

Casual Work In Zimbabwe: Stepping-Stone Or Dead-End?

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Abstract

This study sought to explore casual workers' posterior likelihood of being offered a permanent position at a multinational company in Zimbabwe. The study used a qualitative research approach. Data from sixteen participants who had worked for the multinational company in Zimbabwe for at least seven months were gathered using semi-structured interviews. The research found that a majority of casual work at the case multinational company in Zimbabwe see casual work as a trap than a bridge to more stable and secure positions. The three main factors identified by most of the research participants which makes casual work a trap were employer's flexibility strategy, limited training opportunities and vertical immobility. Nonetheless, a few casual workers claimed that casual employment gives them the chance to showcase their abilities and acquire job-specific skills they need to secure full-time jobs. Hence, as it is, casual work at the case multinational company in Zimbabwe is more of a dead end than a stepping-stone to fulltime positions. The current study recommends that the case transnational firm in Zimbabwe should offer more secure contracts to some of its casual workers when there is fulltime vacancy.

Key words: Casual work; casual worker; stepping-stone; dead end; permanent position; transnational firm

1. Introduction

Labour markets in both developed and less developed countries have displayed increases in the utilisation of atypical forms work particularly casual work (Durach, Wiengarten & Pagell, 2022; Kruse, Mensah, Sen & de Vries, 2022; López-Manuel, Sartal & Vázquez, 2022). Organizations in Zimbabwe have been compelled to utilize unconventional kinds of contracts that differ in their nature and terms due to the necessity for numerical flexibility (Bigsten et al., 2022; Bolt, 2012; Chambati, 2017; Fallon & Lucas, 2021). Most often, firms have been forced to replace full-time employees with temporary contracts in order to enjoy numerical flexibility through nonstandard forms of contracts (Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter, 2019). There is disagreement on the implications of unconventional contract types in terms of the bridge and dead-end perspective (Gunn et al., 2022). According to some academics, atypical forms of work can be a good way to break into the labour market and make the move to permanent employment (Auray & Lepage-Saucier, 2021; Boschman, Maas, Vrooman & Kristiansen, 2021; de Graaf-Zijl et al., 2011; Filomena & Picchio, 2022). Some other studies have shown that nonstandard work is a dead end where employees are trapped in insecure and/or low-paying work (Adermon & Hensvik, 2022; Alba-Ramirez, 2008; Amuedo-Dorantes, 2020; Carmichael, & Drishti, 2021; Danquah, Schotte, & Sen, 2021; Drishti & Carmichael, 2023). When people consistently work as temporary employees, Fremigacci and Terracol (2013) discovered a large lock-in impact, yet there is a stepping-stone effect when non-standard workers are given full-time contracts. Hagen's (2020) global study discovered a stepping-stone effect of non-standard employment in Germany, while Amuedo-Dorantes' (2020) study discovered none for Spain. Workers have been found to accept precarious employment contracts since they serve as a transition to job for life in the future (Auray & Lepage-Saucier, 2021; Boschman, Maas, Vrooman & Kristiansen, 2021) Similar to this, a study on the British labour market conducted by Booth, Francesconi, and Frank in 2002 found support for the stepping-stone concept. Also, a Belgian study by Cockx and Picchio (2012) discovered that lengthy temporary work has a greater impact on stepping-stones to permanent roles than short-lived unusual kinds of contract. In contrast, a study conducted in Spain by Malo (2018) indicated that non-standard employees have little chance of being hired as full-time employees. Similar to this, Autor and Houseman (2010) contend that non-standard forms of work can be a trap rather than a path to more steady employment for workers. The stepping-stone and dead-end idea has been the subject of several investigations with varying degrees of success (Bosco, & Valeriani, 2017; Pavlopoulos; 2019). If there are any transitional steps from temporary employment to permanent roles, Casey (2018)

claims that they are typically slick and do not always lead to the desired outcomes. Several studies on the dead-end and stepping-stone from casual work to permanent positions were carried out in affluent countries, which appear to ignore the narratives of casual employees in a faltering economy like Zimbabwe. In light of this, the current study was done to explore casual workers' chance of being offered a full-time position at the multinational company in Zimbabwe.

