Teachers' Perceived School Level Sources of Low Retention in Remote Secondary Schools in Tanzania

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Abstract

Retaining quality teachers especially for schools located in remote poor contexts remains a problem of critical focus in different parts of the world. Strategies to retain teachers in many Sub-Saharan countries such as Tanzania, for example, have been 'hardly achievable' because of being monetary-based when such a resource is usually scarce and unsustainable in most of these countries. Extant literature identifies organisation-based strategies for retaining teachers as a more promising area for consideration in situations where financially related strategies cannot be sustained. This paper, therefore, discusses the teachers' perceived school level sources of low retention in secondary schools based in remote areas. The paper reports the findings of a study that was conducted in three districts of Kondoa, Mpwapwa and Chemba, Dodoma region, central Tanzania. It was guided by the Organisational support theory and adopted mixed methods approach claiming pragmatic knowledge. Data were collected in three phases, that is, the pilot, survey (using a questionnaire) and follow-up interviews. A sample included 28 schools, 27 school heads and 231 teachers. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended items from questionnaires were subjected to Content Analysis whereas data generated from close-ended items in the questionnaires were analysed with the help of the IBM Statistical Package and Service Solutions (SPSS). Findings show that teachers perceive five key school level sources of low retention in remote schools: Accommodation and social services, school level conflicts, poor teaching and learning conditions, teachers' involvement in decision-making, and lack of alternative economic activities. Arguably, these are more viable issues for consideration as

most of them could be dealt with using school level resources.

Keyword: Remote schools, School level sources, teachers' retention strategies

1. Introduction

Teacher retention has been a topic of critical focus among academics, researchers, practitioners and policy-makers (Guarino, Santibañez, & Brewer, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). The core question has been why teachers leave or remain in the teaching career. Researchers in this area have, therefore, continuously sought to find answers to that question so as to find a lasting solution to the teacher retention problem, especially 'quality teachers'. After all, research has confirmed that teacher quality makes a difference in student learning (Akiba, Gerald & Jay, 2007; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2003; Rowan, Correnti & Miller, 2002; Rowe, 2003; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Stronge, Thomas, Pamela & Jennifer, 2007; Sumra, 2004; Wright, Horn & Sanders, 1997). For instance, Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld and York (1966) concluded that teacher characteristics tend to explain more variance in student achievement than any other school resource. Moreover, Rowe (2003) as well as Sanders and Horn (1998) document that the teacher may be the most important factor in the academic growth of students.

In Tanzania, as it is in many other parts of the world, evidence shows that teachers' retention is a critical problem, mostly affecting remote areas (ITFTEFA, 2010; Moon, 2007; URT, 2008). Evidence shows further that teachers who are deployed to remote rural schools' report in low numbers, and even those who are already there seek transfer to urban areas (URT, 2008; Tanzania Education Sector Analysis [TESA], 2011). Globally, evidence has shown that, despite high turnover, schools serving large populations of low-performing and low-income students, who are in greater need of consistent and supportive school experience (Boyd, Pam, Marsha, Hamilton, Susanna & James, 2011), are largely exposed to inconsistent staffing from year to year, with students taught by an increasing number of inexperienced teachers (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005). In the Tanzanian context, where many students are enrolled in poor schools in remote rural areas, teacher attrition is likely to create social and educational injustice and stratification, hence hindering learners from nourishing their valued capabilities acquirable from quality education and

equality in accessing educational opportunities (Tikly & Barrett, 2010, 2011).

2. Challenges of Retaining Teachers in Remote Areas

A number of challenges are documented in the literature related to retaining teachers, especially in remote areas. These include:

Difficulties in achieving equitable teachers' deployment across different locations by qualification, subject specialisation, and gender. Evidence reveals more striking shortages in remote rural areas (UIS, 2006). Previous studies have shown that the majority of better-qualified, science and mathematics teachers tend to be concentrated in urban areas (Akyeampong & Lewin, 2002; Lewin, 2008; Mulkeen, 2010; UIS, 2006). Teachers are reportedly so resistant to moving to least-desired and poorly-developed areas that, when assigned there, they often do not take up those posts or quickly arrange for an immediate transfer (Mulkeen, 2010).

Wastage and alternative employment (Mulkeen David, Joan & Elizabeth, 2007). The wastage problem occurs when many trained teachers do not enter the teaching profession upon graduation even when measures such as 'teachers bonding' are used (Mulkeen, 2010). The problem is particularly exacerbated by the existence of a private education sector, especially in urban areas, where there are more private schools. Mulkeen *et al.* (2007) have documented that teachers perceive private schools positioned in urban areas to be more attractive even at lower pay than what is on offer in a rural posting. Moreover, where distances between schools allow, secondary school teachers in urban areas reportedly to teach part-time in private schools while holding onto their full-time teaching positions in public schools (Mulkeen *et al*., 2007).

