

Teacher Transfers from Primary Schools in Chama District of Zambia: Causes of the Massive Teacher Exodus and its Effects on Learner's Academic Performance

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Abstract

Scholarly research has shown that the availability of enough qualified teachers in schools is key to effective curriculum implementation. In Zambia however, rural schools experience more teacher transfers to urban schools. The purpose of this study was to find out the main causes of teacher transfers from Chama district of Muchinga province. Researchers in this study also sort to analyze the effects that teacher transfers had on the learning process. A descriptive research design was used to explore this phenomenon. 150 teachers were sampled from 25 rural schools and each of these school's head teachers were also part of the sampled participants. Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted to collect data from teachers and head teachers. Human resource documents and examination performance records from the district education office in Chama were also analyzed. The findings of the study showed that teachers requested for transfers due to a number of factors such as separation from their spouses, conflict with school administrators, poor deployment procedures and social amenities, remoteness of the schools, fear of witchcraft and qualification upgrading. It was further noted that all these factors negatively affected learners' performance since schools were understaffed, and teachers demotivated and at times left schools for a number of days so as to access social services in town at the expense of teaching and learning. While each of these causes needed immediate attention it was however concluded

that the problem of understaffing in schools in rural Chama due to transfers is a big one which required national policy makers to invest in improving the living conditions of teachers in rural schools by providing social services such as hospitals, roads, banks, electricity and modern school structures and staffhouses. It was envisaged that if this is done at a national level most of the causes of teachers leaving rural schools would be gradually reduced.

Key Words: teacher transfer, learner performance, rural schools, academic performance, causes.

1. Introduction

A teacher is one of the indispensable elements of any education system. Realizing how important teachers are in the process of curriculum implementation, Moobola and Mulenga (2020:17) emphatically stated that ‘the teacher is one of the most important resource in the implementation of the curriculum at every level of the education system. He/she is responsible for ensuring that curriculum objectives are achieved’. Despite the teacher being so important as far as curriculum implementation is concerned, Mulkeen (2010) observed that inadequate supply of teachers has been a problem in some education systems in sub Saharan Africa. It is significant to however note that teacher shortage has serious consequences and a lack of sufficient, qualified teachers threatens learners’ ability to learn as Darling-Hammond (1999) and; Ladd and Sorensen (2016) have put it. Instability in a school’s teacher workforce which can be as a result of high turnover and/or high attrition, negatively affects learner achievement and diminishes teacher effectiveness and quality (Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff 2013; Kraft and Papay 2014; Ladd and Sorensen 2016).

Moreover, high teacher turnover consumes economic resources through costs of replacing, recruiting and training new ones that could be better deployed elsewhere. In recent years, education researchers and scholars have called attention to the growing teacher shortage across the globe and in Africa. They cite a variety of indicators of

the shortage which are critical signals to the provision of quality education (UNESCO 2015, Mulkeen, 2010). It is for this reason that Mulenga and Lubasi (2019:64) actually acknowledged that ‘there are equally other factors that support successful curriculum implementation in the school. In view of this, effective curriculum implementation is the one that reflects what the learner eventually takes away from an educational experience’. Among these many factors however, effective curriculum implementation is difficult to achieve without a sufficient number of qualified and dedicated teachers in a school (Mkandawire, 2010).

In Zambia teacher transfer is one among the many factors that contribute to teacher shortage in most rural schools of the country and also seem to contribute to poor performance of learners in some schools. In fact, the Ministry of General Education (2008:79) clearly explained that ‘teacher stability in a school is one of the factors that have a direct bearing on learning achievement’. In a survey which was done by the Ministry of General Education (2016) it was revealed that 45.2% of schools in Zambia had no teachers who had stayed continuously for more than five years. The study also revealed that in urban areas teachers stayed longer in one school than in rural schools. In some parts of the world, teacher transfers and frequent changing of teachers particularly in the course of the term has been noticed to impact negatively on learner academic performance (IOB, 2008). The duration that teachers serve at a particular school affects the performance of learners (Keigher, 2010). Currently, the Ministry of General Education in Zambia is grappling with the mismatch of teacher pay points as a number of them are serving in schools different from their actual pay points due to massive and uncoordinated transfers (Ministry of General Education, 2016). This negatively impacts teacher deployment as teachers are posted to schools that are already well staffed thus perpetuating unequal teacher distribution. According to the 2016 Educational Statistical Bulletin trends over a period of six years indicated that female teachers were transferred more often than male teachers leaving rural districts and schools in preference for urban schools with

reasons that such teachers either followed their spouses or moved on medical grounds (MoGE, 2016). In Chama district, the scenario has continued to worsen because even their male counterparts do not serve many years at a particular school (DEBS office, 2019). Despite some efforts by government such as the provision of rural-remote hardship allowance, timely confirmation and upgrading of some primary schools, rural districts have continued to experience massive exodus of teachers to urban districts (The Auditor General, 2016). Much as teachers are perceived to be very essential in the provision of formal education as evidenced by various literature, to the best knowledge of the researchers, very little or no specific studies have seriously been undertaken in most rural schools in Zambia particularly in Chama district to establish the actual causes of massive transfers and the effects this may have on learner academic performance. It is from this background that this study was aimed at establishing the actual causes of teacher transfers and its effects on learner academic performance in selected primary schools in Chama district of Muchinga province in Zambia. Thus the objectives that guided this study were to;

- i. establish the main causes of teacher transfers from Chama district?
- ii. analyse how learner academic performance get affected by teacher transfer in Chama district?
- iii. suggest measures that can be put in place to minimize and regulate teacher transfers in Chama district?

