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HEAD TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF POWER BASES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ABOUT SWAZILAND

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Abstract

As chief executives of schools, head teachers are often called upon to make demands or issue orders to staff members. Sometimes they need to resort to power to back up their demands and orders. The degree to which teachers listen and carry out head teachers' demands or orders is dependent, to some degree, on the perceived power bases.

The purposes of this study were to examine (i) the profile of high school head teachers of Swaziland, (ii) the power bases perceived by high school head teachers of Swaziland to be very effective in influencing staff members to comply with the head teachers' demands and orders; (iii) the extent to which high school head teachers felt satisfied or dissatisfied with the headship job, salary, car loan, and housing allowance; (iv) the relationship between the background variables of high school head teachers and their level of satisfaction with the headship job, salary, car loan and housing allowance; and (v) the relationship between the head teachers' background characteristics and the perceived use of the power bases to influence staff members to comply with the head teachers' orders and demands.

Data for this study were collected by a survey questionnaire mailed to 105 high schools in Swaziland. A self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed for returning the completed questionnaire. Out of 105 mailed questionnaires, 63 (60%) were returned, of which 4 questionnaires were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis. In essence, the results of the present study are based on information provided by 59 (56%) high school head teachers out of a total of 105.

The data indicated that the majority of the high school head teachers in Swaziland are predominantly male, relatively experienced as teachers, but inexperienced as heads of schools. Second, the majority of the high school head teachers were satisfied with the headship job, but dissatisfied with the salary, car loan, and housing allowance. Third, high school head teachers perceived the position power base to be very effective in influencing staff members to comply with commands and orders of heads of schools. Fourth, they perceived coercive power base to be least effective in influencing staff members to comply with commands and orders of heads of schools. Lastly, older experienced male head teachers were more likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases to influence staff members to comply with demands, orders, and commands, compared to young less experienced female high school head teachers.

The Problem

Schools are formal organizations established to provide learning to students (Hall, 1963). Head teachers are charged with the task of maintaining a school environment conducive to learning (Balderson, 1975). In order to accomplish that task head teachers need not only acquire appropriate administrative, managerial, and leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Magagula, 1991), but also feel satisfied with their job. As chief executives of schools, head teachers are often called upon to make demands or issue orders to staff members. Sometimes they resort to power to back-up their demands and orders. However, the degree to which teachers listen and carry out a head teacher's demands or orders is dependent, to some degree, on the perceived power bases.

Power Defined

Slevin (1989) explains power as a situation whereby an individual A causes another individual B to do something that B would otherwise not have done. It is the ability of an actor to affect the behaviour of another actor in a positive or negative direction (Muth, 1984). Power is an actor's ability to induce or influence another actor to carry out the former's demands, orders, commands, or directives (Etzioni, 1975). In such a situation A has

power over B. In schools, when a head teacher influences staff members to do something which otherwise they would not do, she/he is exercising her/his power over them.

Conceptual Framework

The present study is grounded on the functionalist power models espoused by Weber (1947), French and Raven (1960), Peabody (1962), Balderson (1975), Thomas (1985), Treslan and Ryan (1986), Gunn, Holday, and Johnson (1988), and Slevin (1989). French and Raven conceptualized five bases of power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Thomas (1985) has added a sixth power base: information power.

Information power comes from an individual's ability to use logic, data, and facts to influence others to do what she/he would like them to do which otherwise they would not do. Within the school context, information power may be those facts and data (information) which the head teacher is aware of which she/he uses logically to convince and influence staff members to do what she/he would like them to do.

Reward power is based on the perception that an individual A has the ability to give rewards to another individual B. Within the school context, reward power is based on the teachers' belief that the head teacher has the ability to mediate, withhold, permit, or increase rewards for them. It is the ability of a head teacher to provide staff members with something they want and staff members' belief that she/he can deliver the desired goods.

Coercive power is based on the perception that the power wielder (A) has the ability to mediate punishment if B fails to conform to his/her demands and orders. Within the school context, coercive power is the ability of a head teacher to chastise staff members, through expulsion, suspension, forced transfers, and demotion if they fail to conform or comply with his/her orders and demands.

Legitimate (position) power is based on the belief that the power wielder has the right to prescribe certain behaviour and opinions and others have an obligation to accept his/her influence. In a school situation, legitimate power may be perceived as teachers' perceptions that the head teacher, by virtue of his/her position and status, has the right to expect, demand, or order them to behave in certain ways. Legitimate power comes from the head teacher's job description, right to make decisions, and the staff members' recognition of that right.

