Exploring Teachers' Retention and Attrition in Middle and Secondary Schools in Eritrea: Perspectives of Currently Serving Teachers

Petros Woldu Fessehatsion (iD)
HuaZhong University of Science and Technology, China

Pai Peng (iD)
HuaZhong University of Science and Technology, China

To cite this article:

Exploring Teachers' Retention and Attrition in Middle and Secondary Schools in Eritrea: Perspectives of Currently Serving Teachers

Petros Woldu Fessehatsion, Pai Peng

Article Info	Abstract
	This paper seeks to contribute a fresh perspective meant to enrich the current limited discourse on teacher retention and attrition in Sub Saharan Africa particularly in Eritrea. Factors leading to teachers' retention and attrition in middle and secondary schools in Eritrea are discussed. Results of an in-depth semi-structured interview with thirteen teachers in five purposefully selected schools show that low remuneration, poor school leadership, school-home distance, and placement without preference & interest are factors for teacher attrition. Conversely, meagre alternative employment opportunities, love of the profession, and love of the school children play a crucial role in teachers' persistence in their profession. Although the study was carried out among few teachers and few schools, the findings present valuable discoveries useful for policymakers, school leaders, and stakeholders in the struggle for retaining quality teachers in the schools.

Introduction

The quality of the teachers, in all aspects, forms the fundamental school-related factor in contemporary child education. Researches around the globe show teachers have a decisive contribution to students' achievements and improvement (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Since the adoption of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) international initiative in the 2000s, policymakers, educators, and practitioners made the improvement of students' learning and schools' performance their central focus. However, given the existing gap in students' performances and educational progress worldwide, improving the quality of the teaching force remains a priority to realize these visions (Harrell et al., 2019).

The recruitment of new and retention of the existing qualified teachers remains a global challenge. Three decades of efforts to reduce attrition and enhance recruitment of quality teachers in England and the USA bore little fruit with 11% - 13% and 7% - 8% attrition rate respectively (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Worth, Lazzari, & Hillary, 2017). Developing countries, like Sub-Saharan Africa, suffer higher shortage levels, and this problem is forecasted to pose a serious barrier for the achievement of the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) of 2030 (UNESCO - UIS, 2013). The attrition rate in these countries varies between 5%-30% (Mulkeen et al., 2005). In addition to teachers' attrition, increased students' enrollment and financial constraints also aggravate the problem further.

Researchers tried to explore the reasons compelling teachers either to stay or leave the profession (Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). They summarized teachers' retention factors into personal, social, and organizational categories. Personal factors comprise gender, experience, and academic qualifications (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006), while organizational factors include school conditions, leadership support, and compensation. Finally, social factors are related to the familial responsibilities and obligations coupled with the overall society's attitudes towards the teaching profession.

Background of the Study

In Eritrea, like many Sub-Saharan African Countries, the Government of the State of Eritrea (GoSE) set education as the tool to achieve national development programs (Ministry of Education MoE, 2009), particularly in the fields of poverty reduction (MoE, 2004). Moreover, all UN-led international initiatives such as Education for All (EFA), Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) were quickly adopted to enhance the quality of education in Eritrea. The rapid expansion of educational facilities and new schools resulted in a sharp increase in the number of students, which in turn created a higher demand for quality teachers and school management personnel.

Preparation of new and maintaining of the existing teachers did not go on par with the physical expansion of schools. High levels of teachers' attrition and late report to duty threatened the educational system. In the academic year of 2010/11 alone, 1050 (7.5%) teachers left their posts (MoE, 2012). The effect of the high teacher attrition is multidimensional; lack of adequate teaching staff, quality of education, student-teacher ratio, syllabus coverage, subject disproportionality, and so on. It also causes distributional differences (Cochran-Smith, 2004) in subjects like Mathematics and English, and the Education Sector Plan (ESP) for 2018-2022 predicted big challenges in meeting teacher requirements at all levels during the operational term (MoE, 2018).