This study is likely to be significant to the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) in Chama district and to MoGE provincial office of Muchinga province because it provides primary data on the causes of massive teacher transfers. The understanding of such causes may help the Ministry of General Education to find ways of easing some of the challenges rural teachers face and most likely reduce the transfers. Although different studies, and general surveys have been done in other parts of the country, this study is likely to be significant in many ways. Firstly, it is assumed that the findings of

this study may inform stakeholders such as the directorate of Human Resource in the Ministry of General Education, District Education officers and Head teachers to employ strategies and deliberate policies in the education sector that may help improve teacher stability and retention in schools in an effort to improve academic performance. The research may also help MoGE to review teacher deployment procedures in an attempt to ensuring that all schools are well staffed in order to improve academic performance for learners. Furthermore, it may assist in strengthening adherence to transfer guidelines by all concerned stakeholders. Additionally, the findings of this study may also add to the body of existing knowledge and literature on teacher transfers in relation to rural schools. This study may further strengthen debate among researchers, scholars and education practitioners in the area of teacher transfers in relation to academic performance of learners.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the systems theory also referred to as the Input-Process-Output theory that was developed by Bertalanffy in the 1940s. According to Luhmann (1995), a school is a social system in which people, the environment, formal arrangements and the technical systems are constantly interacting. He posited that without inputs which include learners, teachers, teaching and learning resources and administrators, processes such as teaching and learning, and continuous professional development may not lead to expected outputs which include educated school leavers with desirable knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which are key to the development of their societies. Consistent adherence to the established system by stakeholders lead to desirable results (Nkhata et al, 2019). Systems and subsystems are interrelated via the input and output of resources which are either the result or the precondition of ongoing system processes (Miller & Page, 2007). The school system though a complete system on its own, is a subsystem of the nation's educational system. As earlier mentioned in this whole process the teacher is key to the effective functioning of

the system. Thus, in this study researchers were of the view that if teachers are not in good supply then the education system is likely to fail in achieving its educational goals. It is for this very reason that teachers' leaving rural districts such as Chama district in large numbers raised a concern given that rural schools in Zambia already have many other social and economic challenges than urban schools.

3. Brief Review of Related Literature

3.1. Teacher Transfer Perception in Zambia

Teacher transfer and attrition in Zambia is a major concern of the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) including other stakeholders. According to MoGE (2016), the number of teachers transferred from one school to the other is quite high. Teacher transfers especially from rural areas to urban schools have attracted the Ministry of General Education and government's attention despite having some guidelines in place. This was also observed by IOB (2008) who stated that the availability of appropriately qualified teachers has an effect on performance of learners and ultimately the education system as a whole. From 2010 onwards all the statistics about numbers of teachers in basic schools continue to show that the majority were based in urbanized areas. Teacher shortages in rural schools throughout the country continued to be a challenge (Report of the Auditor General (2016: 8). In the 2016 Auditor General's report, it was also mentioned that the presence of untrained teachers still exists in rural parts of Zambia as a result of staff shortage emanating from teacher transfers. However, the report did not go further to reveal the causes and their effects on learner performance.

Some surveys have tried to give a general picture as to which factors may push teachers to change work places in Zambia, these include: location of schools, deployment procedures, poor transport and communication, lack of decent housing, marital status, medical grounds, lack of motivation and promotion among other factors (IOB, 2008). Most schools especially those in rural/remote catchment are hit with shortage of teachers (MoGE, 2016). According to MESVTEE (2013: 85) the survey pointed out that out of the sampled

230 schools 56.5% teacher transfers were in rural areas while 43.5% were related to urban areas. The implication here is that the majority of schools with shortage of teachers arising from transfers are in rural areas. Provinces with rural districts such as Muchinga, Eastern, Northern and Luapula had high pupil-teacher ratio at grade one to seven (1-7) levels while Lusaka, Central and Copperbelt provinces had low pupil-teacher ratio. For the sake of this research Muchinga province is cited as an example. The high pupil-teacher ratio was attributed to the high level of teacher transfers in the primary sector (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Additionally, in a survey that was conducted by the Auditor General' Office (2016) pointed out the following deficiencies in teacher deployment:

- a. Distorted and unreliable vacancy data
- b. Establishments that were not consistent with the demands of schools
- c. Mismatch in pay points
- d. Noncompliance to teacher transfer procedures

These and other aspects of teacher deployment were cited to have negatively contributed to massive teacher transfers. Although some of these aspects are known from a general perspective, no studies seem to have been done to link them to learner performance. However, scholars, researchers and education practitioners have had insights on this matter.