Referent power comes from the rapport, closeness, affection, respect, identification, feeling of oneness, attraction A has developed with B. A uses that rapport, affection, respect, feeling of oneness to influence B. In a school context, referent power may be perceived as the rapport, affection, respect, identification, feeling of oneness, attraction a head teacher has developed with his/her staff members and uses that to influence them.

Expert power is based on B's perception that A possesses special knowledge and skills (expertise) in a certain area. It is the ability of A to be convincing in the presentation of facts, logic, and data. In contrast to legitimate power, which is assigned, expert power must be earned. Within a school situation, expert power may be a head teacher's ability to make quality management judgements based on his/her training in school management knowledge, and the staff members' belief that she/he possesses such knowledge and expertise in the area.

Empirical research indicates that certain power bases are less effective in getting teachers to perform their teaching tasks (Etzioni, 1968; Herlihy & Herlihy, 1985; Balderson, 1975; Johnson, 1984; Treslan and Ryan, 1986;). Mitzner (1968), in a study of fifty diverse organizations, found that employees in coercive organizations were least committed to organizational values, whereas those in the normative organizations were strongly committed. Franklin (1975) found a negative association between utilitarian power usage and staff commitment to work. Miller (1967) and Schaupp (1971) found a negative association between remunerative power and staff involvement. Warren (1969) found that the

broader the range of power bases used, the greater the teachers' overall conformity. Balderson (1975) found that expert power was more preferred by teachers than the other power bases.

Context of the Study

Swaziland is a small land-locked country of less than a million people. The educational system of Swaziland is modelled after the British system: it is hierarchical, pyramidal, and controlled by terminal examinations at certain levels. As such, there are fewer school places for students in the upper educational levels. Competition for places in the upper educational level is very high. To proceed from one level of education to the next, an individual has to pass the terminal level examinations very well.

Also, education in Swaziland is not free. Head teachers have the right to admit first the pupils who have done very well in the terminal examinations. In recent years, junior high schools (form 1 up to form 3) have been upgraded to high schools (form 1 up to form 5) so as to increase the number of high schools. Despite this policy the pressure for competition in high schools is still high.

Second, to be a head teacher in Swaziland, one must have at least a first university degree. She/he does not have to acquire some qualifications in school administration, management, and/or leadership. Head teachers are promoted from the cadre of experienced teachers. Also, head teachers in Swaziland influence decisions pertaining to the promotions, demotions, suspensions, expulsions, transfers, and tenure of other staff members. Communication between staff members and the Ministry of Education has to be via the head teacher. All information to or from the Ministry of Education has to pass through the head teacher.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the numerous empirical research studies conducted elsewhere on the use of power bases by school administrators, very little, if any, similar research has been conducted in Third World Countries, Swaziland included. Yet the appropriate exercise of power in schools appears to be essential for the teaching/learning process (Treslan & Ryan, 1986). Indeed, power gets things done (Slevin, 1989). Under pressure to produce quick, direct, and visible results, head teachers may inappropriately use the power bases.

The purposes of this study were to examine (i) the profile of high school head teachers of Swaziland; (ii) the power bases perceived by high school head teachers of Swaziland to be very effective in influencing staff members to comply with the head teachers' demands and orders; (iii) the extent to which high school head teachers felt satisfied or dissatisfied with the headship job, salary, car loan, and housing allowance; (iv) the relationship between the background variables of high school head teachers and their level of satisfaction with the headship job, salary, car loan and housing allowance; and (v) the relationship between the head teacher's background characteristics and the perceived use of the power bases to influence staff members to comply with the head teacher's orders and demands.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

- 1. What is the profile of high school head teachers of Swaziland?
- 2. Which power bases are perceived by high school head teachers of Swaziland to be very effective in influencing staff members comply with the head teacher's demands and orders?
- 3. To what extent are high school head teachers satisfied or dissatisfied with the headship job, salary, car loan, and housing allowance?
- 4. What is the relationship between the background variables of high school head teachers and the level of satisfaction with the headship job?

5. What is the relationship between the head teacher's background characteristics and the perceived use of power bases to influence staff members comply with the head teacher's orders and demands?

Methodology

As of 1993, there were 105 high school head teachers. Data for this study were collected by a survey questionnaire mailed to all high schools. A self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed for returning the completed questionnaire. Out of 105 mailed questionnaires, 63 (60%) were returned of which 4 questionnaires were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis. In essence, the results of the present study are based on information provided by 59 (56%) high school head teachers out of a total of 105.

The questionnaire was developed by the author. It had three sections. Section one solicited information pertaining to the profile of the high school head teachers (i.e. age, sex, expperience as a teacher, and experience as a head teacher), the characteristics of the schools managed (i.e. type, location, and size).