Weak school management in many African countries. Most school heads have faced criticism for their tendency to 'look up rather than down', that is, focusing a great many of their efforts on dealing with the district and central administration, rather than on managing the schools for which they are responsible. Such practices fuel the absence of school heads from schools, sometimes for days (Mulkeen, 2010). Arguably, the consequences of such weak management capacities and skills are likely to affect adversely remote teachers who require frequent support from their respective school heads.

Difficulties in attracting and retaining female teachers at the secondary level,

especially in remote areas (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Mulkeen, 2010). This factor is fuelled by a reasons such as lack of standard housing and lack of acceptance among rural community members (Lowe, 2006; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Moreover, working in rural areas may also serve as an obstacle to private social life opportunities including (for the female gender) limited chances of finding a husband of their calibre (i.e. one with a high education and income) (Kadzamira, 2006).

Unclear understanding of local language spoken remote rural areas. Mulkeen (2010) clearly shows that it has been highly challenging to retain teachers in areas where they are not conversant with the local or main language spoken by the local community. Teachers who fail to understand the local language are likely to experience even greater isolation from the wider community that will severely hinder their attempts to support effectively students' learning.

HIV/AIDS infections. This has been reported to be one of the most dangerous diseases killing a large number of teachers in many Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, hence affecting teachers' retention (Bennell, Hyde & Swainson, 2002; Kelly, 2000; Mulkeen *et al*., 2007; Mulkeen, 2010; Pitsoe, 2013). The consequences of HIV/AIDS strike harder in remote areas than urban areas where immediate replacements are readily available. This is because most schools in the rural areas are more likely to be staffed by male than female teachers. Unfortunately, evidence shows that more male than female teachers are affected by this disease (Bennell, Hyde, & Swainson, 2002). Still, even the few female teachers found in remote areas are strongly at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS given their low socio-economic status and remote life (Gordon, 2009; Pitsoe, 2013). Moreover, health and other social services are limited in remote areas. In this context, teachers suffering from HIV/AIDS tend to prefer urban areas where better medical facilities are available. As a result, returning them to remote areas once they have left becomes extremely difficult.

Promotion and advancement opportunity practices. There is evidence that the availability of proper and transparent career-path projections and opportunities for progression strongly motivates employees' satisfaction and influences retention (Mulkeen *et al*., 2007; Mulkeen, 2010; VSO, 2002). This is, however, severely limited in the education profession in many African countries, a situation which demoralises teachers (Gaynor, 1998; Mulkeen, 2010). Apart from perceived unfair

practices surrounding teachers' promotion (Mkumbo, 2012), evidence shows that the promotion criteria mainly based on academic qualifications have led to removing teachers from classrooms for upgrading (Mulkeen, 2010). After acquiring higher qualifications, the majority do not return to the teaching profession, and those formally located in remote areas refuse to go back, possibly finding alternative employment in urban areas. The cost of poor promotion and advancement practices hits remote schools hard. In addition, teachers in remote areas face substantial difficulties in following their promotion cases and advancement opportunities up. This is because most education offices are located in urban areas, hence costly for remote teachers to access them because of high transportation fares. Besides, bureaucratic and corrupt practices in those offices slow down the pace of services, so that a minor issue could take several days/months and implicitly pile the costs up for poor remote teachers.

Career choice forces, motivation and sense of investment. In contexts where the majority of teachers in many SSA countries treat entry into the teaching career as a 'stepping stone' (Mkumbo, 2012; Mulkeen *et al*., 2007; Towse, Kent, O-saki & Kirua, 2002) with low grades and minimal struggle, their sense of perceived investment is likely to be low, especially during their early years in the career (Borman & Maritza, 2008). Arguably, remote areas with poor conditions are likely to be much more affected when it comes to retaining teachers of such calibres than urban centres.

Despite the mounting literature on remote rural teachers' retention challenges, there is a noticeable paucity of stronger policy-practice-focused research (Mulkeen *et al*., 2007). The available research in SSA has, for example, over-focused on, first, clarifying the dimensions of the problem rather than on formulating and testing alternative solutions; second, describing in detail particular countries' efforts to attract, deploy, and retain teachers, but often lacking solid evidence on the effectiveness of the approaches being described (Borman & Maritza, 2008; Mulkeen *et al*., 2007). This research orientation on this matter does not only expose the weak empirical basis for guiding policy and programme development for effective teachers' retention, particularly in remote areas, but also suggest the need for further studies in this area in African contexts in general and Tanzania in particular.

