



Capturing the Knowledge and Skills of Retired Educators for Supporting the Career Development Programmes of a Young Workforce: An Exploratory Study from Botswana

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Abstract

Retired educators acquire a wealth of knowledge and skills through their experiences as education personnel. However, in order for these competencies to benefit upcoming professionals, it is critical to find out from the retirees themselves what they learned over the years of working. This article discusses the exploratory phase of a study in which questionnaire responses and narratives of retired educators were used to determine the skills and knowledge they had and how these could be harnessed to contribute to career growth of young people. A semi-structured Retired Educators' Questionnaire was completed by 108 retired educators in Gaborone, Botswana. The participants had worked for an average of 29 years. The questionnaire has seven constructs of career interventions, career guidance and counselling, knowledge management, being mentored, mentoring others, career growth, and soft skills. The retired educators reported that soft skills related to leadership, self-awareness, communication, and interpersonal relationships contributed to their achievement. The correlation between age and experience was significant, but not between age and soft skills. Taken together, this study shows one approach to capturing valuable information from retired staff. A challenge is then about how to utilize such "knowledge capture", which is the second part of our study.

Keywords: career development, career growth, knowledge capture, mentoring, retired educators, soft skills

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Employees from various sectors of employment move through different stages of career progression, which then culminates in either retirement and/or leaving the usual form of employment. Once an individual retires, they usually take with them the skills and knowledge they had learnt while performing their job. As a result, their skills and knowledge are lost for the institution, while their successor needs to regain the job knowledge that the retiree spent years accumulating (Thilmany, 2008). In other words, valuable skills that may take years to acquire are not effectively transmitted to the next generation of workers. The same is true for the education profession, and those who replace experienced school personnel will have no immediate reference for important skills. Career development programmes can be assumed to be a likely strategy to effectively harness competencies of retiring people for future use.

Botswana has a small population of 2.2 million people. Botswana gained its independence from the British in 1966. Because of its peaceful political processes and very limited corruption, compared to other African states, it was relatively easy to develop critical services necessary for the country (Stockton, Nitza, & Bhusumane, 2010). Amenities that were perilous at the start of independent Botswana included health and education services, and transitioning from colonialism meant the country needed to be self-reliant in developing its workforce (Leburu-Sianga, Molobe, & Ministry of Education, 2000; Tabulawa & Pansiri, 2013). Education became a number one priority. A few years ago, the government's education sector was estimated to employ about 26,000 people with an estimated 22,000 being teachers at both primary and secondary schools (Bennell & Molwane, 2007). Although a 2012 report estimated 28,500 primary and secondary school teachers (Statistics Botswana, 2015), for such a small population, the problem of education-related

job turnover is a serious matter. A study in 2005, for example, showed that 225 teachers between the ages of 46 and 65 retired, which places the retirement rate at 1% annually; and there was an expectation of further annual increase of retiring teachers (Bennell & Molwane, 2007). Furthermore, it takes several years to introduce a newly trained skilled workforce; for example, it takes at least three to four years to train a primary or secondary school teacher at a college or university and many more years to train college and university lecturers. Therefore, the loss of this intellectual capital is significant for small, developing countries such as Botswana. Thus, the development of a methodology to capture and transfer the knowledge and experience of retiring educators could benefit the Botswana educational system and more importantly young employees.

Employees are the key holders of vital knowledge and expertise which ensures the survival of any organisation. The success and preservation of any system, including educational ones, is based on its continuity with regard to these fundamental skills. In other words, the success of any enterprise comes from the "degree to which it generates, develops, maintains, grows, exploits and protects its knowledge base and develops its core skill and competencies," including external or tacit knowledge (McQuade, Sjoer, Fabian, Nascimento & Schroeder, 2007, p. 759). However, little work has been done by organisations to implement knowledge capture for new workers, resulting in the loss of maturity, interpersonal skills, conflict management skills, communication skills, and soft or professionally transferable skills. Although it is assumed that retired educators are skilled it is not entirely clear what expertise retired educators actually have. According to Hoffman, Feltovich, and Eccles (2007), skills and capturing of knowledge of people leaving their workplace is typically limited to exit interviews and Botswana is no exception. Exit

interviews might benefit educational institutions if they were recorded; however, exit interviews are not necessarily effective ways of capturing the knowledge and skills of people who are leaving (Williams, Harris, & Parker, 2008). For instance, in Botswana's public sector, if possible, retiring individuals meet with senior personnel who thank the retiring persons for their service to the government and wish them well, but rarely ask about how they think the workplace they are leaving can be improved. In an earlier study, Maroba, Mokgolodi, and Tidimane (2006) emphasised that Botswana does not have a systematic method to capture and utilize the skills and wealth of experiences of the retired workforce in career development programmes. The assumption here is that not having a standard for questioning and not recording the critical points raised by those who had an opportunity to share their thoughts or just letting an employee go without a word means the retirees' ideas will be lost for good. Furthermore, in a study on retiring professionals conducted in an entirely different context, not only were company and expert knowledge seen as lost, but the authors emphasise that soft skills that an individual develops throughout his or her career are lost because these are not a subject of concern to organisations (Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Portugal & Germany: McQuade et al., 2007).