Section two focused on the six power bases as conceptualized by French and Raven (1960) and Thomas (1985). The questionnaire items were adapted from the work of Slevin (1989). Following Slevin, each power base was measured by two items. Slevin used the literature review to develop the items. To estimate content and face validity, colleagues in the faculty of education were asked to inspect the suitability of the items for the local context.

Head teachers were asked to indicate, on a Likert-type six point scale [1 = "never" to 6 = "always"], the extent to which staff members complied with their demands, orders, and directives in the schools. The Cronbach reliability coefficient alphas of the six power bases ranged from .37 to .57. However, the Cronbach reliability coefficient alpha for the whole power scale was .74.

Section three focused on the head teacher's satisfaction with the headship job, salary, car loan, and housing loan. Each of these dimensions were measured by item. Specifically, head teachers were asked to rate, on a Likert-type five point scale [1 = "very dissatisfied" to 5 = "very satisfied"], the extent to which they were satisfied with the headship job, salary, housing loan, car loan, and promotion system.

Results

Profile of High School Head Teachers

Table 1 indicates the profile of the high school head teachers and the schools they manage. Of the 59 high school head teachers, 53 (90%) were males and 6 (10%) were females. Most of them were of middle age with ages ranging between 30 to 57 years, the majority being 40 years old. More than half (56%) of the high school head teachers were between 30 and 40 years old.

Table 1
Profile of High School Head Teachers and the Schools they Manage

Variable	Number	Mean	Median	Mode
Age		40	40	40
30 - 40 Years	33 (56%)	•		
41 - 57 Years	26 (44%)		•	
Sex				
Male	53 (90%)			
Female	6 (10%)			
Experience as a Teacher	, ,	15	15	15
7 - 15 Years	33 (56%)			
16 - 32 Years	26 (44%)	•		
Experience as Head Teacher	` ,	8	6	· 2
1 - 6 Years	30 (51%)	•		
7 - 27 Years	29 (49%)			
School Size	, ,	392	386	350
150 - 386 Students	30 (51%)			
388 - 900 Students	29 (49%)			
Type of School	` ,			
Government	27 (46%)			
Mission	18 (31%)			
Community	14 (23%)			
Location of School	` ,			
Urban	21 (36%)			
Rural	38 (64%)			

With respect to teaching experience, as expected, the majority of the high school head teachers had taught for more than 5 years¹. The teaching experience of the 59 head teachers ranged from 7 years up to 32 years. Most of the 59 high school head teachers (56%) had taught for 15 years. Also, the majority of the 59 high school head teachers were relatively inexperienced as heads of schools, judging by the range of the number of years as heads. In fact, slightly above half (51%) of them had been heads of high schools for less than 7 years.

In terms of school size, the 59 schools had student enrolments ranging from 150 to 900. The average student enrolment was 392, whilst the median and mode of student enrolments were 386 and 350 respectively. About half of the 59 high schools had a student enrolment of 386 or less. Of the 59 high schools, 27 (46%) were government schools, 18 (31%) mission schools, and 14 (23%) community schools. Similarly, of the 59 high schools, 21 (36%) were situated in urban areas, whilst 38 (64%) were situated in rural areas.

In summary, the data seem to indicate that generally high school head teachers of Swaziland are predominantly male, relatively experienced as teachers, but inexperienced as heads of schools. The high schools are relatively of medium size. Most of them are owned by government and are located in rural areas. The results of this study are in agreement with findings of an earlier analysis of the profile of head teachers in Swaziland by the author (Magagula, 1993).

That the majority of high school head teachers are inexperienced as heads could be explained by the fact that quite a number of junior secondary schools have been upgraded to high schools (Central Statistic Office,

¹ One criteria for appointment to the headship post is that a teacher must have served for at least 5 years.

1993). Evidently, this has led to a number of teachers to be promoted to the headship positions. However, further research is needed to verify this speculative explanation. Also, further research is needed to explain the predominance of male head teachers in the headship positions (see Magagula, 1993) and the relatively little experience as heads of high schools in Swaziland.

Power Bases Influencing Teacher Compliance

The second objective of this study was to examine the power bases perceived by high school head teachers of Swaziland to be very effective in influencing staff members to comply with the head teacher's demands and orders. Table 2 and Figure 1 indicate the mean scores and standard deviations of the six power bases as rated by high school head teachers.