3.2. Effects of Teacher Transfers on Learner Academic Performance

Good academic performance is one of the salient goals for any education system. According to Ingersoll (2001), a teacher is one of the most important inputs into the teaching and learning process. Thus poorly planned and uncoordinated teacher transfers are likely to affect learner performance in many ways including: increased workload, high teacher-pupil ratio and low contact time (Onsomu, 2014). These and other factors may result in poor academic performance of learners when a teacher is transferred from a school

to another school or district or even province while no replacement is done thereby reducing the teaching force. Keigher (2010) opined that schools that are understaffed resort to multi-grade system of teaching leading to reduced teaching and learning sessions, hence high teacher-pupil ratio, low contact time for learning and increased teacher workload. The impact of class size on cognitive achievement has been researched and debated for many years but has been inconclusive. UNESCO (2015) stated that lower teacher-pupil ratio allows for more effective communication between the teacher and the learner. Brown et al (2015) also opined that even with modern methodologies, studies have generally demonstrated a significant correlation between the influence of teacher-pupil ratio and class size on learner performance in an array of educational settings. In the view of this fact, it could be said that teacher-pupil ratio is one of the important factors determining good academic performance of learners (Onsomu, 2014). Poor and insufficient syllabus coverage is another aspect that is affected by teacher transfers. According to Keigher (2010) frequent changing of teachers impacts negatively on syllabus completion. The situation is exacerbated when the transfers are instituted during the term and no immediate and appropriate replacement is done. But has there been any attempts made to correct this situation, especially in Zambia?

3.3. Measures Aimed at Regulating and Reducing Teacher Transfers

The problem of frequent teacher transfers has significantly contributed to the dwindling of education standards in rural schools (IOB, 2008). This is impacting negatively on the achievement of the Seventh National Development Plan goals and vision 2030. UNESCO (2015) posited that low literacy levels in rural areas are as a result of poor staffing levels emanating from transfers. The Ministry of General Education in Zambia has attempted to devise some measures aimed at regulating and minimizing teacher transfers from rural schools. These include; payment of hardship allowance, fast track promotion, bonding policy, fast track upgrading, and provision of housing and upgrading of primary schools into secondary schools among other interventions (The Auditor General's Report, 2016).

For instance, payment of hardship allowance takes cognizance of the distance from the nearest district center to where the school is. The implication here is that those serving in rural parts of the country are paid more by 20% of their monthly basic salary. These are schools in the radius of 0 to 20 kilometers. Those serving in schools located 50 kilometers and more are paid remote allowance which is at 25% of their basic salary. Fast track promotion also aimed at attracting more teachers to work in rural parts of the country (Report of the Auditor General, 2016). But have all these interventions helped the situation? This study was envisaged to find out the causes of the massive exodus of teachers from rural schools of Chama district despite all these interventions that the Ministry of General Education has put in place so as to attract teachers remain in such schools.

4. Methodology

In order to paint a clear picture of the issues surrounding teacher massive transfers in Chama district, researchers of this study sort to give a detailed description of this phenomenon. Thus, a descriptive research design was employed as a method of understanding the problem in which researchers needed to unravel participants' views, opinions, attitudes and experiences. A descriptive research designs are useful as confirmed by Mwimba and Mulenga (2019) in the collection of data about people's attitudes, opinions and views. 25 schools were sampled from the district with the help of records from the district education offices. Using purposive sampling 6 teachers who had taught longer in each school were sampled giving the study 150 teachers. Each of the head teachers from the 25 schools were also part of the sampled participants.

Each of the teachers and head teachers were interviewed using a structured interview guide. With participants' permission, all interviews were recorded and notes taken at the same time. Teachers in each of the schools also took part in a focus group discussion. In this way, data collection was triangulated. For both head teachers and teachers, analyzed data was later checked by participants.

Triangulation, recording of interviews and member checking of analyzed data was done so as to increase the trustworthiness of the research findings. Data analysis began on the first day that data collection commenced and continued thereafter. Since most of the data that was collected provided a description of the state of affairs about the causes of teacher transfers and their effects on learning thematic analysis was employed while descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were used to mostly analyzed data from documents, on causes of transfers, numbers of teachers who were transferred and those who were received in the district and on the districts’ pass percentage averages.

5. Findings and Discussion

One of the objectives of this study was to establish the main causes of teacher transfers from Chama district rural schools to urban schools. Researchers asked head teachers and teachers to indicate some of the reasons why most teachers opted to leave rural schools in Chama district. Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution of the two groups of participants’ responses.

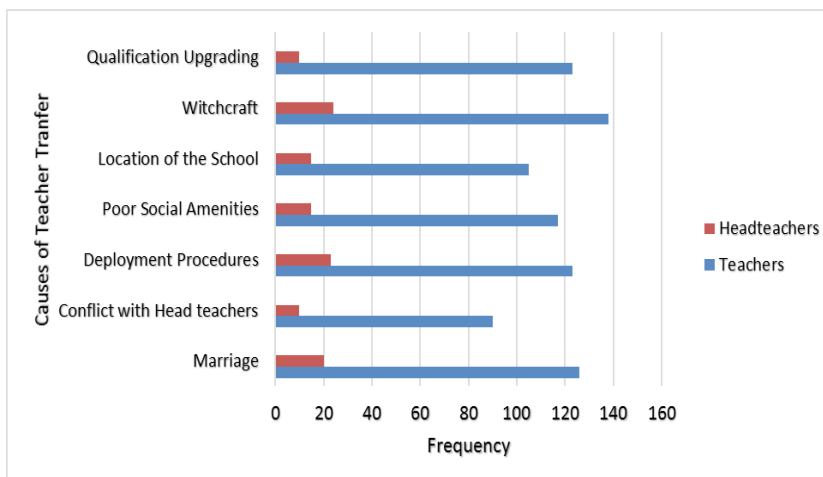


Figure 1: Frequency distribution of head teachers and teachers’ responses on the causes of teacher’s massive transfers.