Eritrea had two operational teacher training institutions that produce teachers for K-12 schools until 2018. College of Education (CoE) trained middle and secondary school teachers by offering two-year diploma and four-year degree programs respectively. Secondly, Asmara Community College of Education (ACCE) produced elementary school and mother tongue teachers with a one-year certificate program. Unfortunately, ACCE accepted students with a low score in the National Secondary School Leaving Examination. Although admission to CoE was on the merit of a tertiary education requirement, the College attracted least performing students whose choice to other colleges (medicine, engineering, business, and applied sciences) was rejected (Mulkeen, 2010). The need for the description of these two past teacher training institutions was due to: (a) all the teachers in the study are from these previous colleges, and (b) that the new College has not yet produced pre-service teachers. These two training institutions could not satisfy the required teaching force in the country, and thus, graduates of other colleges was recruited to fill the gap. The non-teacher graduates attend a two-week pedagogical crush training before their assignment to the schools. The College of Education changed its name into Asmara College of Education in 2018, and started to operate at one-year post-graduate diploma program. It provides one-year pedagogical training to graduates of other colleges in the country to prepare them for teaching. ACCE has permanently stopped operation since 2018.

The Ministry of Education has been taking some measures to address teacher attrition by expanding teacher training institutions, and the provision of other in-service training programs to upgrade the professional profile of teachers. Several in-service training programs, pedagogical refresher trainings, and Open Distance Learning programs (ODLP) were launched. Another strategy of tackling teacher attrition was basic salary increment (nearly double) of all civil servants including teachers which were made in July 2015. Given the non-education teachers' poor readiness to hold teaching positions, the Civil Personnel Administration (CPA) office, since 2015, offers them reassignment opportunities to their mainstream field after they serve two mandatory teaching years. This partially reduces both the shortage of teachers and the attrition rate, and fortunately, some assigned teachers voluntarily agree to continue teaching after finishing their term.

Furthermore, any teacher who served more than five years transfers to the highly desired locations as a form of promotion. Finally, communities and parents also set financial and livelihood support mechanisms to their local teachers including grains, financial incentives, cash during holidays, and meal services. Despite all these loosely coordinated support mechanisms and incentives, teachers' turnover showed no sign of decline. Many schools are, therefore, forced to recruit teachers independently to fill the shortage, and that lead them to employ the least professional profiling in their screening and selection procedures. These teachers' deployment procedures affect and complicate the teaching quality and teacher motivation. Understanding the causes and reasons for teachers' departure and retention is a complex phenomenon particularly in developing countries that requires deeper examination. Rare researches were carried out so far to investigate the causes of teacher dissatisfaction and attrition in Eritrea. This study is important in a sense that it examines all the career stages including novice, mid-career, and long-serving teachers in a single framework. Therefore, this paper explores the context-specific factors contributing to teachers' attrition and retention phenomenon in Eritrean middle and secondary schools.

Conceptualizing Teacher Retention and Attrition

Teacher attrition and retention are inseparable phenomena (Kelchtermans, 2017), and teacher attrition is defined as leaving the teaching profession for reasons other than retirement (Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers may leave the profession prior to retirement at any time for different reasons. Nevertheless, this could not always harm education significantly as teachers might leave due to their inability to master the profession, and poor performance (Fontaine & Kane, 2012). Teacher retention, conversely, refers to the ability of educational institutions to attract and retain experienced teachers. Educators and policymakers debated continuously on the subject but could not strike common standards and benchmarks to evaluate teachers' quality. There is also a failure to identify the exact types of teachers leaving the profession in developing countries, like Eritrea.

The quality and readiness of the teachers are key for students' overall academic performance and thus depends on the efficiency of teachers' training institutions, and continuity of experienced teachers. Unfortunately, no nation has so far fully laid an exemplary model in achieving these objectives, although students' performance and teacher attrition vary across regions and nations (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Previous studies show that a career path to the teaching profession is an important factor to explore teachers' attrition/retention. Teachers, particularly in developing countries, join the teaching profession merely to fill the teaching force

shortage, even if their educational background and experience are below the minimum requirement. Besides, college graduates with no pedagogical or education-related study are also assigned as teachers. These career paths to the teaching profession have a significant impact on teachers' attrition/retention as related to professional identity issues.