2. Literature

Theories supporting the stepping-stone to permanent positions and dead end, the arguments for and against stepping-stone and dead-end effects are presented below

2.1. Screening Theory

According to Stiglitz's (1975) screening theory, businesses use nonstandard contract types often referred to as probationary contracts as a screening tool to see whether a candidate is a good fit for the permanent position. The screening theory postulates that skill screening could reveal concealed information about an employee's qualities. When there is a high likelihood of a mismatch between an employee's talents and an employer's needs, screening is particularly important, especially when education and experience alone does not indicate skills (Nunez & Livanos, 2015). Zwardo-Kuchciak et al. (2020) listed a number of screening procedures utilized in various markets, including competence tests, probationary periods, and interviews, all of which are intended to find out about a candidate's skills and personality. A study by Echtelt (2015) showed that employers utilize probation to screen temporary workers for permanent positions. The study also revealed that a successful probationary period would result in a permanent position. Liu and Liu (2021), who contend that temporary contracts are an effective technique to enable the firm to evaluate candidates' qualifications before granting permanent positions, support the screening theory's underlying premises. According to Puig-Barrachina et al. (2020), who support the aforementioned, it is dangerous and expensive to offer a fulltime post to a worker with unknown competences, which is why a probationary period is necessary as a screening tool. For businesses that may eventually need to offer a permanent position, the probationary term serves as a sorting mechanism (Ioh, 1994).

2.2. Matching Theory

The matching theory proposed by Pries and Rogerson

(2005) describes how a company may provide both temporary and long-term employment. The model makes the assumption that employees are both inspection- and experience-worthy. Both the employee and the employer receive information about the match's quality during matching (Pries, 2005). According to Berton and Garibaldi (2012), a match is created if the signal rises beyond a specific threshold and enables parties to see the match develop over time. A temporary match that works out well is elevated to a permanent position, while an unsuitable match is eliminated (Berton & Garibaldi, 2012). In addition, Wang and Weiss (2006) suggest that companies provide nonstandard workers a probationary period in order to learn more about the workers' suitability for the fulltime position.

2.3. Dual Labour Market Theory

The segmentation and dual labor market theory is the source of the belief that insecure work is a dead end that lowers the likelihood of obtaining a permanent position (Doeringer et al, 1971). The dual labour market and segmentation theories segment work into primary and secondary categories. The primary category has rewarding jobs with full-time contracts. Jobs in the secondary segment, however, are unsatisfactory and unstable, and businesses utilize them to control transient variations in the need for labour (Doeringer and Poire, 1971). According to Reich et al. (1973), the limited mobility flows between the primary and secondary sectors are what define the dual labor market segments. Furthermore, Eichhorst and Marx (2015) state that secondary segment newcomers are more likely to become locked in precarious positions in a secondary labor market segment due to limited mobility.

2.4. Career Mobility Theory

The career mobility theory assumes that workers take atypical forms of work as a bridge to permanent employment (Sicherman, 1991; Sicherman & Galor, 1990). The assumptions of that career mobility theory, according to Büchel and Mertens (2004), are drawn from the notion that temporary workers are not constrained in their movement by ceiling effects. The aforementioned presumptions are also connected to the firm internal labor markets theory, which holds that entry-level jobs serve as a ladder for later, advantageous career prospects (Marsden, 1990; Maurice et al., 1979). The career mobility theory is

especially relevant in a labor market where young, highly educated employees predominate. McGuinness, (2006) define overeducated worker as one who has more education than is generally needed for the job. A number of studies revealed that non-standard workers accept employment with requirements below their educational qualifications and competences to avoid spillover effects of staying unemployed and as a bridge to job for life position (Arulampalam, 2001; de Grip et al. 2008; McCormick, 1990; Sicherman & Galor, 1990).