The primary research question in the current study was: How can the experiential knowledge and skills of retired educators inform career development programmes? To further answer the question, the following questions were asked: What are the career development competencies of retired educators acquired as a result of exposure to career development programmes such as professional development courses, mentoring, and other types of exposure to different environments or contexts of learning? What kind of relationships are seen between the construct of soft skills and other constructs

such as being mentored, career interventions, knowledge management, guidance and counselling? Can we relate being mentored to career growth and is there any relationship between soft skills and experience?

Method

Research Design

A mixed-method design was used for the larger study that the data of this paper draws upon. Pragmatism is the paradigm followed. According to pragmatism, what drives the study is the research question rather than to center the study around the researcher (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). One inference of this paradigm is that multiple ways for answering the research question are to be employed. Based on the philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism, combining aspects of qualitative and quantitative methods formed the methodological paradigm for this study (Creswell, 2010; Creswell, Plano, & Clark, 2007). Of this approach, we present the questionnaire data covered under the quantitative approach.

Retired Educators' Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed to explore constructs identified from the literature. The questionnaire was piloted with 30 retired educators in Gaborone, Botswana to check its strengths and to identify areas that needed to be changed. Based on this pilot exercise, the questionnaire was refined and the final questionnaire consisted of 23 questions (see Table 1 for examples of the questionnaire items clustered by constructs). Some questions allowed the participant to choose more than one option. The first nine questions were biographic items. Questions 10-12 and 14-17 measured the level of agreement of statements on a 4-point Likert-type scale with *strongly agree* being 4 to *strongly*

disagree bearing a value of 1. Questions 13 and 18 used a five-point semantic differential scale with 1 being *not important* and 5 being *very important* covering the constructs of soft skills and being mentored. Question 19 measured the importance of the relationship of the participant with other people. Questions 20 to 22 were open-ended questions seeking to understand the perspectives of retired educators on mentoring and the relevance of their knowledge and skills to education now. The retired educators in the study spoke both Setswana (the *lingua franca* of Botswana) and English, and the questionnaire was administered in English.

We also captured demographic information of the participants: gender, age, year of retirement, work experience, qualifications, and current place of residence. Related to the participant’s career development we captured the following: people who influenced career choice, participants’ reflections on career choice, childhood and career role models, life changing experiences, meaning held by certain experiences, skills necessary for career development, how time is spent post-retirement; and description of career as an educator.

Table 1
Constructs of the Retired Educators’ Questionnaire

Construct	Examples (with item number in questionnaire)
Career interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had relevant training for my career from long-term training (certificate, diploma, degree) (Q10) • My work experiences were helpful in taking forward my career as an educator. (Q10) • I often needed someone or something to intervene to help me align my talents with work demands. (Q10)
Career guidance and counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I finished high school, I wanted to ... (Q11) • I was influenced to do the above by ... (Q11) • What influenced your career decision?.....(Q11)
Knowledge management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The diversity of employees was good for professional development. (Q14) • My knowledge and skills base made me an asset to the organisation I worked for. (Q14) • Would you say your experience is relevant to the future of education or the career development of your successors? Explain. (Q22)
Being mentored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My mentor was important to my professional development. (15) • My mentor kept in touch regarding my progress. (Q15) • I went through most of my career without a mentor. (Q15)
Mentoring others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My mentee was important to my professional development. (Q16) • I had a meaningful personal relationship with my mentee. (Q16) • My mentee was usually younger in the profession rather than in age. (Q16)
Career growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a clear progression ladder in my work as an educator. (Q17) • I needed to continuously elevate my education level to grow in my career. (Q17) • I stayed in my career as an educator because I had no option of other careers. (Q17)
Soft skills (professional or business, research, adaptability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What experiential knowledge do you think made your career successful? (Q22) • What special skills do you think made you successful? (Q22) • How do you think the current educators can tap into your experience to enhance their work? (Q22)