Flores & Day (2006) asserted that teacher identity is shaped by three forces; prior influences, initial teacher training, and school context. According to them, our role model's personality and career success affect our vision and desire of what to become. Secondly, the experience of the teacher in his/her teacher training institutions plays a profound role in building professional identity, and the image of one-self can overcome odd work. Moreover, Olsen (2008) noted the importance of the personal and professional histories to the discourse of teacher attrition. When entering the profession, prospective teachers bring their previous perceptions and images of a teacher (Lindqvist & Karin, 2016) which interacts with the context in shaping their identity as teachers. Many studies show that teachers' professional identity is related to their historical background (Clandinin et al., 2015; Towers & Maguire, 2017).

Scholars who stress on the psychological aspect of the profession view teacher attrition as a culmination of a long process of resentment (Lindqvist & Karin, 2016; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Several interrelated problems contribute to the gradual accumulation of dissatisfaction eventually leading to termination. Individual, psychological, and work environment factors are often cited as the main determinants in this line of thinking (Hughes, 2012; Kukla-Acevedo & Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Individual motivations and expectations shape new and experienced teachers to join and continue (Watt & Richardson, 2012) but if the school environment does not meet their expectations, they leave (Ghana National Association of Teachers and Teachers & Educational Workers of Ghana Trade Union Congress (GNAT & TEWU), 2009). Other scholars stress on the emotional attachment to the work-place resulted from the relationship with the children, colleagues, and host communities as determinants of teacher attrition (McIntyre, 2010).

Factors related to work environment include; compensation, lack of administrative support, students discipline, and workload (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kokka, 2016). Ironically, some research findings show a low correlation between compensation and teachers' decisions to continue (Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014). Salary increment is negatively related to teacher departure, while positively related to switching schools (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Imazeki, 2005; Stockard & Lehman, 2004). The base salary, fringe benefits, insurance, and health allowances are types of compensation. Urban schools are, comparatively, in a better position to attract teachers due to their modern facilities and better benefit practices. Teachers working in rural schools need extra allowances to off-set their disadvantage resulted from the school-home geographic distance.

School leadership is another important factor commonly discussed as a contributor to teachers' attrition (Boyd et al., 2009; Peters & Pearce, 2012). Good leadership is positively correlated to teachers' retention, while poor leadership results in higher teacher attrition. Few scholars reject school leadership as a significant factor for teacher attrition, while majority argue in favor of the idea. Similarly, students' discipline and teachers' workload

are also among the school context that contributes to teacher attrition/retention. In schools where higher students' disciplinary cases existed, a higher level of teachers' attrition is common (Brown & Wynn, 2007). Teachers may get frustrated with classroom management problems, low levels of students learning interest, and consistent disturbance which makes the profession fragile.

In conclusion, most of the previous studies focused on either novice or long-serving teachers with very little studies on all teacher career stages in a single framework. There is also limited research on the subject particularly in Sub-Saharan African countries including Eritrea. Furthermore, quantitatively oriented research overwhelmingly dominates the area with very few qualitative ones. Therefore, this research's choice of qualitative analysis on all teacher career stages in a poorly studied country is intended to partially remedy previous deficiencies. Besides, this study includes novice, mid-career, and long-serving teachers graduated from all the non-education and education colleges in the country to create a deeper and multi-dimensional investigation. This enables the researchers to clearly understand the on-ground factors affecting teacher attrition and retention occurrences by involving all professional and demographic representatives of the sector in Eritrea.

Methods

Design

A qualitative research design was used to discover the factors affecting teachers' decision to continue or terminate their post. The technique renders advantage in generating a naturalistic interpretive approach to the real situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This research design was chosen because the researchers were interested in exploring and understanding the teachers' perspectives on the factors contributing to teacher retention and attrition in Eritrean schools.

