



Drivers and Barriers to Teacher-Led Change in Botswana's Schools: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Schools often grapple with factors that drive or restrain change. Managing change is necessary for schools to fulfil their mandates. In Botswana schools, change factors resulted in the way teachers think and act in managing education programmes. Mindset change is one of the factors that drive or impedes teachers from embracing change effectively in their schools. Hence, this study explored how teacher led changes could drive or impede the necessary change in schools. Qualitative research method was adopted in this study and data was collected from 48 teachers in selected schools in Botswana. The findings revealed that lack of change management structures in schools was a major drawback in the implementation of change initiatives. Such structures would make teachers be up to date with current trends in education. The findings further highlighted how the Force Field Analysis (FFA), a framework or management technique that deals with forces for or against change could be applied in schools. The study recommends the introduction of Change Agents in schools, who would be instrumental in bringing and monitoring the impact of change affecting teachers and students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the 20th Century, the world experienced a massive shift from the industrial to the knowledge age. According to Moremi (2018), countries whose economies were driven by mineral resources began to focus on education to sustain their economic development. Knowledge creation and ideas became the main source of economic growth and new patterns of work developed (ALICT, 2014). This transformation resulted in changes in the way people think and do things. Such changes have also influenced and impacted on the education system in general. According to Kule (2024), education is an ever-evolving field, and educational institutions must adapt strategies that require effective change management to ensure sustainable transformation. Nkosana (2013) identified challenges related to mindset changes by school administrators and their attitudes as impediments in the implementation of new curricular and management issues. Therefore, the need for change agents in schools is paramount as indicated that schools fail to embrace change. Change agents support

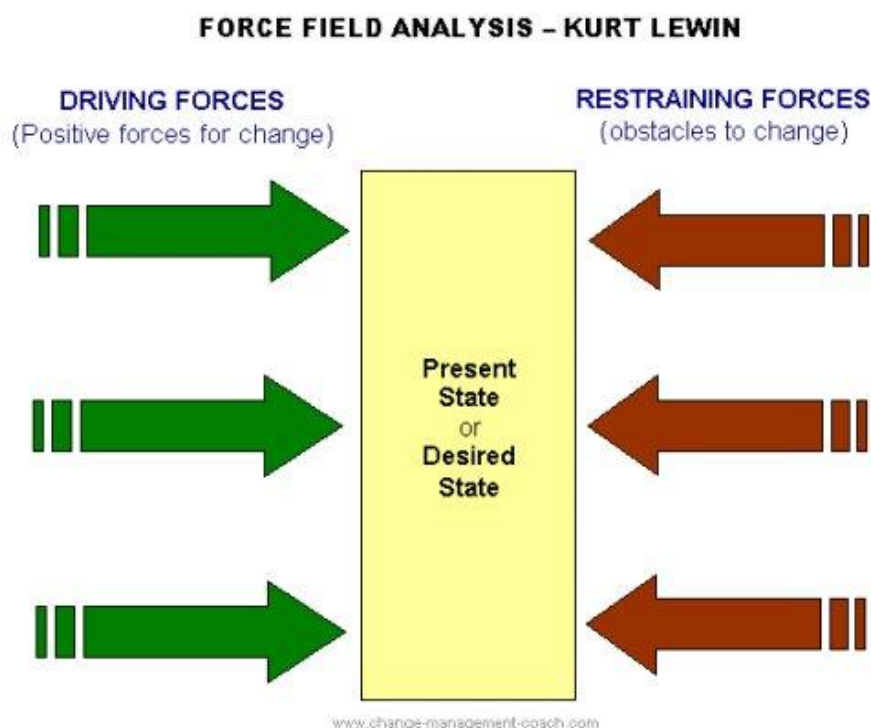
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teachers and school leaders in their practice and professional growth, with an explicit focus on improving student outcomes (Tournier et al., 2023). Change agents play important roles such as: i) personal vision building, ii) inquiry, iii) mastery and iv) collaboration. These roles make the school a perfect environment for learning and growth for both teachers and students. Hence the paper explored the change driven by teachers whether they are drivers or barriers to change in schools. The paper further investigated the roles and the attributes of change agents in schools.