Policy-practice focused research in this study context means those researches

which specifically focus on finding '*implementable*[1]' teachers' retention alternative strategies and policies. In the Tanzanian context, the effectiveness of a few observable strategies to attract teachers in remote areas such as introducing reward systems, fee exemptions for students' teachers, and increasing attractive incentive packages (URT, 2008) remain largely questionable due to their documented failure to bring about the desired outcome. Indeed, research evidence have shown that, most of these policies are financially or economically based, minimal, unsatisfactory, and ineffective (Chenelo, 2011; January, 2010; Mbiling'i, 2011). Globally, evidence shows that, monetary-related policies and incentives are difficult to implement in retaining teachers in countries such as Tanzania, where such a resource is seriously scarce[2] (Mulkeen *et al*., 2007; URT, 2012). Under global educational reforms, in cases where such policies are not treated as urgent, they tend to be easily neglected (Carnoy, 1998, 1999; Weber, 2007).

Generally, the efficacy of monetary-related teacher retention policies in African contexts is strongly questioned (Mulkeen *et al*., 2007). However, there is ample evidence to the effect that examining organisational characteristics of schools and characteristics of teachers' work conditions, including supportive policies, is an important area for forward-looking research on the issue of teacher retention (Borman & Maritza, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Mulkeen *et al*., 2007; Mulkeen, 2010). Within this context, questioning what teachers perceive as challenges emanating from the school level is a promising turn towards informing implementable retention strategies and policies for remote schools. Yet, this area has not been accorded adequate scholarly attention, particularly in the context of Tanzania's remote schools. Moreover, the few identifiable studies in this area carried out in the Tanzanian context have concentrated on attrition at large (Geu, 2009; January, 2010) whereas others (Chenelo, 2011; Kilasi, 2010; Mbiling'i, 2011; Mlavi, 2011; Mkonongo, 2004) fail to indicate which retention strategies are visible for retaining teachers in the Tanzanian context. Furthermore, there are other few traceable studies that explore the teachers' retention in remote areas from school level contexts in Tanzania. On the whole, a paucity exists in the areas of inquiry that can produce 'implementable' teachers' retention strategies, specifically to cater for Tanzania's

1 Implementable teachers' retention strategies and policies in this study context refers to the strategies and policies enforceable *at the school level (using school resources and capacities), with less dependence on monetary resources external to that school*.

2 In Tanzania, for instance, there have been continuous confrontations and strikes between teachers through the teachers' union and the government over the *issue of salaries* and other teachers' fringe benefits in different times (Onyango, 2013; Peter, 2012; Rweyemamu, 2013, 2014;Yankami, 2014).

remote context. This paper sheds some light on these gaps.

3. Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' perceived school level challenges to retaining teachers in remote secondary schools in Tanzania, and reveal areas of inquiry that can inform 'school level implementable' teachers' retention strategies and policies for remote secondary schools in the country. It was guided by two research questions. First, what school level aspects do teachers perceive as sources of low retention in remote secondary schools in Tanzania? And second, what areas of inquiry can inform the 'school level implementable' teachers' retention strategies and policies for remote schools in Tanzania?

4. Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods approach for completeness, instrument development, and complementarity (Johnson & Larry, 2012). It was conducted in Dodoma region in three districts of Chemba, Kondoa and Mpwapwa. Dodoma region and the three districts under review have to contend with an acute teachers' shortage as well as tough working and living conditions for teachers[3].

To obtain the required data, the study used a sample of purposively sampled 28 secondary schools[4], 27 school heads[5] (SHs) and 231 classroom teachers (CTs) randomly sampled. Data were sequentially collected in three phases (Creswell, 2003;

3 Compared to other regions on Mainland Tanzania (cf. Kessy, Mashindano, Rweyemamu & Charles, 2011a, b), Dodoma belongs to regions containing many adults (about 31%) without education, a region where very few households (about 49%) are located within 2 km of a primary school and 6km from a dispensary and/or health centre. Moreover, it is a region where a significant percentage of individuals (about 13%) live below the food poverty line, about 34% below the basic needs poverty line, and one of the ten regions with the most households (32%) living below the poverty line (Kessy *et al*., 2011a). Furthermore, Dodoma, as part of central Tanzania, has other problems including poor climatic/weather conditions (most parts are semi-arid with heavy droughts and, when the rain falls, it is normally heavy, leading to floods and destruction); it also has a poor transportation and communication infrastructure in most of its parts; it has to contend with the presence of diseases such as eye infections, chest-related diseases, trachoma, malaria and dysentery; and there are land and ethnic conflicts, violence and theft-related crimes, wild animals and vermin (Kessy *et al*., 2011b). The ongoing government efforts to address these challenges are commendable.

4 These are schools with an even larger shortage of teachers, teaching and learning facilities, as well as relatively poor academic records and located far (at least 30 km) from district municipalities.