Participants

Thirteen teachers active in their job were consulted, and the interviewees teach in five purposefully selected schools from the central regional administration to represent diverse students' demographics and different socio-economic locations. The three schools have high students' academic performance and better socio-economic situations, while the rest two are low performing schools serving to low socio-economic communities. Another criterion of selection was the high level of teacher attrition recorded in these schools. The researchers believed that the selected schools provide excellent opportunities for comparative analysis.

The respondents include purposefully selected seven teachers from three secondary schools and six teachers from two middle schools. In Eritrea, the levels of the education system comprise of five-year elementary, three-year middle, and four-year secondary schools. Middle schools are from grade six up to grade eight, and secondary schools are from grade nine up to grade twelve. A diploma qualification is required for middle school teachers while a bachelor's degree is required for secondary school teachers. Table 1 below shows the profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Personal and Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondents (R)	Gender	Age	Qualification	Major	Experience (years)
R1	Male	27	Diploma	Horticultural Science	7
R2	Female	36	Diploma	Science Education	14
R3	Female	28	BSc. Degree	Applied Chemistry	7
R4	Male	26	BSc. Degree	Biology Education	2
R5	Female	26	BSc. Degree	Mathematics Education	3
R6	Male	45	Diploma	History	14
R7	Female	28	Diploma	Science Education	6
R8	Male	26	BSc. Degree	Applied Physics	5
R9	Male	39	BSc. Degree	Biology Education	13
R10	Male	31	BSc. Degree	Chemical Engineering	8
R11	Male	41	Diploma	Science Education	16
R12	Female	53	Diploma	Science Education	21
R13	Male	56	BSc. Degree	Chemistry	23

As shown in Table 1, five of the respondents studied neither in CoE nor ACCE. Some studied engineering fields, while others applied sciences, nonetheless due to a shortage of teachers, they were assigned as teachers. There were five female respondents, and three teachers were early career teachers (less than five years' experience). Furthermore, six were long-serving teachers with more than ten years of experience while the remaining four were mid-career teachers with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 10 years.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview was conducted to collect data because it gives independence from relying on a single theoretical framework and helps to disclose concealed experiences by further probing the questions in-depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview guide was prepared based on the works of Gomba (2015) and Watts (2016), and includes the following sample questions;

- Please tell me about yourself and your work.
- How did you become a teacher?
- How long have you been a public school teacher?
- Is it a common phenomenon that teachers want to leave?
- In your experience, do you know anyone who has left the teaching profession? If so, what is the reason for his/her departure?
- According to your understanding, what factors do force teachers to leave their job?

The interview was arranged in the interviewee's convenience, and first, their consent was approved. The interviews were carried out individually, and each interview took about 40 to 55 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, and later coded for analysis.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used through Nvivo 12 data analysis software. After transcription, the data was entered into the software for further codification and identification of emerging themes. Once the themes got identified, a constant comparison was made between the responses of individual respondents inductively. Redundant and repeated information of the responses were also identified and omitted from the analysis. Consequently, only relevant data for understanding the teachers' perspectives on retention and attrition were cross-examined.

Results

The analysis was grouped into two categories (A) causes of attrition, and (B) reasons for continuation. Four major thematic areas were identified regarding the causes of teachers' self-termination. Concerning the reasons for teachers' continuation, three themes were explored from this study. The detailed descriptions of the themes that emerged from the study are presented below in the respective section.

Causes of Attrition

Respondents noted that the main reasons for teachers' attrition are remuneration, poor school leadership & management, home-school distance, and job assignment without preference and subject allocation. The detailed descriptions of these themes are discussed below in order of relevance.

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Responses on Each Attrition Thematic Area

S. No.	Thematic Areas on Attrition	Number of Cases	% cases
1	Remuneration	13	100%
2	Poor School Leadership & Management	9	69.23%
3	Home-School Distance	7	53.85%
4	Assignment without Preference and Subject Allocation	6	46.15%

Remuneration

The respondents overwhelmingly mentioned remuneration as the main cause of teachers' attrition. According to them, the salary could not support the basic needs of the family, and hence they need to find other means of income. R (7) described it as follows:

> *Remuneration is too little to cover the economic needs of the family. You have to look either for paid tutorial classes or leave in search of job opportunities in order to earn for living.*

The respondents strengthen their argument that due to the rise in living expenses particularly house rent, they could not support their livelihood needs. Thus, the efforts and time their job requires and the salary does not match at all.