From figure 1 it is clear that both head teachers and teachers highlighted seven main causes with witchcraft having the highest frequency, followed by marriage. According to teachers the least is conflict with head teachers while head teachers claim that the least was qualification upgrading and conflict with head teachers. It is interesting to note that both head teachers and teachers ranked conflict with head teachers as the least. This is a sign that this challenge can easily be revolved since it is not so prevalent. Most people in African countries, Zambia included reside in rural areas and thus the causes that this study has brought out is also a reflection of the quality of life in these places. Segun, and Olanrewaju, (2011:6) observed that;

Most Africans live in the rural areas; hence, achieving the internationally accepted goals of EFA and providing qualitative education to children who live in rural areas, must be paramount in the policy agenda of African governments. Looking closely on the condition of teachers and teaching in African countries, it is apparent that teachers' fundamental role is not always valued or prized. The worth of teachers is very low, due to poor recognition given to the teaching profession as explained by various demotivating factors. Teachers in many African countries are working in challenging conditions that are aggravated by poor remuneration; delay in payment of salaries, allowances and promotions; scarce teaching and learning resources; and disrespect from government, parents and the community at large.

As we mentioned in the introduction of this paper teachers are key to the effective implementation of a curriculum but if teachers will have to run away from rural schools due to the factors that this study has revealed then providing quality education to learners in these areas where most people actually live will be difficult. Moreover, as Segun and Olanrewaju (2011) have put it such conditions as the ones this study revealed actually demotivate teachers even if they opt to remain in rural areas and this is likely to negatively affect their teaching. Governments need to prioritize working conditions of teachers in rural areas if quality and equitable education is to be achieved. Let us now turn to each one of these causes and analyze

the participants' views and experiences about them.

Marriage

As indicated in figure 1, 20 out of 25 head teachers and 126 (84%) teachers cited marriage as one of the causes of teacher transfers since a teacher who has been separated from a spouse would seek for a transfer so as to join the partner. One head teacher actually observed that:

Soon after getting deployed most teachers, especially female teachers sent to schools far from the main district start to claim they are married to a Mr. X who works on the Copperbelt or Lusaka and that they would wish to join their spouse for fear of losing their marriage.

Similar views were raised by most head teachers who participated in the study. A female teacher at one school had a similar view regarding the same although she brought in another dimension to marriage and this time it was not about a teacher who is already married but about those who are young and single. She explained that;

Unmarried female teachers serve a short period in rural schools for fear of getting married to local men in villages who are most likely to be of low social-economic status than theirs.

Actually this view was supported by five other teachers from different schools. At one of the sampled schools, it was noted that from the time the school was established in 2001, only one female teacher had served at that particular school, for only one term. Additionally, a parent at one school stated that;

A teacher whose spouse is far from their duty station is likely to get a transfer to join the family within the shortest possible time and is prepared to use whatever means in an effort to move and stay with the family.

Despite the researchers mentioning to participants during a focus group discussion that there were a number of female teachers in the district whose husbands were working outside the district, most participants insisted that there were few married female teachers who had accepted to work far from their spouses. The challenge of marriage as a cause for teachers, especially the female ones, leaving rural schools seems to be a very huge one for any administrator in the district to have a concrete solution to it. As researchers we say so because this issue is linked to the level of development in terms of social services that exist in most rural parts of Zambia. Like in most African counties rural areas in Africa lack basic services such as banks, good hospitals, good road network, recreation services, etc and thus most people tend to find good jobs in urban areas and this contributes to the separation of families (Segun & Olanrewaju, 2011). This is not an issue that can be solved by the education district office and not even the provincial offices since it is an enormous national developmental challenge.

Conflict with Administrators

Conflict among teachers, between teachers and administrators and indeed between teachers and the community was cited to be one of the causes of teacher transfers. 60% of the teachers and 10 of the head teachers cited conflict as one of the causes of teacher transfer from Chama district. During a focus group discussion, one teacher noted that;

Some head teachers have no time to listen to concerns and problems of their members of staff all they are interested in is seeing teachers work even when they have serious issues to sort out at home.

Another teacher mentioned that;

Some head teachers have very old and out dated leadership styles. They would want to use intimidation, divide and rule to run the school. But today we talk

of collaborative and participatory leadership and management which involves taking every member of staff alone as one leads the others. I do not mean that head teachers should not take decisions but he or she should listen and consider the views of every teacher in the school before decisions which affect everyone are taken. We have dictators for head teachers in these schools. Mutual respect is very important in every work environment. I find that missing in most of our schools.

The issue of poor leadership style was also cited in three teacher's focus group discussions. A head teacher at one school also mentioned that;

Our teachers work in very difficult and harsh conditions in these schools, thus as a head teacher needs a lot of empath, understanding and consideration when dealing with teacher challenges. But some of the head teachers would want to implement policy as if they are in town where we have all the facilities. Most teachers here are frustrated and are on the edge. These are some of the sources of conflicts which send away teachers from rural schools.

This view was shared by four other head teachers who cited teachers lack of motivation as the source of conflict when dealing with their supervisors. The issue of conflict was also closely linked to systems failures and administrative bottlenecks which in this study we refer to as deployment procedures.

Deployment Procedures

Procedures during deployment were considered to necessitate teacher transfers. Figure 1 shows that 82% of teachers and 23 of out 25 of the head teachers attributed teacher transfers to deployment procedures. They mentioned that schools that are already well staffed receive a fair number of new teachers during every deployment.

