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A determination of factors that influence policy implementation in the Zimbabwean public sector.

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Abstract

Public policies represent the government's thinking at a particular point in time and are incorporated in the national constitution of a country. They act as guidelines for the functioning of public sector institutions. and are periodically amended to address matters arising. The paper is based on a study that sought to determine factors that influence the implementation of civil and voter registration policies in selected public sector institutions in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a pragmatic approach that triangulated data collection and analysis methods. A stratified sample of 278 respondents responded to personal interviews conducted through both structured and semi-structured questionnaires. The statistical data were analysed using SEM the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) Version 2.0 with AMOS. Qualitative data were analysed using theatrics analysis using the NVivo software package. This study revealed that lack of communication; religion; organisational structures and administrative capabilities; false information by stakeholders; inadequate resources and commitment of public sector personnel emerged and economic factors influence the implementation of policies in the public sector. The study concluded that such factors deprive citizens of their right to access services such as civil and voter registration. It also leads to fraudulent acquisition of identity documents thereby compromising the authenticity of the Zimbabwe population database as well as the country's demographics. The study recommends that these factors should be addressed so as to improve the authenticity of both the Zimbabwe population and voter registration system.

Key Words

Policy implementation; factors; performance; reputation.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this –study_was to determine the factors that influence the implementation of policies in the Zimbabwean public sector. There are various factors that influence the effective implementation of policies, some of which were analysed in the current study. Previous studies on public policy have focused mainly on policies pertaining to education, health and climate change among others. The point of departure for the current scholarship is that it analysed factors influencing policy implementation from a civil registration perspective in an African setting. The objective of the study was to determine how these factors influence the overall performance –and consequently –the reputation of the selected institutions.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Policy implementation refers to the delivery of any plan or action with the intention of supporting a particular decision or initiative (Rahmat, 2015; Oku et al., 2017). The study of implementation attempts to address why and how policies deviate from their desired and expected outcomes by providing frameworks for consideration that apply in a variety of contexts *(*Speklé & Verbeeten, 2014; Rahmat, 2015; Signé, 2017). Khan and Khandaker (2016)   posit that the successful implementation of policies may be affected by– design and planning factors. This concurs with_findings of a similar study conducted by Oku et al., (2017) which sought to explore factors affecting the delivery of vaccination communication in Nigeria.

In trying to determine how the factors influencing the implementation of policies affect the performance and reputation of government institutions, the current scholarship focused on the theory of policy implementation. The theory focuses mainly on how governments put policies into effect through embracing top-down and bottom-up policy implementation models (Hatchard, 2014; Reviser, 2018). The top-down policy implementation model assumes that governments set out clear and consistent goals which will be implemented by an institution or agency assigned to do so (Signé, 2017). The responsible institution is accorded the administrative authority to structure the policy to be implemented as well as outlining the non-statutory variables affecting the implementation (Rahmat, 2015; Signé, 2017; Weel et al., 2018). The bottom-up policy implementation model also referred to as theory of street-level bureaucrats emanates from the bottom or in the streets, through the identification of the goals of the key stakeholders involved in the policy (Speklé & Verbeeten, 2014; Kim, 2016). Due to their direct interaction with stakeholders, front-line service deliverers play a key role in this implementation model. Despite giving adequate consideration to stakeholder needs in its

policy formulation, the model faces the criticism of not tallying with government initiatives. To maximise the success of the policy implementation theory, some scholars have suggested the synchronisation of both the top-down and bottom-up models (Signé, 2017; Ali, 2018). It is worth noting however, that policy formulation and implementation is determined by the respective country's domestic context.

Methodology

The setting for the study was Zimbabwe, a land-locked country in Sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated population of 13 million people in 2018. The study site was Central Registry Government Complex in Zimbabwe's Harare Metropolitan province and Murehwa District Government Complex in Mashonaland East province. The study adopted a QUAL-quan approach and cross-sectional descriptive survey. The researcher could not manipulate the study variables hence collected data from the situation as it was occurring (Hale, 2018). Using 95% level of confidence, 5% margin of error and assumed 50% response rate, a sample of 266 respondents was selected. However, in a bid to maximise the response rate, 280 questionnaires were distributed and two were unaccounted for resulting in 278 questionnaires being successfully completed and returned.