5 The 28th school head could not participate in the study because of having other responsibilities outside the school.

2009): the pilot study, surveys and follow-up interviews[6]. Qualitative data were first collected in Kondoa district during the pilot study. The results informed the construction of a survey questionnaire, which was then used to collect quantitative data in Dodoma's three districts of Kondoa, Chemba and Mpwapwa. Then, the qualitative data were collected as a follow-up of the survey results with interviews in selected schools in Mpwapwa district.

Data analysis involved data transformation[7] through quantitising[8] and qualitising[9]. Whereas quantitising helped to see the apparent weight of each theme in the dataset, qualitising simplified narrative descriptions of data from numerical perspectives. The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis techniques and procedures to generate themes and sub-themes from the interview data. Then data generated from closed-ended questions using the questionnaire surveys were analysed with the support of SPSS (Statistical Package and Service Solutions – IBM SPSS Version 21) to generate frequency distributions (tables).

5. Findings and Discussion

Five major causal factors were found to account for low retention at the school level in Tanzania's remote school contexts. These were *accommodation and social services*; *school level conflicts*; *poor teaching and learning conditions*; *teachers' involvement in decision-making*; and *lack of alternative economic activities*. These major factors are summarised and presented in Table 1:

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6 The sample included (i) Pilot: 65 (4 SHs, 61 CTs); (ii) Survey questionnaire: 193 (23SHs, 170 CTs); (iii) Follow – up interview: 13 (3SHs, 10 CTs). Notably, SHs and CTs were randomly sampled – because, the topic under investigation is common to all teachers in remote schools, so specialized/ special knowledge was not needed to obtain the correct answers. Equally, a similar sample was used in surveys and follow-up interviews, because, follow-up interviews were meant to dig further the findings from the surveys.

7 This involves quantitising (converting qualitative data into quantitative data) and/or qualitising (converting quantitative data into qualitative data) (cf. Caracelli & Jenniffer, 1993; Driscoll *et al*., 2007; Johnson & Larry, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993).

8 The qualitative '*themes*' generated were converted into numerical form using 'tallying techniques'- each theme was given a number or sign (such as /) whenever appearing in the data set. Tallies were counted and the total was found at the end of the process.

9 Statistical responses summarised from SPSS merged, leading to participants being categorized into mainly two groups of "*More Critical*" (a combination of the most critical, more critical and critical rating measures) and "*Less Critical*" (a combination of less critical, least critical and non-critical rating measures).

Table 1: ***Responses on Teachers' Perceived School Level Sources of Low Retention in Remote Secondary School Contexts in Tanzania***

S/N	Sources of low retention	Qualitised (Survey) responses		
		More critical (N)	Less critical (N)	Total respondents
1.	Accommodation and social services	141	-	141
2.	School level conflicts	139	33	172
3.	Poor teaching and learning conditions	107	63	170
4.	Teachers' involvement in decision-making	103	50	153
5.	Lack of alternative economic activities	67	-	67

5.1 Accommodation and social services

In this study, accommodation refers to a decent house accessible to a teacher. Contextually, among the reasons which make the issue of accommodation critical in remote areas are the school locations. One of the teachers claimed:

> …some schools are located in very remote, isolated areas, far from people's habitat and there are no teachers' houses…teachers have to walk over a long distance [in many cases more than 10 kilometres], passing through bushes and forests…sometimes they are attacked by wild animals or get robbed.…I think this is discouraging, especially for young educated teachers with 'big dreams'….I think the accommodation issue is amongst the top factors in discouraging the majority teachers in this school …may be the school could arrange for transportation support for teachers [school bus] to rescue them from this daily movement to and from the school (*Halima, classroom teacher*).

Consistent with previous studies (Bennell, 2004; Davidson, 2007; HakiElimu, 2011; ITFEFA, 2010; Jinyevu, 2013; Joyce, Andrew & Muchativugwa, 2014; Kayuni & Richard, 2007; Lowe, 2006; Macdonald, 1999; Mlaki, 2015; Mulkeen,

2006; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008; Sumra, 2004), housing for teachers appears to be one of the crucial factors in attracting and retaining teachers in schools located in remote contexts. Geographical locations where living conditions are extremely poor, harsh, or expensive are susceptible to high teachers' turnover (Macdonald, 1999). In line with Macdonald's (1999) observation, Lowe (2006) draws examples from rural schools in Texas in the US, Bennell (2004) from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and Mulkeen (2006) from Malawi, Uganda, Mozambique and Lesotho. Examples from Malawi (Mulkeen, 2006) and Texas (Lowe, 2006) attest to the fact that the presence of houses near schools is strongly linked to the retention of female teachers in remote areas. In some countries, teachers' housing problem is noted as being so extensive that it forces teachers to use abandoned classrooms or live in inferior dilapidated houses including those with 'falling roofs' (ITFEFA, 2010).