The job we do as teachers and the income we get are not comparable. The net salary is below the house rent. Even though the salary was doubled in 2015, we are not able to satisfy the basic needs of our families. (R13)

Lack of benefits like housing coupled with a rising rate of inflation force many teachers to look for alternative jobs. (R8)

Schools introduced teacher support systems in collaboration with the Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA), and Saturday tutorials were also introduced to create additional income for the teachers. But, the Ministry prohibited these practices in 2018 because teacher support in public schools should be voluntary and non-monetary.

There is no chance to do other jobs because the new guideline demands teachers to stay at their school throughout working hours. I know one teacher whose mother was sick and been the only daughter was obliged to look after her sick mother. Despite insufficient salary she receives, due to the prohibition of Saturday class where she used to get little additional money, she couldn't be punctual and fulfill her duties successfully, consequently, the school head kept shouting at her. Finally, she was forced to quit. (R2)

Here, the respondents claimed that low salary, unclear and non-transparent selection criteria for financial benefits, unavailability of accommodation allowances, transportation problems, and insurance benefits as the main causes of teacher attrition. Even though there is a risk of being unemployed, they quit teaching.

Poor School Leadership and Management

School leadership is another factor that contributes to the high level of teachers' attrition. The interviewee noted that school leaders care only about the fulfillment of class duties, and show no interest to support the newly assigned teachers.

The school leader is not supportive and cooperative with teachers. He thinks only how to fill the gap in teaching. (R2)

Even at the regional level, the administration and management are very weak and uncoordinated. If you visit these offices to facilitate some cases, you will spend weeks or months before you get a decision. (R11)

Teachers get frustrated and displeased with the way the principal runs the school. Principals only complain about teachers' fault but never utter words of appreciation to excellent deeds displayed by fellow teachers.

The school director does not have trust and faith in us. He tried to monitor everything we do, which leads to conflict and hatred of the profession. (R10)

Some of the respondents have variable assessments regarding the impact of school leadership on teachers' decisions. Some interviewees describe their respective school principals as very cooperative and supportive

labeling them as "fathers", while others describe them as rude, rigid, and uncooperative. Sometimes, school principals humiliate or harass teachers in front of colleagues, students, or parents.

> *In my first school, the leader was supportive and cooperative and the school has less gossip while in my current school, the leader is autocratic and unsupportive. He yells and shouts at the teachers even in front of their students that humiliate them and the teachers decided to leave the school because of the embarrassment.* (R1)

> *When I was reassigned to my present school, I was pregnant but the principal showed no support during my difficulties.* (R12)

> *I know teachers who left the profession just because they had a conflict with the school leader since the school leader treated and evaluated them badly. Then they decided to leave the profession and become successful businessmen.* (R6)

Moreover, the respondents clearly spoke about their dissatisfaction with the nomination practices for workshops, conferences, training, and extra-curricular activities participation. Despite little per diem benefits, teachers want to participate in these activities, but the nomination process entirely done by the management and with no transparency contributes to the teachers' dissatisfaction. It becomes a source of gossip and conflict between the management and the teachers, and among the teachers themselves.

> *It depends on your personal relationship with the school leader to get such opportunities, otherwise, you will not have a chance* (R11).

> *It is all about diplomacy not about qualification and contribution* (R1).

The respondents stated that quarrels with the principal expose them to harsh repercussions, and the school principal been the only authority in the school makes things worse and puts the teachers at a severe disadvantage. This may push the already fragile teachers to abandon the profession altogether.