2.5. Stepping-Stone and Dead-End Concepts

The stepping-stone and dead-end effects of atypical forms of work are explained by economic theory. A study by Fremigacci and Terracol (2013) found casual work has both lock-in and stepping-stone effect. Results of the existence of a stepping-stone to a permanent position or dead end have been contradictory or ambiguous. Studies on the motives behind settling for atypical forms of work has shown that a majority of workers in precarious contracts prefer a permanent contract (Buddelmeyer & Wooden, 2011; Baum-Talmor, 2021; Filomena, & Picchio, 2021; Nightingale, 2020; Danquah, Schotte, & Sen, 2019). Moreover, it was found that employees embrace precarious employment contracts because they serve as a transition to job for life positions in the future (Auray & Lepage-Saucier, 2021; Boschman, 2021; Filomena & Picchio, 2022; Declerck et al., 2006). The stepping-stone hypothesis was supported by research on the British labor market conducted by Booth, Francesconi, and Frank in 2002. Similar to this, a 2015 French study showed that non-standard work enhances the chance of landing a full-time position. The effect of prolonged temporary work as a stepping-stone to permanent roles was also discovered in a 2012 study conducted in Belgium by Cockx and Picchio. Contrarily, some other researchers discovered that short-term employment is more of a trap than a path to long-term employment (Adermon, & Hensvik, 2022; Alba-Ramirez, 1998; Amuedo-Dorantes, 2020; Carmichael, & Drishti, 2021; Danquah et al., 2021). Rieger Malo and Muoz-Bullón (2018) conducted another important study in Spain and discovered that temporary workers are less likely to be hired as permanent employees. Similarly, Auto and Houseman (2019) argue that temporary work does not act as a bridge to better positions, but rather can be a trap. Cockx and Picchio, (2017) further posit that settling for atypical work

can be a signal of being a less skilled worker and therefore could represent a dead end. There are some studies which offered mixed results on the stepping-stone and dead-end hypothesis. A study by Pavlopoulos (2019) in United Kingdom and Germany showed that temporary contracts act as stepping-stones in some cases but in others do not. Similar to this, a longitudinal study by Bosco and Valeriani (2017) revealed that the type of atypical contract affects the chances of being offered a fulltime job. The study also found that compared to other atypical contract types, temporary agency work and apprenticeships have lower rates of transfer to fulltime job.

2.6. Arguments in Favour and Against the Stepping-Stone and Dead End

Arguments in favour of and against the stepping-stone and dead end in relation to permanent positions are presented by economic theory. Some of the arguments supporting stepping-stone and dead-end effects are presented below.

2.6.1. Screening Strategy

The principal agent and tournament theory can be used to justify the use of casual work as a screening tool (Beckmann & Kuhn, 2012; Roach, 2016). Using nonstandard labour could be a potential answer to this information challenge (Roach, 2016). A study by Berglund et al. (2021) found that employers use casual workers as a way of screening them for permanent jobs. Similar to this, Kiersztyn (2021) contends that businesses can use nonstandard employees as a screening tool before making a permanent hire. In this way, hiring temporary workers act as a protracted trial period during which the company can gather the necessary data (Forde, 2001; Nunez & Livanos, 2015). If nonstandard workers receive a favourable evaluation, they can be offered a fulltime position; however, if they receive a poor evaluation, they leave the company (Berglund et al., 2017); Bauer & Truxillo, 2000). The aforementioned is related to the employment competition amongst casual employees, in which the winner receives a permanent position, and the losers are required to leave the company. If an employer uses temporary positions with the intention of screening people for permanent jobs, temporary jobholders who exhibit high levels of effort can be predicted to have higher odds, other things being equal, of being granted permanent jobs than other temporary workers (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001; Engellandt & Riphahn, 2005).

2.6.2. Experience and Training

Temporary employment typically aims to give people the training, work experience, and specialized firm skills they need to land a permanent position (Plomp et al., 2019). According to a study by Lilla and Staffolani (2012), atypical workers with greater work-related experience and the longest-lasting temporary positions appear to have had the best chances of receiving an open-ended contract. According to Yeung et al. (2020), precarious contracts give employees the opportunity to receive on-the-job training and access to a network of companies they were previously unaware of. Similar to this, Pham and Jackson (2020) claim that temporary employment permits employees to gain the firm-specific knowledge and practical experience required to secure permanent positions. Contrarily, Fouarge et al. (2012) contend that nonstandard employees lack incentives to invest in their own human capital and are less likely to obtain training from their employers. As a result, temporary employment continues to be more of a trap than a route to permanent employment (Acemoglu & Pischke, 2018; Bilanakos, Heywood, Sessions, & Theodoropoulos, 2018).