The rationale for the study emanates from limited educational reform agendas that require teachers to engage and create meaningful environment for students to reach their academic and social potential. There is also dearth of studies on the contribution change agents could make in schools. This study aims to find out the role Change Agents could play in schools and their characteristics. Furthermore, the study also analyses how Change Agents can entrench change values in schools and deal with resistance to change using the Force Field Analysis (FFA) by Kurt Lewin. These objectives provide a context on the role of change agents in schools and further analysis on the qualities inherent among change agents on their suitability and importance in a school set up. The findings of the study would shed light on how to deal with resistance to change applying the concept of FFA and how schools could entrench change values that are driven by change agents.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the management techniques for analysing the driving or restraining forces of change is the Force Field Analysis (FFA) developed by Kurt Lewin in the 1950s. FFA helps plan to strengthen the forces supporting a decision and reduce the impact of opposition to it. The FFA provides a framework for interrogating these forces and deciding on whether a plan is worth implementing (Dongre et al., 2010). The analysis allows categorisation of any problem in two domains, namely, factors or pressures which calls for maintenance of the existing status (restraining forces) and those factors which calls for bringing about an alteration in the existing situation and thus move towards the desired direction (driving forces) (Dongre et al., 2010). The diagram below illustrates how FFA could be used. It assists in the identification of all those factors which should be dealt with and periodically monitored to enable the managers to assess the effectiveness of the modification.



Lewin (1951) stated that FFA can help Change Agents to investigate the balance of power involved in an issue, identify the most important stakeholders and target groups, identify opponents and allies, and identify how to influence each target group.

The above FFA steps can help Change Agents and school management teams to make changes more acceptable to all. Possession of self-awareness and emotional intelligence skills can also play an important role in helping to understand the presence of driving and restraining forces of change within the schools. Self-awareness includes thinking about ourselves such that we become aware of our characteristics, sustain this awareness, and use it as we behave and interact with others. Thought processes include introspection, self-examination, and self-absorption (Carden et al., 2022; Chon & Sitkin, 2021). Emotional Intelligence, on the other hand, is characterised as the cognitive capacity to perceive, comprehend, and effectively regulate emotions to enhance cognitive processes (Hera, 2024). It is an important element of the competencies that are crucial for effective leadership and teamwork performance in a school environment.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The School Environment and Teachers' Involvement in Change

According to Kule (2024), education systems has constantly been changing over the years throughout the world and a multiplicity of external factors such as globalization, technological innovations, changes in student demographics, global and local agendas for educational reform are forcing providers of education to engage in changing policies, curriculum development, and teaching and learning practices. Education is seen in various structures that make up the whole package. These structures include ministry headquarters, regional offices and the schools themselves. At the school level, the school management and teachers play a pivotal role in either driving or restraining management and curriculum changes. The school management refers to the School Head, the Deputy School Head, the Heads of Departments and the Senior Teachers. According to Nkosana (2013:69), "the main agents of change in a school are the principals and teachers." This goes to show that these agent attitudes towards any envisaged changes within the school determines if transformations see the light at the end of the day or not. Critical factors for change include a clear vision and mission supporting a change initiative (Kule, 2024). The central administrators, who are the school management, needed to show the importance of any anticipated change otherwise teachers would restrain them.

Nkosana (2013:71) noted that for change to come about, a new mindset needs to develop in the system's major players. This will in turn, help the whole education system to develop a greater capacity for change so that change becomes part of the system's culture.

According to Tukwatsibwe (2025), the era of rapid technological, social, and economic transformation requires educational systems to undergo significant change to remain relevant and effective. There is an urgent call for change that can no longer be resisted, especially in the framework of educational systems which are currently suffering from a deeply frozen statist culture (Tukwatsibwe, 2025). The "Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) curriculum was designed at the political level of the central government who then delegated the working out the details of the syllabus to task forces with the bulk of the teachers being excluded from the exercise" (Nkosana, 2013:70). Excluding teachers in such important exercise was a recipe for resistance. Mphale (2004) argued that teachers appreciate programmes where they take part in organising rather than being left in the dark on matters that concern them and that seventy-nine per cent of the respondents showed that resistance to change by long serving teachers hampered professional development.

3.2 School Leadership and Change Management

Historically, education has primarily been concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and the attainment of high academic scores, often at the expense of a more holistic approach to student development (Seligman & Adler, 2018). Student development call for an appropriate curricular to be implemented. School management teams and other education structures must play their role in preparation for management and curriculum changes. They ought to come up with strategies that will

aid in the attainment of change envisaged in their operations. These could be leadership strategies that deal with careers education, guidance and many others. The strategies could be used to refocus important aspects of the curriculum that relate to the running of the school, academic and social development of the students. Nkosana (2013:69-70) argued that “the role played by principals or headmasters must be considered as they were the main agents of change in schools. They serve to legitimate whether a change must be taken seriously or not and to support teachers both emotionally and physically with resources.” Schools are expected to be knowledge organisations. According to Al-Rashidi (2020), educational institutions need knowledge management to achieve their objectives through interaction, sharing and refraining from using the old-fashioned mode which most educational environments suffer from. Schools need to close the gap by implementing knowledge management strategies to achieve their objectives.