Home-School Distance

Teachers' assignment in remote places and distant from their home residence also leads to teachers' attrition. Some teachers leave the profession to take care of their aging parents. Another problem raised by the respondents is the absence of maintenance or any other allowances when posted in non-residence schools and expected to cover all living expenses with the basic salary. Many teachers choose to terminate rather than to go to their distant workplace. One respondent indicated that:

> *Teachers want to be assigned in more convenient places, and near their families. There is no available benefit for working in remote places that compensate for the hardship you endure, and the opportunities you miss. (*R5)

Another important point raised regarding home-school distance is the transport network, which is predominantly poor and unpredictable. In this regard, R(3) has for example demonstrated that:

> *The transportation network even between an urban area and their surrounding villages is poor and sometimes requires one to three hours to commute.*

The possibilities for secondary (additional) employment and private tutorials are so limited in rural areas, and no way to earn additional income to support your family. Due to this reason, they prefer to quite work in rural schools.

> *You cannot get any tutorial tuition classes or other employment opportunities to earn additional money, thus you do not prefer to go to such remote places.* (R4)

Female teachers are reluctant to take up the posts in a remote place because of pregnancy, child-rearing responsibilities, conservative attitudes of families, and other domestic obligations. Female teachers are more likely to leave their posts if they are assigned distant from their parents or husband.

> *Assigning in remote places puts female teachers at a disadvantage. If you are assigned in a remote place, the issues of marriage, child-bearing, and family care put you under stress. Finally, you could decide either to move to schools near family or terminate teaching.* (R11)

Generally, job post far from home or family seems one of the main factors that contribute to teachers' departure from their profession.

Assignment without Preference and Subject Allocation

Majority of the teachers entered the profession without their choice, nor does their qualification prepares them for the job. Even those who graduate from teacher training institutions studied pedagogy because they failed to admit to other more desirable programs and colleges. The respondents reiterated that the problem creates identity crises as teachers.

> *You know…. assigning graduates of the other fields of study to teaching is the main source of dissatisfaction and absenteeism. After all, they have identity crises as teachers and they become a source of negative attitude in the community.* (R11)
>
> *No ... even those who graduated from teacher training institutions do not recognize themselves as teachers as far as they entered the profession without interest. Teacher training institutions receive candidates who failed to get a seat in other areas of professional studies due to a low GPA score in the freshman program.* (R13)

The career preparation pathway is also an important reason that impedes teachers' interest in the profession. Those who entered the teaching profession from other professional qualifications are much more likely to leave compared to those who came through regular teacher training institutions. One respondent claimed that "teachers have little control in their postings, transfer, and promotion which also forced them to lose their interest in the teaching profession" (R9). The respondents confirmed that initial interests and motives to join the teaching profession is a valuable factor that influences teachers' satisfaction and retention (R8 & R9).

Assigning subjects other than their mainstream field to teach in the schools is also another source of complaint and dissatisfaction among teachers.

> *Sometimes the school leaders assign us to teach a subject outside our mainstream study which we do not enjoy teaching. Since there is a shortage in some fields of studies, the school administrations forced to assign us to teach the subjects as a result dissatisfaction occurs. (R10)*

Although the main reason for teachers' attritions is claimed to be due to low remuneration, the other factors mentioned have also a large contribution to the already unsatisfied teachers to terminate the profession.

Reasons for Continuation

The second main question posed to the respondents refers to the factors that made teachers continue their careers. The responses were categorized into three major thematic areas that are discussed below.

Table.3 Number and Percentage of Responses on Each Retention Thematic Area

S. No.	Thematic Areas on Retention	Number of Cases	% Cases
1	Lack of Alternative Employment	8	61.54%
2	Love of the profession	7	53.85%
3	Love of School Children	7	53.85%

Lack of Alternative Employment

The economy does not offer alternative job opportunities outside the public domain, and teachers feel insecure about finding another job. Terminating their teaching post may expose them to harsh unemployment, and hence prefer to continue, and try to find other solution. One of the common solutions for active teachers is doing home tutorials for wealthy families either individually in the client's residence or in a group by using rental classrooms.

> *If I leave at the moment, I have nowhere to work. There is no noticeable economic activity at the moment where I can get another job. (R12)*

Some teachers migrated within the profession by changing from public schools to private schools, because the later offers a higher salary with moderate incentives and bonuses. Nevertheless, private schools are only allowed to recruit applicants with an official release letter from the Ministry of Education, which under normal circumstances is not granted. The Ministry regularly monitors the recruitment files of the private schools and takes action if guidelines are not followed.

