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Teachers' Equity Sensitivity to the Single-spine salary: The Case of teachers in Central and Western Regions of Ghana

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how sensitive teachers were about the single spine salary. It surveyed 129 basic school teachers from Central and Western Regions with the Equity Sensitivity Instrument. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the resulting data. It was found that teachers were mainly equity sensitive just demanding what is fairly due them. This indicates that it is recommendable for the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission to be fairer in the fixing of teachers single spine salaries or teachers might result to reducing their input to measure up to such discontented salary level.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Triggering Employee Performance with Motivation

McGregor's Theories X and Y are a snapshot, taken episodically, of diverse human behaviour. Only to some extent does Theory Y suggest that what is needed is the wisdom, tact and ability of management to motivate workers so that their natural disposition to work hard can be nurtured and realized. Although by this, McGregor's work makes some contribution to the development of the concept of worker motivation, to a greater extent, it fails to capture human behavior in its entirety. Work is not as natural as play as Theory Y postulates; neither does coercion in itself elicit increased productivity as Theory X contends. Indeed, motivation is pivotal in winning the sympathy of workers to work satisfactorily. The reward system in place is capable of driving the workforce to work their hearts out without having to coerce them. Employees will not work just because they itch for work. It is the reward attached to the efforts that drives them to do as much as to obtain that pleasurable gesture. Maslow (1970) found that human needs are developmental, which presupposes that people endeavor to get those needs satisfied. No one will work for no fee while the person lacks the basic physiological needs. Apparently, there will not be any intrinsic motivation where there is nil or insufficient extrinsic motivation. The propensity to work is usually triggered by the reception or experience of certain satisfaction that pleases the individual.

Compensation is one of the key elements of the reward system to appreciate and reinforce appropriate work conduct. The extent of performance can be determined after the employee has been appraised. This has the tendency of propelling the employee to work assiduously towards the achievement of the stated goals in order to maximize income as justified by the expectancy theory. Even the most intrinsically motivated employee will become discouraged if the salary is incapable of *paying rent* or *buying bread*. Occasionally, salary adjustments are necessary to enable workers cope with economic pressures and also to motivate employees to work harder so as to collectively drive the nation to achieve its desired goals.

1.2 Teacher Compensation Packages in Ghana

The economic wellbeing of Ghana, just like any other nation, is directly related to the skills of its citizenry. As well, it is becoming broadly recognized that quality teachers are the key ingredient to a successful school and to improve student achievement. Yet educational policies, forcibly forged by the level of resources in the country, do not ensure that quality teachers are recruited and retained in the profession. Accordingly, over the years, Ghana has been stuck with a compensation system that works against improvements in the teaching force. Without some significant changes, the hope of systematically improving student outcomes is small. Of course, the teacher compensation system works within the entire set of policies that govern teachers

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including recruitment, certification, tenure, and retirement. Things done in those areas interact with the compensation system and determine the outcome of the kind of teachers that are recruited and the consequential students' performance. Any coherent set of policy prescriptions aimed at improving the quality of the teachers in classrooms must have multiple dimensions. An induction policy is obviously crucial. But an induction policy must be coordinated with policies that manage teachers and reward them according to their performance once they have been inducted.

These grotesque inequitably unsatisfactory compensation packages that bedeviled Ghana coupled with the outcry of the entire labour force in the country compelled the 5th government of the 4th republic to implement the single-spine salary scheme. Under this new salary structure, appropriate compensation that measures up to an individual's circumstance is awarded to deserving workers. This is deemed to ensure that workers are treated fairly and equitably. However, the lack of adequate consultation with the workers in the determination of the remuneration and the approach of the new salary scheme implementation might beget mistrust in the scheme. The result of this might be the feeling of inequity and unfairness among the workforce including teachers which may have negative implications on their productivity.

1.3 Teacher Heightened Expectations Referent to Other Public Servants

Pay differentials always bring about unhealthy situations and conflictual and confrontational industrial relations. Such was the long-standing state of affairs in Ghana. However, the quest of the Ghanaian government in addressing the unevenness in compensation packages among employees in public service in the country by introducing the single spine salary has brought about mixed feelings. Civil and public servants whose salaries are higher than what is equitably due them feared that the single spine salary would erode their remuneration. However, the majority of the workforce (mostly teachers) who think they have been unfairly dealt with all this while insofar as the salaries are concerned are in expectancy of colossal upward adjustments. Since its introduction, the single spine salary has been fraught with implementation challenges. As a result, the committee charged with its implementation recommended a piecemeal implementation approach.