Participants

A non-probabilistic sample of 200 retired educators in Gaborone, Botswana was approached for the survey which used the Retired Educators' Questionnaire. Of the 108 participants who returned completed questionnaires, 69% domiciled in the Central and the Kgatleng Districts, 65% were female and 25% male. Ten percent did not indicate their gender. Percent of participants in 46-55 age range was 21%, those in the 56-65 age range constituted 47%, and 22% were between 66-75 years. Four percent were less than 46 or above 75 years. Of the participants who indicated time of retirement, 23% had retired between 2000 and 2005, 56% between 2006 and 2010, and 15% between 2011 and 2012. The inclusion criterion was that the educator had to be retired for at least 1 year at the time of data collection. Six participants did not indicate exactly when they retired but this was not a problem; their age and their responses to the questionnaire indicated that they met the criteria of one year since retirement to participate.

In work experience, the participants stated their places of work as well as years of experience. Across the 108 participants, 86% worked in the public sector, 5% in the private sector, while 3% were in non-governmental organisations, and 5% in other sectors. Forty one percent had between 31 and 40 years of experience, and 32% had worked for 21 to 30 years, while 17% indicated having worked for less than 20 years and 5% for more than 41 years. The average working experience of the 108 participants was 29 years and the average age was 60 years. The relationship between age and experience was significant ($r = .302$, $p < .001$). Qualifications data, available from 106 participants, showed that 85% had a certificate, diploma, bachelors, or a master's degree qualification, while 1% had a PhD level qualification. Of the 106 participants (persons did not respond), 10% had not

attained a professional qualification which is likely to mean even though they went through training, they may not have passed to get a qualification. The finding of 10% not having finished school-level qualifications is understandable because someone who is aged 70 years now could have worked as an educator with a primary, junior, or senior secondary school certificate based on recruitment policies in their time. It is just that this level is not considered as a professional certificate because we applied the current certification standards in our analysis.

Analyses

Descriptive analyses were conducted. The open-ended responses in the questionnaire were analysed for common themes across participants. Frequency data is summarised descriptively and correlations between constructs are presented.

Results

The retired educators indicated that parents were the main career influencers followed by teachers (at 56% and 36% respectively). Siblings and career counsellors as career influencers trailed at 22% and 18% respectively. Turning to who were their childhood role models, many noted their parents, teachers, and siblings (at 55%, 20%, and 8% respectively). But in addition, the retired educators also indicated that people other than those mentioned in our questionnaire were their childhood role models, and the reasons given for the people being role models included these people's attitude, lifestyle and perseverance (at 46%, 39%, and 4% respectively, and a further 4% choosing the non-specific option of 'other'). Specifically in the area of their career as educators, participants' indicate former teachers (at 36%) as career role models, followed by supervisor, parent, and others at 15%, 15%, and 14% respectively. Furthermore, the career role models' work

ethic (at 32%), openness to learning (at 10%), going an extra mile (at 5%), problem solving (at 3%), and change observed (at 2%) were indicated as some of the reasons the retired educators chose them as such. Non-specified 'other' individual aspects (at 20%) were indicated as reasons the people were identified as career role models.

On reflecting about their career development, participants could respond to more than one option per item with 90% and 91% of participants reporting that the education profession developed their potential and their skills respectively. The retired educators were satisfied with a career as educator and were also satisfied with their training (at 90% and 95% respectively). Skills such as leadership, teamwork, interpersonal skills, dedication, commitment, communication, listening, and counselling skills (grouped as emotional intelligence skills) at 60% were indicated by the participants as necessary for career development. Openness at 16%, technical skills at 5%, and research at 2% were the other skills indicated as needed for career development. One percent said "going the extra mile" was important for career development and the remaining choose the non-specific option of 'other'.

Based on the narratives from the retired educators, in which the major themes were quantified, 74% expressed that their experience is relevant to the future of education as it can bring about improvements to the profession, while 5% indicated that their experience is irrelevant. Passion (at 50%) and learning the art of teaching (at 22%) were the uppermost advice retired educators would give to a young person intending to go into the field

of education. The experiences which contributed highly to the success of the retired educators were professional development (23%), interaction with other professionals (22%), and motivation (at 14%). Mentoring younger people including asking questions (at 26%) and guiding in research skills (at 3%) were how the retired educators saw themselves as contributing to career development for the next generation. Workshops (at 19%) were opted as the method by which young people could tap into the experiences of the retired educators.

