26
B.Ed (EAPPS/Mgt)	17	57
M.Ed (EAPPS/Mgt)	5	17
Other	0	0
Total	30	100

The Table shows that approximately three out of every four heads of schools hold an administrative degree in education. This was found to be very encouraging in terms of supervision and evaluation of teachers because the heads of schools are equipped with skills and knowledge in these roles. The study also sought to determine the experiences of the heads of schools in their positions and the pie-chart below illustrates the distribution of their experiences.

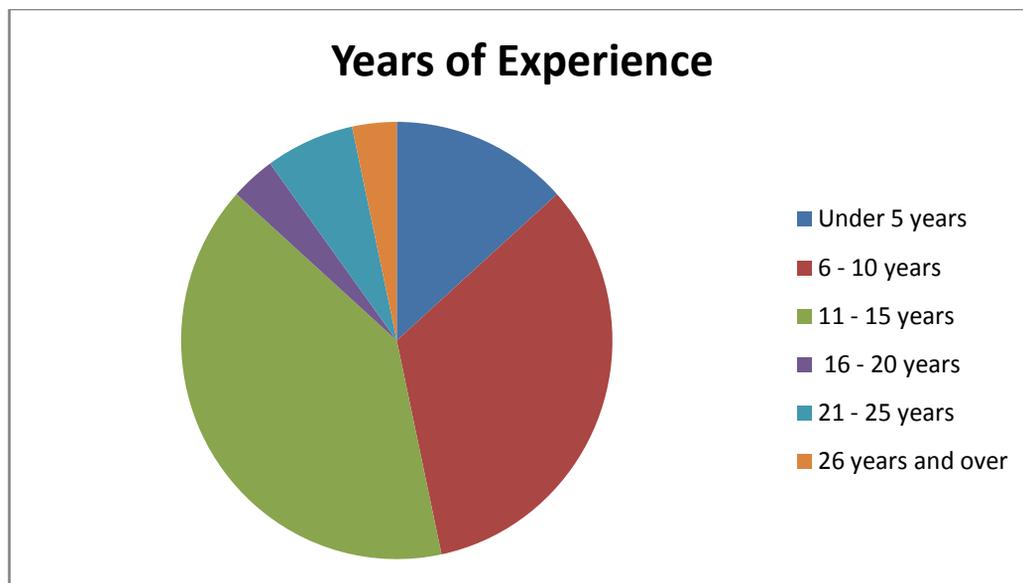


Figure 2: A Pie-chart Showing the Distribution of School Heads by Years of Experience N=30

The modal class of 11- 15 years shows that most school heads are well experienced in their positions which could imply a better understanding of characteristics associated with effective and ineffective teachers. In fact, even those heads of schools with experiences ranging from 6-10 years can be considered well acquainted with the skills and knowledge of supervising teachers. The results show that more than 75% of heads possess experiences ranging from six to fifteen years as instructional supervisors and teacher evaluators.

School heads were asked to provide their own definitions of an “effective teacher”, from their experiences. The definitions were transcribed and analyzed. The following themes characterized the school heads’ definitions:

- An effective teacher is someone who has the ability to establish positive and realistic expectations for success of their students.
- An effective teacher is someone who is organized and able to maintain a well-ordered environment, from the paperwork and deadlines, to the behaviour of students.
- An effective teacher is someone who knows how to create interesting lessons. These lessons must be captivating, reach all students, and ensure mastery.
- An effective teacher is kind and fair.
- An effective teacher monitors students’ progress and potential
- An effective teacher is one who exhibits a high level of professionalism
- Creates a safe, supportive environment
- He/she uses humour, is flexibility, and consistent in his/her dealings with students
- He/she uses feedback-specific praise
- An effective teacher creates relevant and meaningful learning experiences
- He/she plans stimulating and interesting learning activities that engage and challenge the students

- He/she uses a range of strategies e.g. visual supports to arouse students' interest in subject matter.

The strands of possible definitions of an effective teacher above suggest a diversity of views among heads of schools. Thus, no matter how experienced the school heads may be, there is evidence that conception of an effective teacher varies but consistent characteristics appear embodied in all definitions given. One of the major purposes of this study was to determine the degree of consensus among school heads on how they perceived an effective teacher. It seems from the above definitions that although there were some variations, each definition did touch on an important trait of the complex concept of an effective teacher.