The majority of the teachers (141) in the current study identified teachers' housing as a particularly critical source of grave concern and low teacher retention. Findings show that teachers in remote contexts in many cases live in poor, inferior houses, located far from schools. Evidence abound on how housing conditions influence teachers' health, attitudes, motivation, quality of life and work, and commitment (Jinyevu, 2013; Kayuni & Richard, 2007; Mlaki, 2015). In Tanzania, for instance, the housing problem is a significant source of most school heads' 'occupational stress' (Mlaki, 2015). Indeed, poor quality housing conditions demoralises teachers, lowers their self-esteem, compounds their poor performance, and fuels their subsequent turnover (Bennell, 2004; Davidson, 2007). This study strongly emphasises the designing and implementing of deliberate measures to solve the teachers' housing problem to solve the teacher retention problem in remote areas.

Commenting on the issue of *social services* facing remote schools in general, one of the respondents noted:

> …as you might have noticed, travelling from the district municipal council to this school can take you the whole day, though it is only about 85 kilometres away. Roads are quite bad, especially during rainy seasons. In here, there is no bank or its related services… as you can see [there is]no electricity, water is extremely difficult to get….even mobile phone connectivity is very difficult until you are in specific places somewhere around the mountain hills [pointing fingers at a certain mountain hill at distant place from the school]…

> yes, yes,… life is somehow difficult when it comes to coping in remote areas like this…but, we are trying…as you can see (*Kassim, School Head*).

Social services such as clean and safe water, electricity, roads, the Internet and mobile connectivity, health centres, market and shopping areas, and banking services are important for human habitation. Yet, on the ground in the study areas, it was established that most of these services remained so underdeveloped that the situation in remote rural areas remained hostile to the teachers posted there.

The current study findings run parallel to previous studies that concluded that the absence of important social services has a negative impact on employee retention (ITFEFA, 2010; Osaki, Peter, David, & Noah, 2002). It has previously been documented that remote rural areas suffer from an acute lack of services such as clean water, electricity, access to healthcare and telephone coverage (ITFEFA, 2010). More than a decade ago, Osaki *et al*. (2002) observed that the Tanzania government deployed teachers in remote areas without any social services, which adversely affected their motivation and commitment to teaching (Osaki *et al*., 2002). More than a decade later, this study observes an almost non-existing improvement, as the same social services are still perceived as very poor. This means that development in this area has been stagnant and largely unsatisfactory. This sorry situation is likely to continue affecting teachers' retention in remote areas if no tangible remedial actions are taken. Since government efforts are not satisfactory, more research is required to find alternative ways of improving social services in remote areas.

5.2. School level conflicts

Data shows the presence of substantive conflict situations within schools in the remote areas. It is notable that teachers are unequally treated by the school management, especially school heads. Some teachers exemplify how the issue of conflicts in remote schools was connected to unfair treatment by school management, poor communication in schools, and low parents value to education and teachers:

> Major conflicts among teachers and school leadership emerge or are caused by the fact that teachers [classroom teachers in this context] are not valued and respected… the school leadership is the source of groups in schools. There is a saying used by school leadership in grouping teachers…'**These are mine these are not**'.

As a result, if there are opportunities...those few who belong to the school leadership are given and others are not…favouritism brings groups and stratum amongst teachers in schools (Joyce, classroom teacher).

… School heads have been treating teachers not only unfairly but also unequally. For instance, they create groups in school known as '**highly considered or favoured group**' and '**less considered or favoured group**'. The favoured group gets all the opportunities which have economic benefits occurring at the school…it receives all the favours and support from the school head. The less favoured group ends up getting nothing as far as school opportunities are concerned... the less considered group normally '**does everything for free**', no favour or immediate support as compared to the other group. This goes as far as unequal distribution of money for new teachers by the School Administration… I can tell you…this is discouraging and demotivating…because…whatever you say...the management won't listen... (*Muhongo Mchungu, classroom teacher*).

…there is poor information flow or poor communication from the school management, especially from the school head, to the other staff members. Getting feedback on issues raised by classroom teachers to the school management is a big problem. They rarely provide relevant, meaningful and timely feedback. This means lack of **administrative support and poor management**, leading to a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts (*Mussa, classroom teacher*).

…there is poor co-operation between the community and the school or teachers especially on academic matters…there is poor cooperation from parents with children in school especially in monitoring their education development. Teachers and their properties also feel insecure because of villagers' intimidation and theft…. (*Mariam, classroom teacher*).

In our case, parents and the whole community do not treat education as an important thing in their lives. So they do not pay the **agreed contributions**. This causes failure to implement some of the school activities such as remedial classes, weekly/monthly tests, and others which could improve students' learning and performance. This is also escalated by some politicians who tell people not to contribute

> anything because the government is bringing money to the schools. But the reality is different as the government brings such small sums of money that parents ought to top up if other activities are to be run... (*Ijumba, classroom teacher and academic master*).