2.6.3. Flexibility Strategy

Several models see casual labour as a type of atypical work that gives the company more flexibility to adjust employment in response to shifting business cycle conditions (Tejada, 2017). Similar to this, Cockx and Picchio (2012) contend that using nonstandard workers as a flexibility buffer to handle fluctuating product demand is made more difficult by the high expense of terminating permanent employees. Furthermore, according to Passaretta and Wolbers (2019), conversion to a secure post is unlikely because businesses use atypical contracts as a flexibility buffer. According to a study by Johnstone (2019), organisations with a steady permanent staff employ flexibility strategies to change their temporary labour pool in response to changes in economic activity. The study mentioned above is supported by Filomena and Picchio (2022), who contend that businesses employ temporary workers to keep a pool of workers who can be quickly fired when necessary. Similarly, nonstandard contracts enabling contingent employment adjustments without hurting fulltime personnel or output (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2012). Organizations operate a parallel labour market internally, with permanent employees in safe positions and

nonstandard workers trapped in a trap, due to the need for flexibility (Pfeifer, 2006). Precarious workers are probably less likely to receive offers of permanent employment (Berglund et al., 2017; Passaretta & Wolbers, 2019).

2.6.4. Signaling Skills

Employers may utilize a temporary worker's past employment history as a signal to weed out incomplete information regarding future hires (Högberg et al., 2019). The signaling theory is predicated on the idea that businesses find it challenging to accurately assess employees' talents and capacities. Without a signal, businesses will make employment offers based on the average predicted productivity of employees, which could result in both overpaying and underpaying employees (Högberg et al., 2019). According to the signaling theory, temporary employment may be interpreted as a sign of a temporary worker's potential. Similar to this, Van (2001) contend that nonstandard work may be a positive indicator if employers recognize that employees with prior experience have already demonstrated their willingness and ability to follow organizational standards.

3. Method

3.1. Research Setting

The study was carried out at a transnational firm in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland West province. The multinational company in Zimbabwe naturally recruits workers from other provinces and is a solid example of a multi-ethnic site.

3.2. Research Approach

According to Creswell (2014), a research approach is a plan for carrying out research that might include anything from broad theories to particular methods for gathering and analyzing data. Maree (2017) lists the three primary research approaches used when conducting research as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. This study used a qualitative research approach because it allowed the casual workers to communicate with the researcher and reflect on specific situations, allowing the researcher to understand and learn about their real-world experiences.

3.3. Sampling and Sample Size

The purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who were regarded most fit, accessible to participate in this research. Purposive sampling was utilized in the study because it allowed the researcher to choose individuals who were representative and had relevant experience with the topic at hand. According to Denscomber (2010), the guiding principle of purposeful sampling is that the researchers will gather rich information by purposively choosing participants with known features. The researcher selected key informants for the interviews using his judgment.

3.4. Data Analysis

According to Mouton and Marais (2012), data analysis is the process of breaking down a phenomenon into its constituent parts in order to comprehend it better. The researchers employed a thematic method of data analysis. NVivo qualitative data analysis system was also used by researchers during thematic data analysis process.

3.5. Ethical Consideration

The researcher paid attention to ethical issues such informed consent, anonymity, permission, and secrecy that Walliman (2017) and von Unger (2016) identified. The researcher initially made sure participants were completely aware of the study's goals in order to give them the option of participating or not. Pseudonyms were also used by the researcher to hide the participants' identity. This was done to reduce the chance that participants may get hurt or become the target of a confidentiality violation. Last but not least, the researchers complied with the criteria of academic honesty and integrity.

3.6. Profiles of Research Participants

From the multinational company in Zimbabwe, sixteen participants were purposefully chosen. Managerial staff, union representatives, and casual workers from the case multinational company in Zimbabwe took part in the study. The researchers also conducted interviews with two union representatives, four managerial staff members, and ten casual employees. 'W' was used as the code for the casual employees, whereas 'M' and 'TU' were used as pseudonyms for the managerial staff and union leaders, respectively. Table 1 below summarizes research participants' information on their age, gender, employment history, and educational background.