One teacher observed that;

Schools in township though experience frequent teacher transfers, are at least well-staffed. This is because during every deployment, teachers are sent to these schools in the name of medical attention, being married to some staff in other government departments within township and of course directives from higher authorities influence that. While us here remain teaching large classes as if the country does not have other teachers. This discourages us a lot.

In another separate focus group discussion, teachers explained that the majority of female teachers were in township schools thereby depriving rural schools of teaching staff. This was also supported by head teachers. In an interview with one head teacher when the same question was asked he explained that;

Although schools where staff vacancies exist are identified before recruitment, during deployment however more than 50% of the teachers deployed are not sent to their actual duty stations. Instead, they are redirected to other schools especially those near towns. The payroll system is distorted as data regarding vacancies in schools is unreliable.

Additionally, a parent at one school in a focus group discussion presented similar views as she noted that;

Most teachers who come from other districts and provinces on first appointments just come to get employed. As soon as they start getting paid, such teachers process their transfers so that they get back to join their families and relatives in other districts and provinces. Just in grade two, my daughter has been handled by more than five different teachers and yet the school has not affected the aspect of teacher subject

specialization.

Aspects of frequent changing of teachers came out strongly during interviews with most school head teachers as well. As much as changing of teachers who are not teaching well may have a positive effect on learner academic performance, it also impacts negatively on learner achievement if it is not done with caution. A situation where learners in one grade are actually taught by more than three teachers before the end of an academic year is very worrying especially for primary school learners.

Poor Social Amenities and Location of the School

As we have earlier mentioned, most rural schools in Zambia especially those in Chama districts are located in places where there are no social amenities such as banks, shopping centers, hospitals, recreation facilities and others. More than 68% of teachers as indicated in figure 1 attributed teacher transfers to lack of social amenities and remote location of the school. Most of the teachers especially those employed by the Ministry of General Education are quite young and starting work comes with a lot of future plans and aspirations. Thus most of them shun rural schools and actually leave in very short periods from the time of deployments. One head teacher actually mentioned that:

A number of my teachers especially those who are young leave the school the same day we close to go to town and only appear back on the day of opening. Within a short time, you find that they have organized a transfer to an urban school. They flock to town schools because they cannot live in places such as these ones where they are no social facilities.

This view was also mentioned by a number of parents who thought that the remoteness and lack of facilities in their schools disadvantage them and their children from retaining teachers. One teacher also mentioned that:

I know of a lot of teachers who have opted to leave schools in this area on medical grounds so that they

go to places where there are good medical facilities. In this area we only have a clinic with a nurse which is 20 kilometers away. Moreover, those of us who have remained here is because we are involved in a number of money making activities such as farming and running of small shops. Thus we spend some of the teaching time going to town and buy our stocks.

Other teacher who was actually support by others in a focus group discussion mentioned that:

Because of the remoteness of our school, education authorities such as Education Standards Officers, the District Education Board Secretary and those from the province offices rarely visit our schools. We know about changes in the education system many months after everyone else is already implementing such changes. We feel neglected and abandoned. We occasionally attend workshops and colleagues from town schools seem more informed than us.

Unresolved conflicts in schools, poor deployment procedures, poor social amenities and location of schools seem be pointing to one thing about teachers' state in rural areas in Chama district. Researchers in this study came to a conclusion that this should have affected the morale, passion and zeal of teachers to dedicate their competencies to their profession. This situation resonated with what Segun and Olanrewaju (2011:70) observed that:

System failures also undermine teachers' morale and damage the teaching and learning process. Teachers in rural schools often feel neglected by the authorities and perceive that they are treated unfairly regarding access to promotion, transfers and other benefits.

Other scholars have actually cited unfavorable working and living conditions in rural schools in Africa as real challenges. For instance,

Chakanika, Sichula, Sumbwa and Nduna (2012:11) clearly stated that:

Most of these teachers feel isolated and lonely. For instance, they are rarely visited by their supervisors from the education district and provincial offices. These teachers are made to think that their superiors have little concern for their welfare or the state of education in such locations and places.

Although some of these studies were done as far back as 2012 as is the case of Chakanika et al. (2012), the situation has not changed any bit as our study findings are revealing. Such continued situations in Chama have been pushing teachers to think of leaving their schools for urban ones.

Witchcraft

Interestingly, fear of witchcraft had the highest percentage as a cause for teachers leaving rural schools of Chama district. 138 which is 92% of teachers and 24 out of 25 head teachers cited witchcraft and superstition as one of the causes of teacher transfers from rural schools in Chama district. Scholars such as Chakanika *et al.* (2012), have cited it as one of the challenges facing teachers in rural schools. A teacher observed that;

There is massive witchcraft practicing in villages and teachers are victims. For example, when you discipline a child in school in form of punishment, be prepared to spend a sleepless night. Sometimes we are even warned verbally by parents that we should not make life difficult for their children or else they will visit us.

Another teacher complained that;

Some witches and wizards use magic to make love with female teachers at night. As for male teachers, they are made to work in the field in the night and consequently feel tired to teach the following day. Single male teachers are invited to marry local girls and if they

refuse that will be the beginning of trouble with the villagers. It is scarily in these rural schools.

A head teacher also mentioned that;

Black magic is real in these villages where schools are located and to some extent even among teachers. At my school a number of teachers have been transferred because of being terrorized at night. I know about quiet a good number of teachers that have shifted their families to the central district just to safeguard them from being tormented by evil powers. The teacher will remain in school and the family is at the boma.