The majority of the teachers (about 81%) consider conflicts as bad and as an important source of teachers' attrition in remote schools. This seems to align with the classical management theorists' (Fayol, 1949; Taylor, 1911) thoughts that conflict in an organisation ought to be avoided as it could have a negative effect on the functioning of an institution (Saiti, 2015), and that conflict is like a 'disease' with dissociating and dysfunctional consequences (Corwin, 1966). However, the 19 percent who did not see conflicts as a critical source of low teachers' retention in remote school contexts may echo the modern management outlook that conflict is a positive indicator of organisational performance that leads to better decision-making, evolution and effectiveness (Saiti, 2015). Evidence shows that conflicts in schools catalyse the teachers' decision to drop out of their schools (Göksoy & Türkan, 2016). Such departures are appear much higher in remote areas given their poor and difficulty living conditions relative to urban centres.

Findings show that a significant number of conflicts at the school level take place between teachers and their management because of unjust and unsupportive management practices. The findings are consistent with Corwin (1966), who observed that almost half of the conflicts within schools were associated with teachers and members of the authority, and mainly concerned authority problems. On the other hand, the findings partially contrast with previous studies documenting that school principals often spend their valuable time trying to solve problems that arise as a result of a conflict or disagreement among school members (Saiti, 2015; Somech, 2008). School heads have specifically been identified in this study as some of the key sources of conflict in remote schools. They treat teachers unequally and split them up along the lines of favoured and unflavoured groups. Some teachers, who sympathise with the school heads are favoured, receiving all school level benefits and opportunities such as attending regional / national examination marking sessions, which lead to financial gains, whereas others are left out altogether.

Moreover, the current study found conflicts to be associated with poor communication within the school. Classroom teachers pointed out that the poor information flow from the school management to other staff members

delayed the reception of meaningful and timely feedback on a number of issues as required. School principals serve as main agents of the school culture and dynamics and, thus, ought to adopt a balanced role in achieving a positive system of communication (Saiti, 2015). Equally, group unity and mutual approach to problem-solving is vital in attaining conflict resolution (Somech, 2008). However, in contexts where school heads are sources of school level conflicts, their 'leadership and management capabilities' become questionable. The question then becomes: To what extent are school heads capable of managing and leading remote secondary schools, let alone school level conflicts and teacher turnover in remote Tanzanian schools? Research evidence identifies 'incapable school leadership' as the most common cause of conflict (Saiti, 2015).

Furthermore, schools in remote areas find themselves in tension with communities around them. Some parents are not co-operative in terms of fulfilling their obligations as agreed over time. In remote areas, many parents are poor, less educated and attach low value to education. They do not care or have time to oversee what their academically lowly motivated children are doing in schools. Paradoxically despite the valuable contribution to the society, teachers are not valued, respected, and treated with dignity. They are seen as strangers who there to destroy their cultural and moral conduct and are suspected of teaching their children bad practices. In such situations, teachers and their properties become insecure because of intimidation, theft and other bad practices in local areas such as witchcraft.

5.3. Teaching and learning conditions

In connection to this issue, teachers strongly noted thusly:

> …many teachers allocated to remote schools do not report. Few who report stay only for few weeks and leave…school and the living environment in remote areas is not promising…most schools have few teachers…and they have to carry out the entire teaching load… Indeed, they stretch themselves hard, becoming extremely tired at the end of the day *(Babu, school head*).

> … This school has both ordinary and advanced levels. Those are six classes, and a class has about sixty students on average. I teach both Physics and Chemistry from Ordinary to Advanced level. I can tell you it is a disaster and, indeed, torturous. But I have no alternative because I am the only Science teacher in the school (*Magessa, classroom teacher).*

> …we have a big problem here…discipline and truancy. Many of the students do not come to school and enter the classroom. Even right now, if I take you down hills and in forests surrounding the school [pointing at nearby school hills and forests], you will find many students there. We punish them, but the society, especially their parents are not co-operative with us. Teachers are discouraged to work in these schools because of the massive failure of students …teachers are accused of failing to teach [their children] well…most teachers are migrating from remote rural schools to urban areas where performance is relatively good...(*Kishimba, school head*).
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> Most parents are illiterate and poor. I think this is a challenge among most students' families. I have also noted the presence of low motivation for students to learn even when being supported. I think students and parents alike are unaware of the importance of education…students are performing poorly, and we become highly discouraged as teachers (*Paul, classroom teacher*).