In order to further demonstrate how school heads perceived an effective teacher, the study asked them to indicate their agreement or disagreement with definitions drawn from literature search. The school heads were further asked to select five definitions from that given list and rank them in order of importance starting with number one as the most appropriate definition. Table 2 below shows the responses of how the heads agreed or disagreed with definitions from literature search.

Table 2: School Heads' Agreement or Disagreement with Given Definitions (N=30)

Statements	SA	A	DA	SDA
An effective teacher prepares his/her work before teaching	26 (87%)	4 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
An effective teacher is one whose students pass examinations very well	1 (3%)	7 (23%)	17 (57%)	5 (17%)
An effective teacher is one who is friendly to students	14 (46%)	9 (30%)	2 (7%)	5 (17%)
An effective teacher uses a variety of teaching methods in his/her lessons	28 (93%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
An effective teacher prepares attractive teaching and learning aids	7 (23%)	2 (9%)	17 (57%)	4 (13%)
An effective teacher instils discipline among students	19 (64%)	10 (33%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
An effective teacher is one who is knowledgeable in his/her subject matter	27 (90%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
An effective teacher has a good relationship with other school staff	11 (37%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	13 (43%)
An effective teacher relates well with parents	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	24 (80%)	1 (3%)
An effective teacher is one who is seldom absent from work	5 (17%)	3 (10%)	5 (17%)	17 (56%)
An effective teacher is one who creates opportunities to learn for his/her students	25 (83%)	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
An effective teacher is one who is always smartly dressed to set an example	6 (20%)	4 (13%)	12 (40%)	8 (27%)
An effective teacher is one who has studied through teacher education college	26 (87%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
An effective teacher gives his/her students plenty of work to do	10 (34%)	12 (40%)	4 (13%)	4 (13%)
An effective teacher maintains a clean and orderly classroom environment	5 (17%)	9 (30%)	13 (43%)	3 (10%)
An effective teacher uses corporal punishment when necessary	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	6 (20%)	22 (73%)
An effective teacher caters for all students in his/her lessons	23 (77%)	6 (20%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)

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The most appropriate method adopted in analyzing the responses was to group them into two categories, those that weighed more on the agreement side and those on the disagreement one. The following definitions were strongly agreed to by school heads as being consistent with an effective teacher:

- An effective teacher prepares his/her work before teaching
- An effective teacher is one who is friendly to students
- An effective teacher uses a variety of teaching methods in his/her lessons
- An effective teacher instils discipline among students
- An effective teacher is one who is knowledgeable in his/her subject matter
- An effective teacher is one who has studied through teacher education college
- An effective teacher is one who creates opportunities to learn for his/her students
- An effective teacher gives his/her students plenty of work to do
- An effective teacher caters for all students in his/her lessons

What the school heads appear to agree with is in line with what Adams and Pierce (2004) present as the key characteristics of an effective which are:

- Knowledge of basic principles and procedures (pedagogical theory)
- Planning and preparation of work
- Teaching experience
- Flexibility, and
- Knowledge of subject matter

Although the heads of schools put these traits in differing terms, it seems that they concur on the above as critical to an effective teacher. The second category of analysis includes those aspects on which heads of schools were generally in disagreement with and they were:

- An effective teacher is one whose students pass examinations very well
- An effective teacher prepares attractive teaching and learning aids
- An effective teacher relates well with parents
- An effective teacher is one who is seldom absent from work
- An effective teacher is one who is always smartly dressed to set an example
- An effective teacher uses corporal punishment when necessary

It appears respondents were in agreement with Goe, Bell and Little (2008), and Richardson (2008) who indicate that student success at learning requires a combination of circumstances well beyond the actions of a teacher alone and judging teacher effectiveness on the basis of students success in examinations would be a misnomer. It is, however, unclear why the respondents generally disagreed with the view that an effective teacher should relate well with parents, and prepare attractive teaching and learning aids. Literature seems to consider the teacher's good relationship with parents as a strong indicator of teacher effectiveness.