3.3 The Role of Teachers as Change Agents in Schools

Teachers play a crucial role in implementing change within their schools; however, research describes this change as generally imposed upon them by school leaders, curriculum designers or policy makers rather than being instigated by teachers themselves (Brown et al., 2023). They understand the complexity of their context and are well positioned to adapt professional learning to implement change in their school. Teachers not only act as teachers who transfer knowledge, but also as agents of change who play an active role in shaping students' mindsets, attitudes and behaviour (Fien & Aslan, 2025). According to Senge (1990) and Fullan (1993) change agents have four roles to play in schools. a) Personal vision building, which means examining and re-examining why one became a teacher. Personal vision gives meaning to work and is the ‘route to organisational change’. b) Inquiry, which is captured by Pascale (1990), describes it as an activity that a change agent carries out by constantly asking themselves questions. As Pascale (1990:14) puts it, ‘Inquiry is the engine of vitality and self-renewal’. c) Mastery is another key role that is played by change agents. It is necessary for effectiveness and involves strong teacher preparedness and continuous staff professional development. To be an effective change agent, mastery of the importance of innovation is crucial. Lastly, d) Collaboration is also an important factor for change agents because working together in a school sets up is a recipe for a successful implementation of change programmes in a school.

3.4 Characteristics of School Change Agents

Couros (2015) listed five characteristics of change agents as: a) have clear vision, b) patient yet persistent, c) asks tough questions, d) knowledgeable and leads by example, and e) strong relationships built on trust. These attributes are critical in defining teachers as change agents not teachers who just initiate change. According to Lukacs & Galluzzo (2014) teachers who are change agents go beyond the classroom to improve the school unlike those who just initiate change without making the necessary follow up to ensure its implementation. In the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, educational challenges are increasing. Ama et al. (2020) state that teachers must adapt to impart 21st century skills effectively on students so that they think and operate creatively in the digital and non-digital worlds to come up with original solutions. Teachers must be able to direct change and create a learning environment conducive to the growth of creativity and innovation (Fien & Aslan, 2025). Lukacs (2009) also highlights teacher change agents as people who can read their school environment, enable the participation of their colleagues in generating solutions, possess the skills to address the problems they identify in their schools and lastly feel a sense of ownership about those problems. It is necessary to empower teachers with these important attributes so that they pursue improvements on a broader scale to make teaching and learning conducive for students. Furthermore, possessing these attributes also make teachers as change agents well suited to adapt in a world where change is daily phenomenon in the educational space.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach and purposive sampling was used to select participants in the schools around Palapye village, Botswana. The sampled teachers provided data through semi-structured interviews. The study population consisted of forty-eight (n=48) school

members who included four (4) School Heads, six (6) Deputy School Heads, fifteen (15) Heads of Departments and twenty-three (23) Senior Teachers. The members were interviewed individually in their offices and secure spaces within the school premises away from distractions. They read the consent forms and signed them to participate in the study. The participants also agreed to have the interview sessions recorded. The recorded transcripts were compiled during the interview sessions and analysed at a later stage.

4.1 Findings and Discussion

The demographic findings of the study indicated that there were more females in management portfolios than males, 27 females and 21 males respectively. Majority of these 33 out of 48 range between 31–50 years of age. Only 15 out of 48 are above 50 years of age. Therefore, this means the age range and experience are pro-change in the knowledge era. From the study, majority of respondents were long serving teachers. Twenty-three (23) respondents have served for more than 11 years in management. This showed that they had adequate time to implement change strategies in their schools. In terms of qualifications, most diploma holders were found in both junior and primary schools. If qualifications enhance change, then junior secondary and primary schools have significant change limitations than senior secondary schools. Senior Teachers and Heads of Departments were the majority in management (38 out of 48 respondents). They were many because of the nature of their responsibilities in schools. Therefore, they can influence the nature of change the school could adopt considering their large numbers. Table 1 provides demographic information summary about the participants on gender, age group, number of years in management, qualifications and positions held.