In an interview with parents almost all of them made similar remarks about how teachers leave their schools due to witchcraft. One parent explained that;

In the school where my children go we lose teachers almost every other year because they complain that they are troubled by witches and wizards at night. They also mention that people in the village do not understand that as teachers we come here for work, to teach their children and not to compete with them in their way of life.

This situation is very unfortunate because not even the education administrators at district or provincial level have a solution to it.

Qualification Upgrading

Most of the teachers in schools who have been having certificates and diplomas have been upgrading their qualifications mostly through distance education. Although the quality of the education that they get is something that needs investigation 82% of the teachers cited it as one of the causes of teacher transfer after one attains a higher qualification. One teacher explained that;

Most of our colleagues have moved to the secondary sector after graduating. There is too much work in

primary sector and yet conditions are not attractive; accommodation is poor; most classrooms are dilapidated, schools are in typical rural and remote areas, among other disadvantages. As soon as I complete my degree programme I shall not hesitate to push for a transfer to the secondary sector as well.

Other teachers also pointed to the fact that upgrading one's qualification does not always grantee them a transfer so they explore other options. For instance, one teacher mentioned that;

One of the advantages of having a higher qualification especially a degree I am likely to be promoted to a higher position and thus leave this rural place. Alternatively, I can also be seconded to any education NGOs within the ministry and that we make me leave this school.

Parents presented similar views and one of them lamented that;

Most teacher are upgrading through distance learning so that they are transferred to secondary schools. I don't know why teachers are shunning the primary schools. Who is going to be teaching our children in primary schools? It's like they want to be enjoying electricity in secondary schools because at least a good number of secondary schools have power.

From what the respondents were saying regarding upgrading of their qualifications the focus for most teachers in rural areas is not so much about enhancing their competencies to teach but to find a way of leaving rural schools using the newly acquired higher qualification. Segun and Olanrewaju (2011:96) observed that; in Zambia, for example, there was an annual output of 4,300 newly trained primary school teachers from the pre-service training, but annual losses of 1,100 primary teachers upgrading to secondary level. In Zambia it seems teachers are regarded as tools to be used only regardless of the conditions in which they work. We say so because other studies such as those by Musilekwa and Mulenga (2019), Mkandawire (2012), Mulenga and Mwanza (2019) have clearly shown that teachers in Zambia are sidelined even in matters of their very profession such as

development of learners’ text books and in curriculum development respectively. As we mentioned in the proceeding sections of this paper all these causes of teacher transfers have some effect on the learner performance. In our study we concentrated on the narratives of what teachers, head teachers and parents gave regarding the effect teacher transfers had on learning.

Effects of Teacher Transfers on Learners’ Academic Performance

The findings of this study indicated that there were a number of effects of teacher transfer on learner academic performance. Good academic performance is one of the salient goals for any educational system. According to Cuban (2004), a teacher is one of the most important inputs into the teaching and learning process. In order to appreciate the extent to which teacher transfers in Chama district had indeed affected the district researchers did a document analysis of the human resource records at the District Education Board Secretaries office. Figure 2 shows the number of teachers who were transferred in and out of the district over a five-year period from 2015 to 2019.

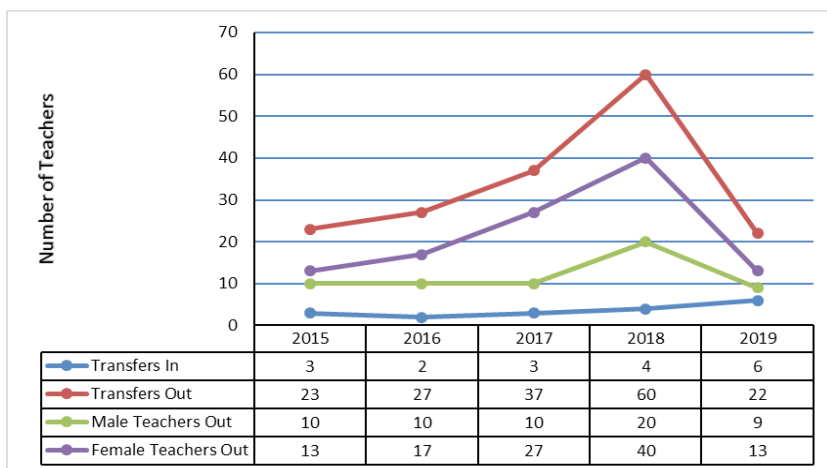


Figure 2: Number of teachers who were transferred to and from Chama district from 2015 to 2019.

It is clear from this figure that there were actually more teachers who left the district than those who were transferred to the district each year and the worst year was 2018 in which 60 teachers were transferred out of the district while only 4 came into the district. This is quite worrying in terms of the effects the phenomena may have on learning. Research further analyzed the performance of learners in their district mock examination at grade seven. Mock examinations were preferred to the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) national examinations because ECZ examination were highly moderated. Moreover, the ECZ examinations for grade seven had been modified to the extent that most schools record in the country have been recording 100% pass rates even with most pupils who cannot read and write. Figure 3 shows the percentage distribution of mock examinations in Chama district over a period of four years.