The respondents were asked to select any five traits associated with effective teachers and rank them from one to five in order of how they saw them as important and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Top Five Characteristics of Effective Teacher: Rankings by School Heads N=30

Characteristics of Effective Teachers	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total (%)
An effective teacher is one who is knowledgeable in his/her subject matter.	28	93
An effective teacher caters for all students in his/her lessons	26	86
An effective teacher prepares his/her work before teaching	22	73
An effective teacher is one who has studied through teacher education college	21	70
An effective teacher uses a variety of teaching methods in his/her lessons	18	60

A knowledgeable teacher was by far regarded as an effective one by 93% of the respondents. This was followed by teachers who cater for all students in their lessons at 86%, one who prepares his/her work before teaching at (73%), one who has gone through teacher education at (70%), and finally the teacher who uses a variety of teaching methods at (60%). According to McBer (2000), there are three main factors within teachers' control that significantly influence pupil learning and progress, namely teaching skills, professional characteristics, and classroom climate. What the respondents gave as the top five characteristics of an effective teacher appears to support the assertion by McBer (ibid). There are those characteristics relating to classroom climate, those relating to teaching skills, and those that relate to the teacher's professional traits.

4. Discussion of results

Although it is theoretically possible to identify indicators or characteristics of an effective teacher, it seems there is very limited consensus among those charged with the task of evaluating teachers. The study demonstrated that there are problems associated with the determination of teacher effectiveness. Enthusiasm for a subject or specialism has however, appeared as a key characteristic of effective teachers. Effective teachers have also been identified as knowledgeable about their lesson content so that it is intellectually stimulating and challenging, they also offer plenty of variety, so that pupils enjoy learning. Effective teachers were characterized by school heads as those that embrace the following qualities:

- Good classroom management and organization
- Clear planning of work and orienting for instruction
- Implementing instruction by catering for all learners
- Monitoring student progress and making remedial lessons where necessary.

School heads were agreed that effective teachers providing maximum opportunities for all students to learn, built a supportive climate and learning environment, and frequently engaged students in active learning opportunities. There was concurrence among heads of schools on the view that many circumstances combine to yield student success and therefore an effective teacher may not be measured or defined on the basis of production of high pass rates. Arthur, Gordon & Butterfield (2003) support the views of the school heads when they discovered that an effective teacher creates a positive learning environment, organises the classroom ecology in such a way as to maximise academic learning time, manages the physical environment, develops the classroom code, and develops routines and procedures as guidelines for students to abide by.

What failed to come out of the findings of this study, however, was the inclusion of communication as a critical characteristic of an effective teacher. An effective teacher communicates effectively (Hodge, 1993.) and listens effectively. Turnbull (2007) also claims that it is not only *what* a teacher says, but, also, *how* a teacher says it, that ensures that the message is correctly conveyed. It is important that the teacher

uses adequate hand gestures, body movement and facial expression to physically accompany what is being taught.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

School heads focus on a variety of characteristics in their definition of an effective teacher. There is little consensus among the heads of schools on what characteristics constitute an effective teacher. However, despite the divergence of views among them, the school heads included the main characteristics of effective teachers in their explanations. There are common characteristics of effective teachers that are agreed upon even though they leave out what literature considers critical attributes of an effective teacher. The definition of an effective teacher associating him/her with achievement of high pass rates among students is denied while the one that views an effective teacher as someone knowledgeable is widely accepted.

The following conclusions were reached:

- School heads hold different definitions of an effective teacher even though all of their definitions do embrace the main characteristics of an effective teacher.
- There is diversity of focus in the definitions of an effective teacher as viewed by school heads.
- The majority of school heads agreed on what they considered the top five characteristics of an effective teacher.

In the context of these conclusions, the following recommendations are presented:

- Staff development programmes should be held to familiarize heads of schools on the main characteristics that constitute an effective teacher. The staff development programmes will be aimed at helping heads of schools to find some common ground regarding what to look for as they supervise and evaluate teachers.
- Teacher education should focus on the major attributes of an effective teacher to ensure that their products meet the demands of classroom teaching.
- Further research is recommended on determining the measurability of the indicators of an effective teacher.

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