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

Category	-	-	%	-	-	-
Gender	Male	21	44%	-	-	-
	Female	27	56%	-	-	-
Age Group	<30 yrs	31-40 yrs	%	41-50 yrs	%	51 yrs+
	0 / 0%	12	25%	21	44%	15/31%
No. of Yrs in Management	<5 yrs	%	6-10 yrs	%	11 yrs+	%
	6	13%	19	40%	23	48%
Qualifications	Diploma	%	Degree	%	Masters	%
	23	48%	25	52%	0	0%
Positions held	Senior Teacher	Head of Dept	Deputy Head	Head		
	23 / 48%	15 / 31%	6 / 13%	4 / 8%		

The next section provides the findings and discussions from the interview sessions. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and themes from the data were identified. These were: a) The value of change management in schools, b) characteristics of Change Agents in schools, c) change management structures in schools and d) factors that hampers or motivate the need for change in schools. The themes were derived by ‘identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Theme 1: Are teachers aware of the need/reasons for change in their school?

The findings showed that many participants (28) agreed that teachers in their schools were aware of the need to implement changes if they were for the betterment of the school. However, twenty (20) participants reluctantly agreed with the question. This means that majority agree with Nkosana (2013) that principals and teachers are the main agents of change in a school. Since teachers were aware of the need for change in their schools, they should be taken on board by management regarding decision making if the envisaged change is to be effectively implemented. In other words, teachers needed to be involved or else they would restrain the intended change.

Theme 2: Does school management timeously engage teachers on matters of change?

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Majority of the participants (29) articulated that to some extent teachers were engaged on change matters, and four (4) out of 48 believe that teachers were rarely engaged; whereas 15 out of 48 believe that teachers were timeously consulted. If teachers were not timeously engaged as agents of change in schools, there was bound to be resistance. Kule (2024) posited that administrators need to articulate the importance of any anticipated change to the teachers so that they do not constrain them. It is important that teachers were consulted and a plan developed to strengthen the forces supporting a decision and reduce the impact of opposition as the Force Field Analysis by Kurt Lewin argued.

Theme 3: Are structures for change management available in schools?

Twenty-nine (29) respondents reluctantly agreed with the assertion and twenty (20) of them said to some extent change management structures were available such as the consultation process once a new directive came from the ministry headquarters to implement a new policy or directive, while nine (9) said to a small extent there were change management structures in place. The findings proved that in some schools, there seemed to be structures in place as shown by some participants. The pattern emerging is that there were structures like formation of knowledge teams aimed at ensuring the schools were productive and formation of knowledge networks that linked the schools with others (Ozmena & Muratoglu, 2010). The participants saw the need for such change structures. Lunenburg (2010:1) states that “the education environment was constantly changing, and the school environment must adapt to these forces in order to remain relevant and effective.” As such, the attitude of such stakeholders towards any envisaged change determines whether the change would see light at the end of the day. The structures for change management are one the recurring themes in this study as participants were not totally convinced that the structures were in place to drive change in their schools.

Theme 4: Teachers in my school embrace change

Only 10 out of 48 respondents agreed with the statement. However, 38 respondents said teachers only embraced change to some extent and to a small extent. The responses mean that most schools were not for change and believed that schools do not embrace change to a level they should be despite the evolving nature of the education systems. This reinforces the theme on the value of change management in schools. The teachers were not taken on board by the management when change management endeavours were implemented. They were willing to adopt change, but the strategies adopted in embracing change in schools were a problem. The mind-set endeavours were not cultivated enough among the teachers to appreciate the value of change adoption in the schools. Nkosana (2013) notes that for change to occur, a new mind-set needs to develop in the system's major stakeholders. This will have a ripple effect, hence help the whole education system to develop a greater capacity for change so that change becomes part of the system's culture. The role played by school heads was critical and must be considered. They are the driving force behind any change initiated and implemented in schools. If they were reluctant to initiate change or embrace change initiated by others, the schools would remain static.

Furthermore, a collaborative work culture could reduce professional isolation and contribute to higher morale, enthusiasm, and willingness to accept new ideas (Barth, 1991). Management as agents of change needed to encourage and support collegial relationships between the principal and teachers and among teachers. Collegial relationships facilitate change because peer group consensus and interaction were important to social learning (Goodlad, 1984), and change has been characterised as a learning process.

Theme 5: There is need for policy makers to improve the way they drive change

Majority of respondents, forty (40), agreed that there was a need for policy makers to make a conscious effort to drive change. This calls for the review of strategies that have been employed to drive change. As Mphale (2004:8) noted, “teachers appreciate programmes where they take part in organising rather than being left in the dark on matters that concern them.” As Brown et al. (2023) argue, teachers play an important role in change implementation in their schools. They must be consulted on any change that occur within their schools. Since school heads, as change agents, were not effective, different agents needed to be engaged in all schools for change to occur in the education system.