The inclusion of the personnel of the public service in the first batch of the implementation could heighten teachers' expectation. Using the Police as the reference point, teachers who form the greatest percentage of the government workforce might think that they have higher qualification than the Police and as such they deserve better treatment. Even though they were yet to see how much was due them when it got to their turn of the implementation of the new salary scheme, some teachers were estimating how much they are likely to earn. In other words, some teachers were using the salaries of the Police as a benchmark in calculating their anticipated salary

increment. This was a likely indication that if they are not given a better condition of service they might be disillusioned to work. Although their package under the new salary scheme was yet to be implemented one may consider the extent to which teachers think the new salary scheme was equitable. Therefore, it was prudent to know how sensitive Ghanaian teachers were about pay differentials relative to other workers under the new scheme. Any such feeling of inequity among teachers could lead to reduced morale which could be translated into reduction in commitment to duty which might lead to turning out graduates who are not fully functional and educated with the desired attributes of the Ghanaian education system.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to find out how workable and equitable teachers saw the single spine salary structure. The purpose of this study was to take a closer look at the efficacy of the applicability of the Equity Sensitivity Theory to teachers. More specifically this study focused on the ability of Equity Sensitivity to discriminate between the responses of three different classifications of individuals posited by the theory (Benevolents, Equity Sensitives and Entitleds) in response to the single-spine salary structure. The specific objectives were to:

1. assess how sensitive teachers were to the equitable nature of the single-spine salary structure;
2. investigate whether teachers' gender, rank or qualification influenced their equity sensitivity to the single spine-salary structure.

2. Theoretical Framework

There have been practical problems with the use of equity theory. Greenberg (1990) illumines the incapability of the theory in aiding prediction of the action to be taken by employees, when faced with inequity, to bring their equity ratio into balance. This lack of specificity regarding what responses individuals experiencing inequity are likely to have is a serious shortcoming of the original equity theory (Furby, 1986) and as such, the original equity theory eventually became less popular (Greenberg, 1990). Accordingly, research efforts were focused on generating a solution to the inadequacies of the equity theory eventually created the equity sensitivity theory (Sauley & Bedeian, 2000). This regeneration of interest in equity has been promulgated in part by an extension of the original equity theory to include individual differences and accordingly modified as equity sensitivity theory (Patrick and Jackson, 1991).

Inasmuch as equity sensitivity theory is an offshoot of the equity theory, equity sensitivity has proven to be a refinement of the original equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965). However, if equity sensitivity is to prove more useful than the original equity theory, it must be more predictive with regards to how employees respond to feelings of inequity. Without this ability, equity sensitivity theory risks the fate of being considered

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an interesting notion with little or no practical value and falling out of favour much as the original equity theory (Greenberg, 1990).

Equity sensitivity, posits that employees can be conveniently categorized into three groups: equity sensitives, benevolents and entitleds, along points of a continuum. On one end of the continuum are the benevolents, otherwise known as “givers,” who express high satisfaction relative to others when their output/input ratios are less than the referent persons. Benevolents have higher tolerance for under-reward situations. At mid-range are the equity sensitives. These individuals most closely adhere to the traditional norm of equity – with the balance of inputs to outcomes (Allen & White, 2002). On the other end of the continuum are the entitled individuals or “takers,” who are most satisfied when they receive more outcomes than inputs (King, Miles and Day, 1993). Entitleds are most sensitive to perceived under-reward inequity (Sauley & Bedeian, 2000).

According to the latest view, equity sensitives fit the classic equity theory propositions. Equity sensitives prefer to be in a state of equity with regard to the outcomes they receive for the amount of inputs they expend when compared to someone doing similar work. The original propositions of equity theory apply to this group. If an equity sensitive’s ratio of outcomes to inputs is out of balance with their referent other, the person will be motivated to act in a way so as to get their ratio back into balance.

Benevolents are more tolerant of situations in which they are being under-rewarded. While they do not seek to be under-rewarded, they are assumed to be less likely to respond (at least overtly) when they are placed in an under-reward situation. Entitleds are posited to experience less dissonance when they are over-rewarded and more dissatisfaction when under-rewarded. As such, they are assumed to be more likely than the other groups to respond overtly to an over-reward situation.

3. Method

3.1 Sample

The target population for the study consisted of all basic school teachers in the Western and Central Regions. A sample of 150 basic school teachers were selected from the University of Education, Winneba, Institute of Educational Development and Extension (IEDE) Cape Coast study centre. Students who are at this study centre are predominantly from the Central and Western Regions. Simple random sampling was used to select 150 basic school teachers to participate in the survey, only 129 completed and returned the survey instrument. This method was adopted because each basic school teacher at the centre was a potential candidate of giving the required pieces of information needed.

