

Policy Brief



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Fundamentals of Teacher Education Development:

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(No. 3) Strategies for Improving Teachers' Working Conditions and Their Retention in Schools in Africa

Rakissouilgri Mathieu Ouédraogo

Summary

In regards to education, the “teacher challenge” has been one of the most difficult to face because of economic and financial constraints. Attracting, developing, and retaining effective teachers is also a challenge for many African education systems, which makes achieving universal primary education a difficult task. Quality teachers are essential to providing quality education for all. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of teachers, and retaining those that are recruited and trained is not an easy task. The working conditions for teachers must be improved if retention rates are to increase. This book, written in 2011, addresses the challenges faced regarding teachers' working conditions and retention, which are still relevant to today's education landscape.

What the Research Shows

Reasons for Teacher Shortages: The “teacher challenge” in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is double faceted: there is a shortage in the number of teachers needed to fill the existing gap, as well as, a high demand for **quality**, which requires recruiting qualified teachers. Additionally, there is a lack of financial resources to pay and support teachers.

The reasons for teacher shortages vary among countries. In some places, it is caused by a general lack of teaching staff; while in others, it is due to poor distribution and deployment of teachers, leaving rural areas lacking sufficient numbers of teachers. At the secondary and tertiary levels in particular, these shortages are most often felt within certain subject areas, such as mathematics, physics and chemistry, computer science, and vocational skills. As a result of these shortages, many places will hire unqualified teachers, which contribute to the poor quality of education.

Teachers already in the profession have named a number of reasons for leaving their work as educators, including working conditions. Among the top reasons are: poor physical and environmental conditions, lack of organization within schools, social challenges between teachers and administrators, and psychological factors as a result of poor teachers' status in society. In order to address these issues, school administrators can take a number of actions such as: create improved salary measures and provide great incentives to teachers, communicate important information with teachers, improve the physical environment for teachers, provide support in the psycho-social environment, and improve school management systems.

Other reasons for shortages include: the increasing number of staff who are retiring, the growing number of teachers who leave the profession after a few years, an increasing number of teachers who have died or in poor health due to HIV/AIDS, and the difficulty of attracting and recruiting qualified students in teacher training institutions. There is a serious need to recruit more teachers to fill the vacancies caused by these reasons and increasing enrolments.

In order to increase quantity, without sacrificing quality, conditions for teachers should be improved. This includes teachers' living and working conditions and maintaining quality training of teachers. The quality of education will also suffer if teachers are not well trained before deployment. Pre-service training is not always required to become a teacher, but it would certainly improve quality.

Additionally, the decentralization of the education system may be an effective way to improve the management of education institutions. The issues concerning the recruitment and assignment of teachers must be viewed from a local level, taking into consideration the local development policies and programs. Recruitment and assignment at a local level is quicker and more effective. Additionally, decentralization would allow for the adaptation of more relevant education programs and curricula at a local level and more efficient control of education expenses.

Conclusion

The need to retain teachers is not separate from the need for quality, relevance, and excellence. In order to provide the best education possible, teachers must be well qualified and committed to their roles as educators. If this is to happen, teachers must be given sufficient working conditions and incentives. When teachers are well regarded and respected for their skills and knowledge, they will be more likely to remain in the profession and provide good quality education to their students.

Recommendations

Some strategies for retaining quality teachers and providing quality education include:

- 1) **Improving pre-service** teacher education programs
- 2) **Improve the many aspects of teachers' working conditions**, including the physical environment, psycho-social support, motivation/incentives, and better salaries
- 3) **Provide continuous professional development opportunities** for teachers
- 4) The **decentralization of education systems** and **teacher recruitment processes** in order to reach the need for teachers at a local level

About the Author

Dr. Rakissouilgri Mathieu Ouédraogo is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Ouagadougou. He has developed and led programs and training courses for teaching staff, education supervisors and education resources managers. He had published literature related to teacher training, education supervision, and education resources management.

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