Post retirement, participants were engaged in farming (26%), education-related activities (23%), homemaking and community work at 12% each, with time spent on commercial activities low at 4%. We do not have information for 14% of retired educators who chose the option of 'Other' activities but this appears to suggest they all remain occupied after retirement. Finally, of the 93 participants who responded to this question, 69% described education as an honourable, meaningful, or fulfilling profession.

Relationships amongst constructs. When age increases, experience is expected to increase and our data confirms this. There is, however, no correlation between soft skills and age, and soft skills and the constructs of career interventions and guidance and counselling. However, although the relationships are weaker, there was a significant correlation between soft skills and the constructs of being mentored and knowledge management (see Table 2)

Table 2
Zero order Correlations between the construct of Soft Skills and the rest of the constructs on the Retired Educators’ Questionnaire, and with Age.

		Retired Educators’ Questionnaire				Participants’
		Being mentored	Career interventions	Knowledge management	Guidance and counselling	Age
Soft skills	Correlation	.28*	.11	.21*	.15	-.13
	<i>p</i> value	.05	.25	.04	.14	.18
Number of Participants		51	105	105	104	101

Discussion

The average age of participants in our study was 60 years whereas their average work experience was almost 30 years. We found a significant relationship between age and experience. What was not anticipated was the young age at which the participants retired. Even though Botswana’s mandatory retirement age is 60, several educators had retired much earlier. Early retirement may have consequences for loss of expert knowledge and skills within the education system (Udjo, 2011). The current study purports that retired educators are worth considering in the development and implementation of career growth programmes for the younger generations entering the teaching workforce. Both the length of work experience and the qualifications of the retired educators, in the current study, attest to the potential skills and capabilities they have. Early retirement may explain why educators seem to seek professional and paying jobs after retirement. In addition, it was found that even with this level of skills acquisition, most retired educators were self-employed in areas that may not necessarily be related to education as a profession. It can be counter-argued that retirement means different things to different people. Studies

indicate that change that still continues in an individual’s professional work activities into retirement makes adjustment to retirement itself much easier (Price, 2003).

Work ethic, attitude, and lifestyles were reported as the main influences on participants’ choices. It emerged from the questionnaire analysis that soft skills such as communication, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills were more important in the career development of the retired educators, compared to the technical skills needed to do a job. In addition, the retired educators in the study seemed content with the education and training they went through to prepare them to be educators, as these developed their soft skills. However, studies on pedagogy, curriculum, teaching practices, and teacher education conducted in 11 sub-Saharan countries, one North African, one Central Asian, four South Asian, and three East Asian countries have highlighted that there are varied resources in teacher education across regions (Westbrook et al., 2013). Despite the fact that Westbrook and others (2013) see teachers as connoisseurs and professionals with necessary knowledge to draw from, they authors cannot deny the fact that the lack of adequate training amongst teachers around the globe waters down the teaching profession. While some countries had

documented that they had qualified and trained teachers, other countries still operated with unqualified or undertrained teachers.

“Knowledge capture” includes the capture of tacit knowledge and soft skills from retired educators so that this knowledge and skills can be put into practice in order to prevent knowledge loss. A synthesis of country papers (including, Australia, Botswana, Canada, South Africa, Italy, India, and the UK) on human capital or human resource development, labour supply, older workers and employability skills emphasised the need for innovation and creativity in these areas (Watts, Sweet, Haines, & McMahon, 2006). Instead, career development programmes present an opportunity whereby retired educators’ experiences can be used to capture their knowledge and skills in a structured, systematic manner. These career development programmes can include interaction of young teachers with retired educators, mentoring opportunities, research guidance provided by retirees to young teachers, and workshops conducted by retired educators. In this survey we show through a newly developed questionnaire how to capture retired educators’ experiences.

Lifelong learning or a life span perspective is central to most career guidance and counselling or career development programmes (Stead & Watson, 2006). When individuals reflect on their experiences in a way that helps them to see what was, what is, and what will be, then the world of work is likely to develop lifelong learning for the individual. In the wider context of Botswana and other developing countries, career development of younger generations can no longer be the sole responsibility of the government. Retired professionals, especially the educators should be sought out to assist in helping young professionals learn the critical soft skills that helped them throughout their employment as educators. The loss of knowledge and skills as a result of retirement is not a challenge for Botswana only. Many nations around the world are concerned with their aging workforces, or lack of skilled young people (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Bergin et al., 2006; Watts et al., 2006; Westbrook et al., 2013; Yang & Meiyang, 2010). Therefore, trends in the findings from this study may benefit other countries experiencing similar human resource processes as Botswana.

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