Careful examination of Table 2 and Figure 1 suggests that overall the high school head teachers believed that five of the six power bases were effective in influencing staff members to comply with the demands, directives, orders, or commands of the head teachers. The mean scores of the five power bases (information, position, referent, expert, and reward) were above the conceptual mean of 3.5². The overall mean score of the six power bases was 3.77. When rank ordered, head teachers seemed to have viewed the position (authority) power base (4.09) as the most effective in influencing staff members comply with orders, followed by the information power base (3.91), reward power base (3.72), referent power base (3.66), and expert power bases were above the overall mean score of the six power bases (3.77). Coercive power base was the only item with

² In a scale of 1 to 6, the conceptual (theoretical) mean is regarded as the mid-point of the scale, i.e. 3.5.

a mean score (2.84) below the conceptual mean score (3.5) and the overall mean score (3.77) of the six power bases.

Table 2

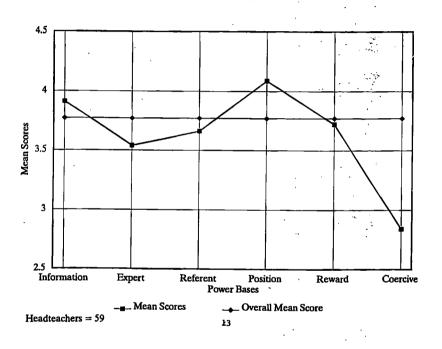
Head teachers' Perceptions of the Six Power Bases
Influencing Teacher Compliance

	Actual Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Information Power	3.91	.60
2. Expert Power	3.54	1.06
3. Referent Power	3.66	.86
4. Position Power	4.09	.85
5. Reward Power	3.72	.99
6. Coercive Power	2.84	1.09
7. Overall Power	3.77	.63

Scale: 1 =Never; 6 =Always

Figure 1

Head Teachers' Perceptions of the Six Power Bases
Influencing Teacher Compliance



In summary, whereas high school head teachers perceived position power base to be very effective in influencing staff members comply with commands and orders of heads of schools, coercive power base was perceived to be least effective in influencing staff members comply with commands and orders of heads of schools. This finding is in agreement with earlier findings Warren (1969) and Etzioni (1975).

Satisfaction with the Job, Salary, Car Loan and Housing Allowance

Another purpose of this study was to find out the extent to which high school head teachers were satisfied with the headship job, salary, car loan, and housing allowance. The data in Table 3 and Figure 2 indicate that slightly over 20 percent of the high school head teachers were at least "dissatisfied" with the job, 29 percent were "neither" satisfied "nor" dissatisfied with the job, 49 percent were at least "satisfied" with the job. Also, the data in Table 3 and Figure 2 indicate that the majority (56%) of the high school head teachers were at least dissatisfied with the salary, car loan (80%) and housing allowance (66%).

Table 3

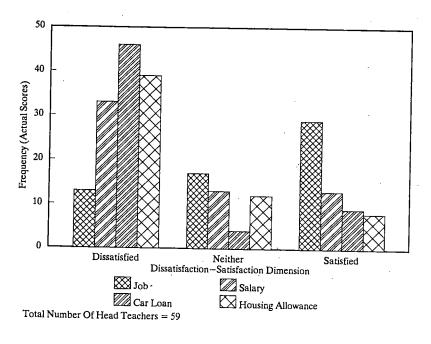
Extent to which High School Head Teachers were Satisfied with the Job, Salary, Car Loan & Housing Allowance

	Job	Salary	Car Loan	H. Allow
Very Dissatisfied	3 (5%)	18 (31%)	34 (58%)	20 (34%)
Dissatisfied	10 (17%)	15 (25%)	12 (22%)	19 (32%)
Neither	17 (29%)	13 (22%)	4 (6%)	12 (20%)
Satisfied	18 (30%)	8 (13%)	3 (5%)	3 (5%)
Very Satisfied	11 (19%)	5 (9%)	5 (9%)	5 (9%)

Scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied; 5 = Very Satisfied.

Figure 2

Extent to which High School Head Teachers were Satisfied with the Job, Salary, Car Loan & Housing Allowance



An in-depth study is needed to establish reasons why the majority of the high school head teachers are relatively dissatisfied with the salary, car loan, and housing allowance. That the majority of the head teachers were satisfied with the headship job is not surprising considering that the headship position is the highest paying job within the school level system in Swaziland. It is one of the top jobs most teachers would aspire for. Also, as indicated above, the headship position has a considerable amount of power. The head teacher has the power to recommend the promotion, suspension, transfer, and demotion of staff members; and suspension and expulsion of students.