Table 1: Profiles of research participants

No.	Pseudonyms	Age(Years)	Sex	Work experience	Academic Qualification	Interview Duration
1	W1	19	M	9 months	Diploma	40Mins
2	W2	18	M	1 year	O level certificate	34Mins
3	W3	22	M	10 months	Diploma	33Mins
4	W4	26	F	6 months	Diploma	41Mins
5	W5	31	M	7 months	Bachelor's degree	54Mins
6	W6	23	F	1 year	Diploma	36Mins
7	W7	23	F	6 months	A level certificate	55Mins
8	W8	33	F	10 months	Bachelor's degree	53Mins
9	W9	32	F	3 years	Bachelor's degree	44Mins
10	W10	20	M	8 months	Diploma	36Mins
11	M1	29	F	2 year	Bachelor's degree	34Mins
12	M2	33	M	1 years	Master's degree	32Mins
13	M3	32	M	5 years	Bachelor's degree	56Mins
14	M4	37	M	2 years	Bachelor's degree	45Mins
15	TU1	43	F	4 years	Master's degree	35Mins
16	TU2	45	M	3 years	Master's degree	37Mins

Source: Author's fieldwork

Interviews were conducted by the researchers with research participants who had spent at least six months working for the case transnational firm in Zimbabwe, as shown in Table 1 above. The sixteen participants had an average job term of one year and nine months. According to the gender classification, there are nine male participants and seven female participants. Academic profiles show that

six of the research participants held bachelor's degrees. The longest interview lasted for 56 minutes.

4. Findings and Discussion

The researchers posed the question: Is casual work a stepping-stone to a permanent position or a dead end?

The subthemes that emerged from the study are gaining work related experience needed to get permanent position, marketable skills to get fulltime job, gaining firm specific skills to improve your chances to get fulltime job, Showing the employer the skills, you have for consideration in permanent positions, you remain casual worker because of limited mobility and training, casual work is a flexibility strategy. The subthemes were group into two themes, namely stepping-stone and dead end. The themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Stepping-stone	Internal direct route (Screening) Internal indirect route (Signalling) External route (Acquisition of skills and work experience)
Dead-end	-Employer flexibility strategy -Lower firm sponsored training probability -Limited mobility

Source: fieldwork

4.1. Data Frequency

Table 3 below illustrates the research participants’ response rate.

Table 3: Sub-themes that emerged from data analysis and frequency

Sub-themes	Frequency
Employer flexibility strategy	6
Lower training probability	3
Limited mobility from casual to permanent positions	2
Screening and signalling	3
Work-related experience and firm specific skills	2

Source: fieldwork

4.2. Employer Flexibility Strategy

The findings show that six of the research participants revealed that the case multinational company in Zimbabwe use casual employees as flexibility strategy to manage

fluctuations in economic activities. The participants further indicated that casual work is a trap and there are low chances of getting a job for life contract since they are used as flexibility buffer. In this regard, W2 said:

'My brother I do not see myself being offered a fulltime job here. During rainy season when demand for our products is low, the employer terminates our contract.'

In response to the same question, W5 posited that:

'Tinongoshanda pano kana basa rakawandisa asi kana ravashoma vazhinji tinonzi chimbomirai. Saka kupindura mubvunzo wenyu haaa ini handioni ndichizonzi ndakushanda pano zvamuchose (They offered us work when demand increases. Getting a permanent job is close to zero here).'

W7 mentioned that the employer uses casual workers to enjoy numerical flexibility. She asserted that:

'My brother the honest reality is that the employer enjoys numerical flexibility through casual workers. I do not think that one day I am going to be a permanent worker here.'

In the same vein, W9 responded by saying:

'Casual work is a trap. You are offered casual work during peak periods usually from April to November and they terminate our contracts off peak periods.'

This trend continued with M1. She submitted:

'Casual work in most cases is a dead end. The employer utilised casual workers because it gives the employer the freedom to numerically adjust number of casual workers.'

This view was equally expressed by TU1 who mentioned that:

'Employers use casual workers a flexibility buffer. There are slim chances of a transition from casual work to permanent position here.'

Given the aforementioned comments, a number of models consider casual labor to be a type of atypical work that gives a company more flexibility to modify employment in response to shifting business cycle conditions (Tejada, 2017). Furthermore, according to Passaretta and Wolbers (2019), conversion to a secure post is unlikely because businesses use atypical contracts as a flexibility buffer.