This study echoes previous findings (Bennell & Akyempong, 2007; Kadzamira, 2006; Lumandi, 2008; Moleni & Ndalama, 2004) that established that teaching and learning conditions in remote rural areas in developing countries have adverse impact on the teachers' retention and on the quality of education provided. This sorry state of affairs is related to the question: 'How can teachers do their jobs without appropriate infrastructure and materials?' The findings are in line with Mulkeen *et al.*'s (2007) observations that trying to perform a job without appropriate infrastructure and materials is so frustrating that it could force people in such situations to consider quickly leaving and looking for another job. There is no shortage of examples that teaching and learning situations, especially in remote areas, have deteriorated drastically in many African countries such as Tanzania, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali, They generally have to contend with an insufficient supply of student textbooks and teaching materials, inadequate equipment, poor teaching conditions, large and overcrowded classrooms, high workloads and unconducive school environments (Bennell & Akyempong, 2007; Mulkeen *et al*., 2007). Similarly, Bennell and Akyempong (2007) in a study of twelve low income countries found that rural schools mostly experienced high staff turnover, and the highest vacancy rates. Drawing on examples from South Africa on poor school infrastructure, Lumandi (2008) documented some schools that had classrooms with broken windows, cracked walls and without doors for a long period; some

buildings were almost collapsing, and others were available but incomplete, for example, without roofs, which entailed that classes tended to be cancelled during rainy weather. As Mulkeen *et al.* (2007) observed, improving conditions of service for teachers is a promising way boosting the teachers' morale, improving the quality of teaching and learning, making the profession more attractive, and enhancing the retention of teachers.

5.4. Teachers' involvement in decision-making

The respondents also clarified that the issue of involving them in decision-making was crucial to them; however, they were rarely granted that opportunity. In this regard, one of the teachers claimed:

> School heads in many cases do not involve classroom teachers in decision-making, even for things which affect teachers directly... you know when a teacher is involved in decision-making at the school, he/she feels a sense of recognition and part of changes at the school (*Jenifer, a classroom teacher).*

Another teacher noted:

> This is my second year in this school, but I have attended not more than three meetings…There is a tendency of holding meetings to discuss key school issues when most of the teachers are not around. I am not sure, but I think the head of this school is weak in management…It is like he cannot handle teachers' critical questions (*Mtaita, classroom teacher*).

The limited teacher participation in decision-making may be related to 'poor school heads' support and exchanges practices'. One reason for that could be lack of knowledge among school heads on how to support effectively teachers' participation. In line with Grissom's (2012) assertion, there is a need to invest more in developing relevant competencies that would enable school managements to improve their capacities enhancing teachers' participation in the decision-making processes. Such participation is essential because teachers' involvement and participation foster their sense of empowerment (having a voice), reducing their stress, role ambiguity and conflicts and, consequently, enhance their retention (Conley, 1991; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997; Wright & Kim, 2004). As noted in Table 1, this source of poor retention of teachers was noted as being more critical by 103 respondents as opposed to only 50 who said it was less critical.

Moreover, the findings echo those of other studies on teachers' empowerment and involvement in decision-making and retention (Laschinger, Michael, Arla, & Debra, 2009; Shen, 1997) indicating that teachers who feel to have some influence over school and teaching policies are more likely to stay. Workplace empowerment has also been shown to be an important precursor of employees' positive relationship with their work, an important factor in burnout and subsequent turnover intentions (Laschinger *et al*., 2009; Nedd, 2006). Within the Organisational theory and practice, the purpose of empowerment is to boost employees' control over their work, thereby improving their job satisfaction and enhancing organisational commitment (Laschinger *et al*., 2009). Kanter (1979) describes four organisational empowerment structures: Access to information, access to support, access to resources needed to do the job, and opportunities to learn and grow.

5.5. Lack of alternative economic activities

On this issue, classroom teachers had strong observations. One of them commented:

> …one among the major problems facing teachers and the teaching profession is low and unsatisfactory salaries. Many teachers face a crisis in terms of maintaining their families as their incomes are not enough. Contrary to urban areas, in remote rural areas it is difficult to get activities which could supplement your income. Well, some teachers are trying to engage in agricultural activities and some in petty businesses, but it is not paying. Sometimes, the weather is not good and crops do get dry, and most of the people in villages are poor, so even business is difficult to do…I think that students' teachers need to be given entrepreneurship education in their colleges and universities… (*Mathew, classroom teacher*).

The other teacher observed:

> …some schools are really built in an extremely challenging environment… some schools, especially the ward-based ones, are built in degraded lands, poor soils, gullied and bare lands which cannot support any economic activity…even small scale agriculture (vegetable gardens)…getting food is sometimes difficult (*Malima, classroom teacher*).