> *There is no other employment opportunity where I can earn money from, so I have to continue my teaching work. (R6)*

The interviewees noted that the lack of employment opportunities usually prevents teachers from leaving their job despite insufficient salary. They try to supplement their deficit by other income-generating activities discussed above. Generally, retention earned due to this reason might increase the number of teaching

personnel, but at the expense of quality because these types of teachers display poor performance and a high record of absenteeism.

Love of the Profession

Some respondents noted that being a teacher was their childhood dream job often inspired either by a parent or influential teacher and hence carry on because of this long-held motivation. They love the profession because for them it is noble of all kinds of professions.

> *I had a dream to be a teacher since my childhood. Even though I had a competitive CGPA that would allow me to join any college, but driven by my childhood dream, I joined the teacher training institute.* (R8)

> *Teaching is the master of all professions. If there is no teaching, the other professions will not exist. I believe it is a noble profession.* (R6)

Some respondents said that, despite their love for the profession, they were tempted to leave when assigned to distant locations. Later, when they got reassigned to convenient schools, they decided to continue.

> *You know I was tempted to quit in my first assignment due to its distance from home but when I transferred to the school near family, I have decided to continue due to the love I have to the profession.* (R9)

Others loved the profession due to their contribution to the society. One respondent, for example, cited as "you can find your ex-students working in the public institutions, you feel proud of being a teacher, this is why I love it" (R8). Similarly, R7 expressed his love to the profession as follows:

> *Once I joined the profession, I realized that teaching is my passion and like to work with kids. At the moment I do not have any intention of leaving the profession. I do not want to leave the profession due to the love I have on it and the kids.* (R7)

The teachers who love the profession are encouraged by the fact that teaching is regarded as the mother of the other professions. Respondent 1 expressed that "every student goes through us and become who they are in other professions." As a result, teachers feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction as they contributed the noblest product to society.

Love of School Children

The respondents said their career brings them an opportunity to shape the future of children and society. This makes their job enjoyable and fulfilling by creating a strong bond and interaction with the students.

> *You know, working with children is a lovable thing in your life. They are innocent, honest, and after all, they show you their love when you find them outside the school compound. I just love working with them.* (R2)

They further said that it is fun to work with them.

> *Working with children is a kind of having fun. That is why I like to continue in my job.* (R6)
>
> *As I stayed in the teaching profession longer, I am attaching strongly to the students, which I enjoyed helping them. I loved them very much. (R9)*
>
> *The students always fascinate me as they are friendly and open in all aspects…… so, I loved them and I do not want to see myself separated from them. (R1)*

The majority of the teachers claim they continue in the profession due to lack of employment opportunity outside the public domain which seems temporarily postponing their intentions to leave until jobs are available in the market. Although some teachers claim they love the profession and the school children, as far as they have income problems to cover their basic livelihood needs, they may not persist longer.

Discussion

The findings show the reasons why middle and secondary school teachers in different stages of teaching experiences decide to continue or leave the profession, which involves many interacting endogenic (school-related) and exogenic (community-related) factors. First of all, the findings from all the respondents echoed low remuneration, and poor school leadership in align with the literature (Imazeki, 2005; Peters & Pearce, 2012). They believed that salary is the measure of professional esteem where people make judgments about the status of their profession and its reward. These findings showed a pattern of similarities across all the career stages. A study made by GNAT & TEWU (2009) on Ghanaian teachers pointed out similar conclusions regarding remuneration's inadequacy to run family needs and the salary's inability to take them home confidently consequently teachers leave the profession.

Even though majority of the respondents from all the career stages resonated school leadership as key factor for decisions to leave, some of the mid-career and long-serving teachers revealed their mixed experience regarding school leaders encountering them at different schools. One teacher described his experience as follows: 'In my first school, the leader was supportive and cooperative and the school had less gossip while in my current school, the leader is autocratic and unsupportive. He yells and shouts at the teachers even in front of their students' (R1). This indicated the diversity of teachers' perception on the effect of school leader depending on their positive or negative encounters.