According to a study by Johnstone (2019), organizations with a steady permanent staff employ flexibility strategies to change their temporary labor pool in response to changes in economic activity. Filomena and Picchio (2022), who support the aforementioned study, contend that businesses use temporary contracts to keep a buffer supply of employees who can be quickly let go when a need arises. Precarious workers are probably less likely to receive offers of permanent employment (Passaretta and Wolbers, 2019; Berglund et al., 2017).

4.3. Lower Training Probability

According to the study, one of the factors that make casual work a trap is a lower training chance given to atypical workers. Extant literatures to date have shown that nonstandard employees are less likely to obtain company-sponsored training and lack incentives to invest in their own human capital, which is necessary to land a permanent employment (Fouarge et al., 2012). Acemoglu and Pischke (2018) make a similar argument, claiming that a lack of firm-specific training means that temporary work continues to be a trap rather than a stepping-stone to permanent positions. The following quotes are evidence for the literature mentioned above:

“We are not offered any training here of which permanent positions require in-house training certificate. In short, I am saying I will die a casual worker” (W1, Transcript, p. 2).

“How can you be a fulltime worker without proper on the job training? The employer does not have time to train casual workers. On the job training is offered to permanent workers only” (W4, Transcript, p.2).

“Due to financial constraints, it is difficult to train all workers and as a cost saving strategy, the company is forced to train only fulltime workers leaving casual workers with limited training probability” (M3, Transcript, p.2).

The literature and quotes from the research participants mentioned above refute Plomp et al’s. (2019) assertion that casual work is typically intended to give people the training, work experience, and specialized firm skills they need to be offered more secure positions. Similar to this, Yeung et al. (2020) contend that precarious contracts give employees the opportunity to gain the on-the-job training necessary to land a full-time job as well as access to a network of companies they were previously unaware of. Also, according to Pham and Jackson (2020), doing temporary

employment enables employees to get the firm-specific skills and professional experience necessary to get fulltime employment.

4.4. Limited Mobility from Casual to Permanent Positions

The study's finding on limited mobility from casual work to permanent positions contradicts the assumptions of the career mobility theory. The career mobility theory assumes that employees accept casual work because it serves as stepping-stone to fulltime employment (Sicherman, 1991; Sicherman and Galor, 1990). The assumptions of that career mobility theory, according to Büchel and Mertens (2000), are drawn from the notion that temporary positions are not constrained in their movement by ceiling effects. The aforementioned presumptions are also connected to the firm internal labor markets theory, which holds that entry-level jobs serve as a ladder for later, advantageous career prospects (Marsden, 1990; Maurice et al., 1979). In response to the question, W3 said:

'Only two forms of contracts exist here. Its either you are casual worker or permanent. It's rare for a casual worker to be offered a fulltime contract.'

W6 aligned with W3, and posited that:

'Casual work is not a ladder to more secure contracts. It's very difficult for a casual worker to be offered permanent position unless if you are well connected'.

Segmentation and dual labor market theory, which holds that insecure work is a dead end that lowers the likelihood of obtaining a permanent position, support the aforementioned quotes from research participants (Doeringer et al, 1971; Eichhorst & Marx, 2015; Emmenegger et al., 2012; Reich et al., 1973). In addition, Reich et al. (1973) state that the limited mobility flows between the primary and secondary sectors is what defines the dual labor market segments. Furthermore, secondary segment newcomers are more likely to become locked in precarious positions in a secondary labor market segment (Eichhorst & Marx, 2015).

4.5. Screening and Signaling

A few participants view casual work a way used by the employer to screen them for permanent positions. The following quotes represent their sentiments:

“Casual work allows the employer to screen workers and offer permanent positions to best performers.”(M4, Transcript, p.1).

“Casual work is for my probation period, once I proved beyond reasonable doubt that I am competent, they a likely to offer me a permanent position.” (W8, Transcript, p.1).

“In some cases they use casual work to evaluate workers earmarked for permanent positions in the future.”(TU2, Transcript, p.1).