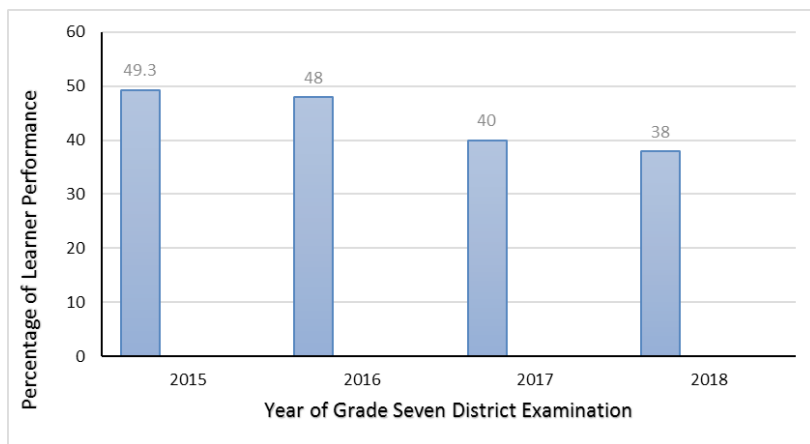


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of learner performance in the district mock examination

After the district mock examination results for all the schools in Chama district were analyze figure 3 shows that the district did not go above average for a period of five years. While we acknowledge that learner performance is determined by many factors we were

particularly interested to find out the extent to which teacher transfers contributed to this kind of performance among learners not only in grade seven but also in the other grades in primary schools. To that effect one teacher explained that:

Being understaffed at a school disadvantages pupils in so many ways. I teach two grade two classes myself who come to school at different times. Shifts in most schools in the district is very common because we are understaffed. Thus the time for learning is very much reduced. In my two classes I find it very difficult to follow up on learners who have challenges especially in reading because I get very tired unlike when I was just teaching one class. I can tell you sir, learners in my class struggle to learn very simple things because we do not have enough time due to understaffing. Most teachers do not want to work from this school because it is too rural.

Another teacher added that;

Each month we lose a lot of time because we combine classes when teachers go to town. The situation worsens when teachers go out for salaries as they spend more than two days there. Since we have no banks in the area. Pupils are sometimes given a ball to entertain themselves from first to last period. We are made to combine classes. This situation has greatly contributed to the poor performance of learners. Most learners reach grade seven without knowing how to read and write properly.

The aspect of losing time for teaching or curriculum implementation is one that seem not to attract attention of education administrators and policy makers although researchers such as Mulenga and Lubasi (2019) explored it extensively. In this case it is vital to note as Mulenga (2018:13) explained referring to Taba's definition of a

curriculum that; ‘Taba focused on the planned experiences aspect of the curriculum to the extent that planning and organization of curriculum elements preoccupied her thinking about curriculum’ This is key when it comes to the scenario that we are presented with here where learning time is lost as a result of teachers leaving schools to access social facilities. This is also consistent with Mkandawire (2010) who reported that the movement of teachers during teaching time for various reasons can be an impediment to curriculum implementation. Since a curriculum is planned, any time that is lost is not easily recovered because each content has its own planned time to be covered. During data collection, about six head teachers were found in classes teaching meanwhile there were people who were to be attended to at their office. We are not saying that head teachers should not teach but they should not be given too much teaching loads since they have another serious duty of leading the school. During the interview one head teacher explained that:

I have a full class and two subjects in another class because we are understaffed. We are only three trained plus two voluntary teachers at this school managing grades one to nine. We even closed the Early Childhood Education center this year in February because of poor staffing levels, the one who was handling the class got transferred to Chinsali. This has negatively affected the performance of learners for the past three years.

Except for township schools, ten head teachers in the rest of the sampled schools had full-time classes to teach. This undermined the manner in which they executed administrative duties. Findings were in agreement with Onsomu (2014) who stated that schools that are understaffed resort to multi-grade system, reduced teaching and learning sessions, hence high teacher-pupil ratio, low contact hours between teachers and pupils and increased teacher workload. Under staffing in most schools in Chama district was as a result of massive teacher transfers as shown in figure 2. One head teacher

who happened to be the head teachers' representative in the district explained that:

More than 95% of the teachers that transfer out of the district are primary school teachers coming from Lusaka and Copperbelt. However, only less than 10% of these transfers follow laid down procedures and yet the government has been very clear on the need to follow correct procedures. As a district we have continued to lose teachers through transfers. Chama is just used as a deployment ground. What is devastating is that no one seems to care about the poor performance of learners caused by these transfers. At my school for instance when we had enough teachers most learners would break through in literacy and numeracy by the time they are in grade two but the story is now different ever since we lost many teachers in the lower grades due to transfers.

After conducting document analysis, the researchers also discovered that the district had been ranked number eight out of the nine districts from 2016 to 2018 in the grade seven national examinations at provincial level. It was only in 2015 that the district was ranked fifth.

Measures to Minimize or Regulate Teacher Transfers in Chama district

While education administrators may have their own views about what can be done to minimize the massive exodus of teachers from rural schools and in this case Chama district, researchers in this study wanted to hear from the participants who actually lived the rural experience on what needs to be done. All respondents were asked to suggest measures to be put in place to minimize teacher transfers in Chama district. Most of the views pointed to two areas namely the deployment strategy and provision of incentives to teachers in rural areas. For instance, one head teacher explained

that:

If government deployed teachers who were already familiar with challenges found in a particular district, then transfers could be minimized. There should be strict adherence to government policies by implementers. When deploying teachers, the ministry should first of all consider schools that are critically understaffed as opposed to the current trend where more teachers are sent to well-staffed schools in the township. Moreover, it will be good to deploy teachers whose origin is Chama rural, this will help minimize the transfers.