Theme 6: If teachers embrace or resist change, how would it affect them and the school?

The school managers felt that teachers' resistance to change resulted in them (teachers) not developing professionally. They would rarely be up to date with current global educational trends. Such situations, they further noted, resulted in the decline in their academic performance and that of the school as both parties adapt to the changing world at a very slow pace. The school managers' view was that teachers who embraced change cope with current trends in educational developments, and so do their schools. They also said teachers' embrace of change positively affects the way the school was governed.

Theme 7: Factors that hamper change or motivate the need for change in schools

Most participants mentioned that change was normally imposed on teachers without consultation. This problem, they further said, was compounded by the teachers' lack of understanding of global transformation or "why change." For example, Nkosana argues that the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education Syllabi were developed in the absence of critical stakeholders. He says these were "designed at the political level of the central government who then delegated the working out (of) the details of the syllabus to task forces with the bulk of the teachers being excluded from the exercise" (2013:70). Others mentioned that some teachers, especially the old ones, just feared change and wanted to remain in their comfort zones because they did not know what that change had for them. It also came out clearly from the school managers that at times teachers' poor accommodation, and inadequate teaching resources frustrate teachers resulting in resistance to change. Such conditions eventually result in a disgruntled teaching force which eventually did not see the need to drive any change. Among factors motivating the need for change, some of the factors mentioned were 'good working conditions and modern technology.' So, in instances where the working conditions were favourable and modern technological infrastructure was available, teachers supported new ideas for change in their schools.

Theme 8: Any advice to policy makers in relation to change management in the schools?

At least 90% of the participants felt that currently, there were no proper consultation of teachers on changes in the schools. They argue that since teachers were the implementers of many of education policies they ought to be consulted thoroughly. This will make them appreciate the changes taking place as they were participants in formulation of such changes. They said in almost all the cases policies and other documents used in schools come as finished products from policy formulators and imposed on the teachers to implement. The school managers were right on this matter because many of these policies and documents involved changing the status quo, which can only be fully appreciated if the implementers, who are the teachers, had meaningful input in their formulation. The researchers propose a new approach to managing change in the schools. That is, the introduction of change agents in schools and the implementation of Force Field Analysis by Kurt Lewin.

The Force Field Analysis (FFA), on the other hand, could be used to analyse forces driving or restraining change. It provides a framework for dealing with these forces and how best to implement strategies that will yield positive results. Change agents can implement the FFA to address perceptions to change by applying what Kurt Lewin proposed. That is, (a) investigating the powers involved in an issue, (b) identifying the most vital stakeholders and target groups, (c) identifying those who are for and against an issue and (d) developing strategies of how to influence each target group. These simple steps can help change agents deal effectively with change in a school environment. As stated in the literature review, change agents are vital in a school to drive innovation activities and change processes. They facilitate the flow of information and provide alternatives to issues affecting the schools. Their strength lies in two aspects: a) human behaviour knowledge and b) organisational change.

The change agents do not necessarily have to be in the management of the school. They can operate at any level of the school hierarchy if they possess the following attributes: a) They live in the future, not the present — a change agent is always looking to the future and has a vision as alluded earlier. b) A change agent has passion and inspires passion in others. c) A change agent has a strong ability to self-motivate — they need to understand that sometimes they risk being misunderstood and mis-

appreciated but at the end their efforts may be rewarded in future and may be claimed by someone else. d) Change agents should understand people because change is about people. Change will happen effectively if people embrace it.

5. CONCLUSION

Transformation in education has resulted in new ways of thinking around the world. There were mindset challenges that impeded administrators and teachers from embracing change in the schools. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to adopt change management techniques that support teachers to improve the performance of their schools. The paper discussed the role played by change agents in schools and how they entrench change values among teachers and students. The study also highlighted the importance of the FFA in addressing resistance to change and how it could be overcome through categorising the problems and engaging the groups to accept change as a necessary step in the right direction. At schools, teachers play a pivotal role as change agents such as supporting change initiatives. Change agents scan the school environment to identify problems and initiate strategies for problem solving that involves administrators and teachers in a school. The paper addressed themes identified in the study. In summary, the study proposes new approaches to managing change in schools such as the introduction of change agents and the application of the FFA by Kurt Lewin to reduce abilities of those who resist change and motivate the need for change that will benefit the school.

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