Relationship between Background and Satisfaction Factors

The fourth purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the background variables of high school head teachers and their level of satisfaction with the headship job, salary, car loan, and housing allowance. As Table 4 indicates, on the whole, age, experience as a teacher, and experience as head teacher were positively correlated with job satisfaction and car loan, although in most cases not significant statistically. However, age and experience as a teacher were statistically significantly correlated with job satisfaction (age r = .44; p < .001; experience as a teacher r = .41; p < .01). Put differently, older and experienced head teachers were more likely to be satisfied with the headship position, salary, and car loan than younger and inexperienced head teachers.

Table 4

Relationships between the Background Variables of High School Head Teachers and their Level of Satisfaction with the Headship Job, Salary, Car Loan and Housing

Allowance

	Job	Salary	Car Loan	H. Allow.
Age	.44**	.12	.01	.02
Experience as a Teacher Experience as a Head	.41*	.11	.02	.12
Teacher	.30	03	.11	01

NB: Number of Cases = 59

KEY: 2-tailed significant: *p < .01; **p < .001

Also, Table 4 indicates that experience as a head teacher was negatively correlated with salary and housing allowance. This can be interpreted to mean that experienced head teachers were more likely to be dissatisfied with the salary and housing allowance than inexperienced head teachers.

Relationships between Background Variables and Power Bases

The fifth purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between the head teachers' background characteristics and the perceived use of the power bases to influence staff members comply with orders and/or demands. Table 5 reveals several patterns.

Table 5

Relationships between the Background Variables of High School Head Teachers and the Six Power Bases

	Inf.	Exp.	Ref.	Pos.	Rew.	Coer.
Age	.12	.20	.22	.20	.31.	32
Experience as	.,				-	•
a Teacher	.05	.05	01	.13	.16	06
Experience as a		•		"· ·_		
Head Teacher	.25	.38*	.07	.18	.19	15

NB: Number of Cases = 59

2-tailed significant * p < .01; ** p < .001

Inf. = Information Power Base; Exp. = Expert Power Base Ref. = Referent Power Base; Pos. = Position Power Base Rew. = Reward Power Base; Coer. = Coercive Power Base

First, age and experience as a head teacher were positively correlated with all the power bases, except coercive power base. Age, experience as a teacher, and experience as a head teacher were negatively correlated with the coercive power base. Experience as a teacher was positively correlated with information, expert, position, and reward power bases, but negatively correlated with the referent power base. Experience as a head teacher was positively correlated with all the power bases except the coercive power base. However, all the correlation coefficients were not statistically significant with the exception of the correlation coefficient between experience as a head teacher and the expert power base (r = .38; p < .01).

The findings in this section can be interpreted to mean experienced head teachers were less likely to use the coercive power base, but more likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases to influence staff members to comply with the head teacher's demands, orders, and commands than inexperienced, young, high school head teachers.

Also, head teachers with long teaching experience were more likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases, and less likely to use referent and coercive power bases compared to head teachers with less teaching experience. The relationships between the background variables and the power bases, however, were not statistically significant except for expert power base and experience as a head teacher (r = .38; p < .01).

Summary and Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that high school head teachers of Swaziland were predominantly male, relatively experienced as teachers, but inexperienced as heads of schools. They believed the five power bases (information, position, expert, referent, and reward) to be very effective in influencing staff members to comply with the demands, directives, orders, and commands of a head teacher. However, they perceived the coercive power base to be least effective in influencing staff members to comply with commands and orders of heads of schools.

Most high school head teachers of Swaziland were satisfied with their job, but dissatisfied with the salary, car loan, and housing allowance. In fact, older and experienced high school head teachers were more likely to be satisfied with the headship position, salary, and car loan compared to young and less experienced head teachers. Experienced high school head teachers were more likely to be dissatisfied with the salary and housing allowance than inexperienced head teachers. Female head teachers were more likely to be dissatisfied with the housing allowance than male head teachers.

Older experienced male head teachers were more likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases to influnce staff members comply with demands, orders, and commands compared to young less experienced female high school head teachers. Head teachers with long teaching experience were more likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases compared to head teachers with less teaching experience.

Further research is needed (i) to explain the predominance of male head teachers in the high schools of Swaziland; (ii) to establish reasons why the majority of the high school head teachers are relatively dissatisfied with the salary, car loan, and housing allowance; (iii) to shed light on why older and experienced male head teachers are more likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases, but less likely to use the coercive power base to influence staff members comply with demands, orders, and commands; (iv) to explain why inexperienced, young, female high school head teachers are likely to use coercive power base instead of the other power bases; and (v) to find out why head teachers with long teaching experience are likely to use information, expert, position, and reward power bases, but less likely to use referent and coercive power bases.

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