The screening, principal agent, and tournament theories (Beckmann & Kuhn, 2012; Roach, 2016; Stiglitz's, 1975) are supported by the responses of the aforementioned participants. According to Stiglitz's (1975) screening theory, businesses use nonstandard contract types often referred to as probationary contracts as a screening tool to see whether a candidate is a good fit for the position. Houseman et al. (2004) contend that temporary contracts provide a practical means for a company to assess a candidate's qualifications before granting a permanent position, which supports the screening theory's underlying premises. The foregoing is also supported by Alfonsson (2017) who asserts that it is dangerous and expensive to grant a permanent post to an applicant with unknown skills and capabilities, necessitating the use of a probationary period as a screening strategy. The job tournament theory also assumes that a positively evaluated temporary worker (winner) will be promoted to a permanent position and losers have to leave the firm (Bauer & Truxillo, 2000; Berglund, Håkansson, Isidorsson & Alfonsson, 2017).

4.6. Work-related Experience and Firm Specific Skills

The last sub-theme that emerged from the study was work-related experience and firm specific skills. Presented below are the quotes from the participants:

“Once you acquired the much needed experience you can get a permanent position here or elsewhere my brother.”(W10, Transcript, p.1).

“We gave them casual contracts so that they learn and get firm specific skills. If a permanent vacancy arises we promote our casual workers.”(M2, Transcript, p1).

Plomp et al. (2019), who argue that casual work typically aims to provide individuals with training, working experiences, and specialized company skills needed to land a permanent career, support the aforementioned quotations. Similar to this, a study by Lilla and Staffolani (2012) discovered that atypical workers with greater work-related experience seemed to have the best chances of receiving an open-ended contract. Also, according to Pham and Jackson (2020), doing temporary employment enables employees to get the firm-specific skills and professional experience necessary to land permanent jobs. On the other hand, Fouarge et al., (2012) posit that nonstandard workers are less likely to receive firm sponsored training and there is no incentive for them to invest in their own human capital. As a result, temporary employment continues to be more of a trap than a route to permanent employment (Acemoglu & Pischke, 2018).

5. Contribution of the Study

The study has added to the disciplines of employment relations and human resource management theoretically, methodologically, and practically. Extensive research and theories of stepping-stone and dead-end effect of casual work have been developed in developed nations (Doeringer et al, 1971; Sicherman, 1991; Sicherman & Galor, 1990; Pries & Rogerson's, 2005; Reich et al., 1973; Stiglitz, 1975). Little was also known about the stepping-stone and trap effects of casual work in Zimbabwe. The current study is unique and has provided distinctive theoretical contribution, new themes and concepts on stepping-stone and dead-end effect of casual work from a developing nation perspective. From a methodological standpoint, it seems that the majority of studies on the dead end and stepping-stone effects of casual work have been carried out in the global north utilizing quantitative approaches. This study's qualitative research methodology and interpretivist lens make methodological contributions to the field of employment relations by offering fresh perspectives and an alternative perspective, as well as by interpreting the stepping-stone and dead-end effects on casual labor. The study would benefit several institutions and employment relations actors on a practical level. It is predicted that the data acquired for this study will contribute significantly to our understanding of Zimbabwe's employment relations and labour casualisation. Human resource practitioners will

benefit from the study in terms of how to utilize and manage non-standard workers. Current and prospective scholars in the subject area can conduct comparable studies in Zimbabwe with other organisations that were not sampled in this study.

6. Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

This research faced significant obstacles. The study explored the stepping-stone and dead end effect of casual work at one multinational company in Zimbabwe. As a result, the research findings cannot be applied to all multinational companies in Zimbabwe. The study's use of semi-structured interviews and qualitative research methodology was not without its own drawbacks. A mixed research methodology might have given the study's conclusions even more context. The sample size of sixteen people does not accurately reflect the entire population. A larger sample size might have shown more information and produced different results.

7. Conclusion

The results of the study show that most casual employees at the case multinational company in Zimbabwe view casual work as a dead end. The three main factors identified by most of the participants which makes casual work a dead-end were employer flexibility strategy, lower training probability and limited mobility from casual to permanent positions. Only a few participants at the multinational company in Zimbabwe indicated that casual work is a stepping-stone to permanent positions. Thus, it can be said that casual work is a dead end at the multinational company in Zimbabwe. Hence, the case multinational company in Zimbabwe should offer casual workers secure contracts when permanent positions arise.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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