3.2 Instrumentation

The Equity Sensitivity Instrument (ESI) by Huseman, Hatfield and Miles (1987) was employed to gather the necessary data from the selected respondents. ESI attempts to measure how individuals differ in their allocation of outcomes. The ESI is a five-item, forced-distribution measure on which the respondent allocates 10 points between a benevolent response and an entitled response for each of the five items. The standard conventional ESI was modified to contextualise its usage. Wherever *organisation* was found in the ESI it was substituted with *government* for the purpose of this study. No other alteration was made to the instrument.

Although the ESI has established validity and reliability, in its edited form the entire questionnaire was tested to determine whether there had been a reduction or further strengthening in this wise. Previous research studies using the ESI have reported coefficient alphas ranging from .77 to .88 (King and Miles, 1994; Patrick and Jackson, 1991) and a test-retest reliability of .80 (Miles, Hatfield and Huseman, 1989). For this study, the Cronbach's alpha was .78, which was consistent with the values found in the other studies cited above.

3.3 Measuring Equity Sensitivity

After scoring the items and averaging the scores of respondents a total ESI score was obtained by adding the points allocated to each of the five benevolent statements. Equity sensitivity scores have a possible range of 0 to 50. In order to generate the 3 classes or sub-groups representing benevolents, equity sensitives and entitleds, the conventional rule set by previous researchers (King et al., 1993; Allen and White 2002) was utilized. The mean equity sensitivity score of the total study sample was 25.9, with a standard deviation of 5.66. and a range of 8 to 45. The decision rule of plus/minus one-half of the standard deviation from the ESI mean was adopted to define the breakpoints for each sub-group. King et al. (1993, p. 305) suggest that "sample-specific breakpoints are necessary because of the unique characteristics on any particular sample that can influence response to the ESI". For example, gender, differing ranks, varied school contexts, age homogeneity, and other variables may influence responses (King and Miles, 1994). This decision rule was applied to trichotomize the sample into the three groups. Thus, teachers with an ESI score of 24 or less were classified as entitleds. Those with a score between 25 and 29 were considered equity sensitives. Benevolent teachers were those with an ESI score of 30 or higher.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Equity Sensitivity to the Single-Spine salary

The expectation of taxpayers is to have a system of accountability of the stewardship they entrust in the hands of policymakers and specialists. Teachers by their professional training as specialists are expected to bring their expertise to bear to bring about desired learning in students. They are accountable to the various stakeholders of education since

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“they are well placed to observe the reaction of pupils to different instructional context” (Pratt, 1980, p. 82). Parents and other stakeholders of education repose faith, trust and confidence in teachers to deliver as expected of them, as they are considered competent. Yet, achieving any phenomenal results in teachers’ output depends greatly on their motivation and thus how sensitive they are to the single-spine salary. Typical data on teachers’ equity sensitivity to the single-spine salary have gathered, analysed and synthesized.

Participants who had a benevolent score of at most 23 were classified as *entitleds*; those with scores between 24 and 28 inclusive were labeled *equity sensitives*; and others with a benevolent score of at least 29 were categorized as *benevolents*. Thus the total study sample was split into 40 entitleds, 51 equity sensitives and 38 benevolents.

There was almost an even distribution of teachers across the categories of equity sensitivity. Apart from the equity sensitive teachers who were the simple majority (39.5%) in the teachers surveyed, the entitled and benevolent teachers almost tied with 31 per cent and 29.5 percent respectively of the total study sample. This means that 31 per cent of the teachers surveyed are interested in receiving a relatively higher amount of pay under the single-spine salary scheme than their input may warrant. Approximately 40 percent of the basic school teachers surveyed were just interested in receiving an equitably equivalent output in the form of pay that their input may allow. However, another 29.5 percent of them were ready to receive some amount of pay lesser than what would have otherwise been provided. The bottom line is that basic school teachers are not indifferent to differences in compensation packages. Rather they were mindful of the extent to which their treatment compares with other workers.

According to King et al. (1993), benevolent employees experience less distress than entitleds when facing either under-compensation or over-compensation scenarios. They found further that entitleds placed significantly more importance on pay and benevolents placed more importance on work characteristics. Furthermore, Miles et al. (1994) found that entitleds tend to place a greater emphasis on extrinsic tangible rewards (e.g., pay), whereas benevolents are more focused on intrinsic intangible rewards. Therefore, since a majority of teachers are equity sensitives, they are likely to demand a fair compensation. However, since the number of teachers who are benevolent do not match either of the entitled and equity sensitive teachers, it is less likely for teachers, in general, to be more concerned about the intrinsic intangible rewards and focus on their work characteristics. Rather, teachers are more concerned about what is due them, at least.