Another head teacher spoke with a lot of emotions and indicated that:

As a district, a number of positions have been frozen by PMEC and yet we have teachers that can take up these positions. We have teachers that completed their degree programmes about five years ago but their salary cannot be upgraded to that of a degree holder, a thing which has demotivated them. Out of frustration, others have even gotten transfers to other provinces. Hardship allowance takes very long to be effected once a teacher is moved to rural schools in this district. Moreover, teachers live in very dilapidated houses and others have built their own grass thatched houses and yet they do not get any housing allowance. Such conditions have frustrated teachers who end up leaving our schools. The ministry should make working conditions for rural teachers attractive. We have had enough of beautiful speeches from authorities about rural schools. It is time they acted.

Most teachers also mentioned that increasing hardship allowance,

fast track promotions, improving school infrastructure and strict adherence to government transfer policies would help solve the problem of transfers. These views are in agreement with those advanced by Noor (2012). Other strategies that could be of help would be to improve transport, communication systems, providing social facilities such as good hospitals, electricity and banks in rural areas.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Like many rural districts and schools in Zambia and in most of Sub-Saharan African countries, Chama district teachers are suffering the challenges of underdevelopment of most rural areas in Zambia. Other studies that have been done on the same subject have concluded by giving recommendations for each of the challenges that are experienced by teachers in rural schools. While that is fine we however, feel that such recommendations may not actually solve the problems which are caused by the economic neglect that areas such as Chama district experience as a result of unequal distribution of basic facilities in rural districts and schools, and sometimes just as a result of poor management of national resources due to incompetence and corruption. However, in our case we would like to conclude this way.

As we mentioned earlier in this paper, most people in Zambia live in rural areas and thus rural education is cardinal to achieving national priorities for economic growth and development. If provided with quality education, people in rural areas will have competencies to grow a strong rural economy. With the introduction of a competency based curriculum in 2013, Zambia would be on the road to success as Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019a:127) rightly explained that ‘competency-based learning is a system of education, often referred to as proficiency or mastery-based, in which learners advance and move ahead on their lessons based on demonstration of mastery or visibility of what they have learnt’. Therefore, the vision for education in rural Zambia should be to promote the creation of strong communities through improved working conditions of

teachers and teaching. This off course will have a ripple effect on other government workers and the rural communities as well. But because of the poor environments in which teachers work, especially in the rural areas, quality of education has been adversely affected as evidenced in this study. As Segun and Olanrewaju (2011) explained rural people do not only need quality education, in the form of literacy and numeracy skills, to become informed participants in the social life of their community and engage in its development. They more than anything need innovative, creative, collaborative and critical thinking skills which education should provide so as to turn the most available natural resources in their immediate environment into products to better their lives. When people have the skills and knowledge they need to be part of the economic and social life of their community, it results in a more cohesive and inclusive society. The competency-based curriculum that is being implemented in schools today can be a golden window of opportunities for rural learners as Zulu and Mulenga (2019:277) described its advantage that ‘the guidelines in teaching this type of curriculum as given by the Ministry of General Education are that learners should be given practical experiences during the teaching and learning process that would help them acquire life skills’.

This is only possible when there are enough qualified and motivated teachers in rural schools. However, rural schools in Chama face many challenges that do not exist in urban or peri-urban areas, such as geographic isolation, poor working conditions of teachers, conflict as a results of school location, lack of adequate resources, witchcraft and superstition and poor deployment procedures. Moreover, many rural schools are confronted with the problems of dilapidated buildings and poor teacher housing. Consequently, learners’ achievement in rural schools of Chama has become poor and most often varies, depending on what type of rural school they attend. Beyond the general improvement in teachers’ welfare, those working in rural areas such as Chama deserve additional incentives such as housing loans and allowance, rural hardship allowance, double class allowance and salary bonuses to attract and retain

qualified and reputable teachers that are willing to work in rural schools.

Beyond political rhetoric and statements on the Zambian education system, government must be seen to be actively involved in the development of rural schools. Although there are statements by the Ministry of General Education and government that they recognize the importance of teachers in the development of their educational systems, the reality on the ground is that teachers are continuously treated as second class workers and their status has continued to be at risk despite the fact that no school can rise above the quality of its teachers. For instance, while we see other government workers in Zambia such as those in security wings being built modern houses, we do not see the same done for teachers. In addition, there has been overconcentration of development activities in the urban areas. This is occasioned by the fact that urban people are more visible. The commitment to education can be revealed through adequate provision of human and financial resources to rural schools. Masumba and Mulenga (2019:91) actually reminds education decision makers that ‘teaching and learning are based on common phenomena of achieving the national goals of education’. Therefore, if in one part of the education system effective teaching and learning is not happening it will eventually affect the whole picture of national educational goals. It is thus proposed that governments should show more commitment in providing a good percent of a country’s budget to education and not the current 12%, in the 2020 budget, which is way below the recommended international standard. The situation seems to be getting worse because earlier on Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019b:126) had expressed worry that the ‘National budgetary allocation to the education and skills sector in Zambia has been reducing since 2015 as follows; 2015 (20.2%), 2016 (17.2%), 2017 (16.5%) and 2018 (16.1%)’. Policy makers should give priority to indicators contributing most to teachers’ attraction and retention so as to improve the working conditions of teachers in rural schools for better teaching and learning outcomes in Chama district and across the country.

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