The study used semi-structured questionnaires with Likert-type for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative data and an observation guide based on a checklist. All questionnaires were administered in person through face to face interviews to maximize response rate. The total number of study participants who participated in the quantitative survey was 260 from both Harare Metropolitan province and Murehwa district. Of these, 193 participants from Harare province successfully completed and returned their questionnaires. However, out of the 67 questionnaires administered in Murehwa district, only 65 were successfully completed, while the other two (2) were unaccounted for. Therefore, the total of structured questionnaires that were successfully completed and returned were 258. Twenty (20) face to face interviews using semi-structured questionnaires were conducted with stakeholders from both the RG department and ZEC. Statistical data collected during the study were validated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability analysis, convergent validity and discriminant validity. Quantitative reliability was done using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient. The respondents' actual verbatim responses were quoted during the discussion of results and record keeping of these responses was done through transcribing the data in Microsoft Word (2010) and importing into Nvivo 11 Plus.

Findings and discussion

Factors Influencing (FI) policy implementation construct was measured using six items with internal consistency Cronbach Alpha (α) of 0.858 (Yong & Pearce, 2013; Pallant, 2016; Tsun Hoe et al.,2018).

Lack of communication between the Zimbabwean government and its stakeholders regarding the implementation of new or amended policies emerged as a key factor influencing the implementation of policies in the selected Zimbabwean public sector institutions. This was evidenced by a factor loading of 0.843. Responses from public sector personnel and clients communication is unclear in government institutions.

Religion also featured dominantly among the factors influencing policy implementation in the RG department. Research findings established that some members of the Apostolic sect do not register their children thereby defying government directives. The study also observed that the majority of these children do not attend school and usually get married as minors in polygamous settings. Being married as minors is a violation of the Zimbabwean policy that seeks to prevent early marriages (Prevention of Early Marriages Act) which is also in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5). The requirements for the attainment of civil documents were noted as an influential factor to the effective implementation of both the civil and voter registration initiatives. It emerged during the study that some respondents who were not in possession of civil documents such as national identity cards or passports were unable to participate in national programmes.

False information by stakeholders complicates the effective implementation of policies as substantiated by findings from the current study. Findings from Murehwa district reflected that most parents cited fire as the major reason for failing to produce documentary proof of the births of their children. This was somehow subjective since there was no documentary evidence such as police or any other reports which proved that the fire had actually occurred. The alternative documentary proof in such circumstances were school letters from school heads declaring that these children were either attending or once attended school without a birth certificate as evidenced by their school records. These were relatively more authentic as compared to letters from village heads or those signed by church leaders from the various apostolic sects. School letters give date of births of school children as per the school records unlike the letters from village heads and church leaders which will give contradicting dates of births.

Lack of skilled and committed personnel featured prominently during the study as one of the key factors influencing the implementation of policies in public sector institutions. Respondents explained that the application of civil documents in Zimbabwe was a chilling experience in which one had to gear up for spending several days and long hours at the civil registry offices. The personnel were labelled as being arrogant and inconsiderate to the clients' needs. They were also blamed for making errors during registration processes and when the clients pointed out these errors, they were made to pay. Some of the clients highlighted that due to fear of victimisation, they had remained silent and carried the burden of staying with wrongly spelt forenames or surnames for the rest of their lives. In the Zimbabwean context, a surname determines one's family heritage and relations. As such, a slight misspelling of the surname separates siblings in terms of identity and belonging.

The public sector employees, however, had their own grievances. Some of them outlined that they had never received proper induction when they joined their respective departments. Moreover, they highlighted several factors as affecting their performance and the reputation of their respective institutions. These are illustrated by word cloud in Fig 1.1.