In any case both equity sensitive and entitled teachers outnumber the benevolent teachers. The implication is that teachers were responsive to the minutest pay

differentials which they will always struggle to level out. This tends to exemplify the description of Osafo Marfo, then Minister for Finance in the third government of the 4th republic, that “teachers are economic vampires”. Thus they agitate every now and then to get higher rewards without recourse to recent or current attempts made by government to improve their conditions of service. This is literally translated to imply that teachers seem not to get satisfied with any pay package.

However, one cannot blame teachers for the insistence in striving for fair and equitable treatment. At least a majority of teachers, as equity sensitives, are just interested in receiving fair compensation under the new salary scheme. It therefore could be predicted that teachers, in general, might resist the single-spine salary scheme if the scheme fails to bring about equitable treatment among the various categories of workers captured under the pay policy.

The ability of the single-spine salary to respond positively to teachers’ needs might propel the teachers to work assiduously towards the achievement of or meeting the stated or desired goals in order to maximize income as justified by the expectancy and equity theories. As alluded to earlier, the most intrinsically motivated teacher will become discouraged if the salary does not pay rent or buy bread. Occasionally, such adjustments in salary are necessary for improved teacher motivation. This could only happen if the adjustment is favourable to teachers. In any case, if teachers lift up their performance, because they do not turnout physical products, it would be a bit difficult to measure the resulting productivity. Even where it is possible to do so, Johnson (1986) warns that such a practice might change the relationships between teachers and students as poor student ratings are used as a means of gathering evidence or information to judge teachers’ effectiveness and subsequent reward.

4.1: Influence of Teacher Characteristics on Teacher Equity Sensitivity

In spite of these results, it was prudent to analyse the phenomenon in detail to find out whether certain characteristics of the basic school teachers influence the equity sensitivity. The independent variables assessed whether to have influenced teachers’ equity sensitivity included teachers’ gender, qualification and their rank. To determine whether basic school teachers’ equity sensitivity about the single-spine salary structure was tied to these characteristics, a between group Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) was conducted in search for significant differences at 5% significant level.

None of the results indicated significant differences between teacher equity sensitivity and teacher characteristics. Thus basic school teachers’ equity sensitivity was independent of their gender, qualification and rank. The gender of the teacher does not matter in making demands from the government about the adequacy or not of the single-spine salary.

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Yet in a typical Ghanaian setting where the man is considered bread winner, it is expected that he demands more so as to distribute such resources to benefit the household. The finding may be authenticated by the recent shift from traditional view of the control and management of households where women are now empowered to contribute. The quest of generating enough to support the family, therefore, is not the preserve of the man. This might account for the lack of any apparent differences between the equity sensitivity of male and female basic school teachers about the single-spine salary.

The differing qualifications of the basic school teachers are said not to make any difference in their equity sensitivity. Possibly, basic school teachers have just settled with tradition that has been with the Ghana Education Service which does not value qualification that much. Basic school teachers most whom have virtually the same qualification (Diploma in Education) might not be disturbed about how their salary compares with other workers.

5. Conclusions

The fact that teachers are mostly equity sensitives and thus they requiring a fair and equitable treatment from the single-spine salary is an indicative of the fact that they might act in commensuration of the compensation given them. Should the single-spine salary fail to meet their expectation, teachers might give a work output of the same measure suiting the salary level. This implies reduced productivity. It is always argued whether improved conditions of service should precede increased productivity or the other way round. Whatever being the case there seem to be some relationship between worker morale, which is the consequence of conditions of service, and productivity. Therefore the average teacher will work harder when they anticipate some actual or perceived benefits to derive from their efforts. Hence, teachers' actions and inactions are contingent on the satisfaction or otherwise of their needs to be met by the single spine salary.

Although found to be mainly equity sensitives, teachers' equity sensitivity is independent of their gender, qualification, and rank. Hence, such teacher characteristics are not predictors of teacher equity sensitivity to the single-spine salary. Teachers' equity sensitivity to the new salary is therefore generally arbitrarily predictable based on their general quest to for salary adjustment. Therefore, there is need for the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission to be actually *fair* in principle and indeed. If the Commission fails to design an equitable salary that teachers would be comfortable with, this pay structure might fail just like the old pay policy.

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