Teachers, like many other employees, have always participated in extracurricular activities to raise their incomes, as salaries in most cases are too inadequate for them to make ends meet. However, the critical issue does concern the different contextual

conditions between urban and rural areas. It is more difficult to have something to offer to generate extra earnings in rural areas than it is in urban centres, a reality that compounds life difficulties, escalating teachers' dissatisfaction within the remote contexts. The important question, which remains unanswered, is on how to support teachers' possibilities of generating extra incomes in remote contexts. An answer to this question is crucial because teachers' retention is sometimes affected by economic factors, as teachers make rational economic decisions pertaining to their careers and seek better paid work when possible to do so (Mulkeen *et al*., 2007). Some teachers leave remote schools because they are attracted to alternative employments in other areas (ITFEFA, 2010).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has generally discussed the school level aspects that teachers in remote school perceive as sources of low retention. Moreover, it has offered insights into how to deal with issues raised. Such insights have not hitherto been well-documented in the existing literature, particularly in the Tanzanian context.

The findings reveals four sources of low retention: *School level conflicts* (especially improving justice practices by school heads with their teachers, improving communication within schools, and improving relationship between schools and their immediately surrounding communities); *the teaching and learning situation* (improving teaching and learning infrastructures and architectures); *teachers' involvement in decision-making and opportunities for extra earnings* can be meaningfully addressed with recourse to school resources. *Accommodation and social services* (particularly teachers' decent housing and other social services such as clean and safe water, electricity, roads, the Internet and mobile connectivity, health centres, market and shopping areas, banking services), on the other hand may require government interventions.

Though the Tanzania government's ongoing efforts to address these sources are commendable, the need to explore even more practical interventions cannot be underestimated. Within that context, the current study advances a number of strategies that could be plausibly considered as alternative plans towards addressing teachers' housing dilemma in remote areas:

1) Looking for companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or community groups that could build low-cost houses for teachers. The local or central government could make acceptable arrangements to provide

land where such houses could be built near schools. This land could be used under acceptable terms as collateral for securing loans from banks to build those houses. In return, these houses could be rented to teachers at a reduced rates, and schools could assist, for instance, by subsidising the house rent (depending on the financial situation of a given school).

2) Locally able-people could be urged to provide short-term accommodation for teachers with pressing needs such as new non-native teachers, while looking for a permanent housing solution. The above two practices (1 & 2) have been tried elsewhere (e.g., in Texas, Mozambique and Lesotho). In Mozambique and Lesotho, for instance, NGOs and local communities or community groups have constructed/provided teacher housing in an attempt to make rural locations more attractive (Mulkeen, 2006). Moreover, female teachers' accommodation must be prioritised.

3) There is also a need to consider how teachers could be encouraged to 'invest' in their posted remote schools through, for instance, building houses and letting them out to their colleagues at reasonable terms. This could help to minimise the teachers' housing problems and trigger retention for both the teachers who own the houses and for those accommodated there.

4) At the policy level, it is important—since the government requires that the community should participate in building teachers' houses—for the government to define clearly the community in question and how it should participate. At the moment, it is hard to understand what the community comprises. Does the community mean parents with children in a particular school? Or does it mean all of the society within which the school is situated/built? Does it include people who visit the area for a short while such as business people or tourists or just indigenous people with permanent settlements in those areas? The answers to such questions need to be clearly spelled in remote teachers' accommodation policies. *This implies the need for a retention policy for remote teachers*.

Apart from these suggestions, there are a number of areas for inquiry which can meaningfully inform 'implementable' teachers' retention policies for remote areas in the Tanzanian context. Arguably, findings from these inquiries could be useful in formulating and testing implementable alternative solutions for retaining teachers in remote schools. These areas of inquiry advanced include:

First, a countrywide study is necessary to establish how the question of decent teachers' housing, social services, poor teaching and learning situations could be visibly addressed with less dependency on the central government,

Second, a study could be carried out to explore how teachers' salaries can be improved within remote areas, for example, by finding out possible investment opportunities and how they could be successfully supported, particularly at the school level and in broad perspectives,

Third, a study could be conducted to explore how to possibly and effectively decentralise power and authority at school level in remote schools to enhance teachers' empowerment, involvement and participation in decision-making as well as,

Fourth, a study can investigate the extent to which school heads in remote schools have the listening skills capable of empowering teachers and enhancing collegiality,

Fifth, a study is essential in exploring the extent to which school heads are capable of managing and leading remote secondary schools and their logical association with school level conflicts and teachers' turnover in those areas in Tanzania, and,

Sixth, a study could be carried out to establish the 'genesis of school heads' unfair practices' in Tanzania's remote schools. Parallel to Grissom's (2012) assertion, such knowledge is important in further establishing evidence on the need to invest more in school management to develop relevant competencies that could help improve its capacities to solve successfully school-level conflicts, and hence reinforcing retention.

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