Figure 1.1: 'Employee' word count

Source NVivo 12 (2020)

The word '*negative*' had the highest frequency rating. It was mentioned ten (10) times by the respondents signifying a weighted percentage of 22.73%. The words '*reputation, allegations, publicity, corruption, bad and globally*' had a frequency rating of two (2) each with a weighted percentage of 4.55%. Explanation to the meaning of these words as regards the evaluation of government policy implementation is presented in the text search in Figure 1.2.
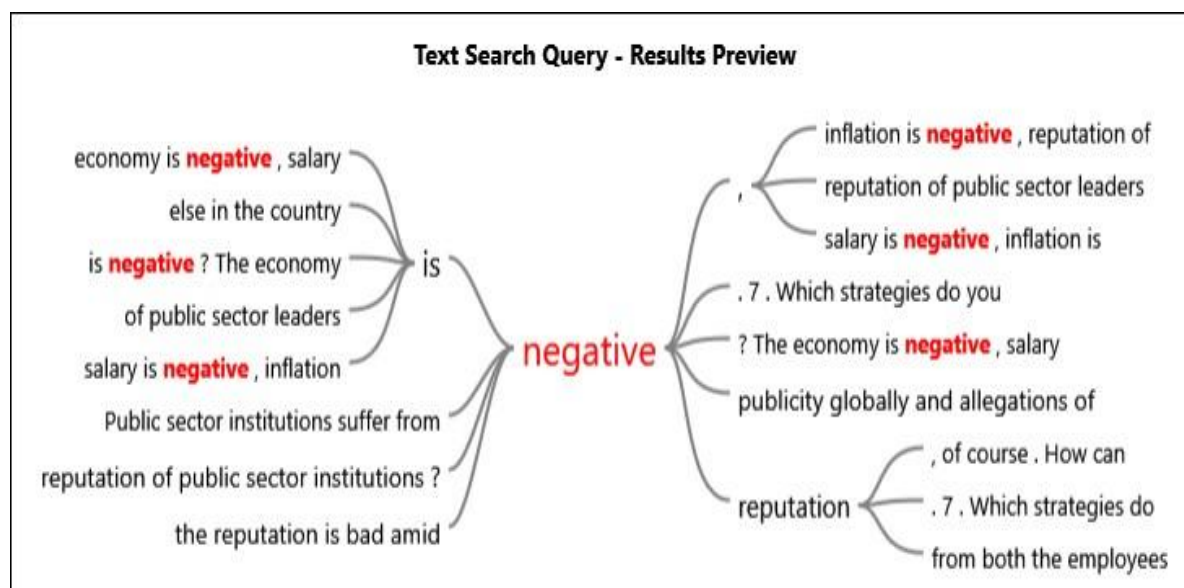
Figure 1.2: 'Employee' text search
Source Survey Data NVivo 12 (2020)

In line with the text search in Fig 1.2, economic factors were mentioned as contributing to the implementation of policies in the public sector. This resulted in poor remuneration and inadequate resources.

Inadequate resources had a mean rating of (M=2.40; SD=1.066) on the descriptive statistics. Results of the study reflected that the allocation of personnel to the implementation of national programmes by both institutions was affected by financial constraints. This was substantiated by the shortage of modern equipment in the selected public sector institutions. It emerged that modern equipment such as desk-top computers, laptops and printers were supplied in limited quantities in the public institutions under review hence are vital in civil and voter registration processes. It emerged that data entry and capturing of registrants was slow due to faulty machines and this resulted in some omissions. Such omissions created panic among the registrants. Other resource constraints noted during the study included the supply of power which was so erratic to such an extent that clients could not complete some of their electronic registration processes. Although generators were available as power supply back-up, they had no fuel. As a result, in some instances, the clients offered to combine money and buy fuel that could be used in a power generator so as to enable them to complete their processes. Lighting equipment was not readily available, thereby forcing those stations operating in rural areas or those places without power supply to close early. This inconvenienced those clients who wanted to register in the evenings.

Conclusion and recommendation

The study concluded that communication is a key factor influencing the issuance of civil documents in developing countries like Zimbabwe. The study therefore, recommends strategic communication with all stakeholders so as to safeguard the authenticity of the Zimbabwe population database as well as preventing the fraudulent issuance of civil documents. Moreover, the fraudulent acquisition of civil documents compromises stakeholders' trust in the performance of the selected public institutions. Accordingly, the study recommends that the law makers should implement stringent statutes which eliminate the fraudulent acquisition of these vital documents.

The study also concluded that the factors influencing the implementation of policies in public institutions were embedded in financial constraints. Developing countries like Zimbabwe, for example, have their own unique political and socio-economic challenges which may see them operating with very limited resources. Another conclusion drawn from the current scholarship is that poor remuneration and lack of motivation result in brain-drain which usually leaves the public sector with a semi-skilled and inexperienced workforce. Such situations require strategic dialogue between the government and its workforce.

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