Although the findings of this study aligned with the existing literature regarding attrition, it adds new perspectives, particularly, in relation to home-school distance, and undesirable subject allocation as well as deploying unwilling teachers to the profession. Majority of the mid-career and long-serving teachers stated that central deployment of non-education major as teachers, and assigning teachers to teach subjects outside their field of study frustrates them, and eventually, leave the profession. These findings could be replicated in other countries where non-education major teachers are deployed to the teaching profession. Auguste, Kihn, & Miller (2010) pointed out that advanced nations made teaching a respected and honorable profession, which helped them to recruit qualified candidates voluntarily. The teaching profession in Eritrea, however, is probably the

least preferred job held by people who lack job opportunities elsewhere. Even after entering the job, due to home-school distance, and little reward, many teachers leave their post. Similar to Towers & Maguire (2017), this study concludes that professional identity crises linked to forceful assignment, frustration, and undesired subject allocation contribute profoundly to the teacher attrition.

These factors cause organizational disruptions where delays in school calendars, loss of exemplary mentors, and irregularities in the school system are commonly observed. As a result, the quality of education got weakened with time in the last decade. This directly affects the students' performance negatively particularly to low performing students who should have benefited from the experienced and exemplary teachers. Lose of experienced teachers left the school management stranded between fulfilling the educational policy demands and the actual school problems. Therefore, our findings suggest that improving school leadership, remuneration, regular transfer practices, and recruiting interested candidates could help school management to tackle the problem of attrition.

Conversely, the result of the study showed that teachers' retention in Eritrea owes largely to the absence of better employment opportunities, teachers' love of the profession and commitment, and teachers' readiness to work with school children. Some of the teachers revealed that unavailability of alternative employment as their main reason to stay in the profession. One respondent explained it as follows: 'If I leave at the moment, I have nowhere to work. There is no noticeable economic activity at the moment where I can get another job' (R12). This finding was similar across the three teacher career stages.

Although teachers' salary barely covers their basic needs, and struggle to fulfill the daily demands of their family, many teachers sustain in their profession out of the love for the profession. Studies in other developing countries also brought similar results particularly in countries with a high unemployment rate. Some mid-career, and long-serving teachers stay because they have a passion for the profession as they feel they are contributing to society (Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014). Some novice respondents noted that teaching was their childhood dream inspired by exemplary teachers and this motivated them to remain in the profession. Arguably, such teachers who join the profession with deep passion persist longer and resist any contextual challenges faced to them.

According to McIntyre (2010), the longer teachers stay in the profession, the stronger the emotional ties they develop with the school communities. She further noted that teachers impressed by the openness and friendliness of their students tend to stay longer in the profession. Our findings show similar results, and R2 highlighted the emotional attachment between teachers and their profession: "You know, working with children is a lovable thing in your life. They are innocent, honest, and after all, they show you their love when you find them outside the school compound. I just love working with them". In this circumstance, teachers do not want to see themselves separated from students as they build strong bonds and attachments (Towers & Maguire, 2017). Unlike the findings on the unavailability of alternative employment and love of the profession which were similar across the three career stages, only the mid-career, and long-serving teachers shared that love of school children as their reason for continuing in teaching.

Conclusions

Although the scope of the research was limited to few schools and few teachers, its results highlight the complex and multidimensional nature of teachers' retention and attrition. The research found that initial interest and home-school distance affect their early teaching orientation and their persistence in the teaching profession. On the other hand, rigid and unfair school leaders affect even the most passionate teachers to leave. School leaders should not be deceived by the hanging on teachers, who probably postpone their termination decision until alternative choices are available.

The researchers perceive that the study adds new perspectives to the existing literature regarding teachers' retention in two ways. First, it exposes the phenomenon of teacher retention and attrition in the Eritrean context. Although, our conclusions regarding teacher attrition seem to be in line with previous literature, the situation appears to be context-specific as the uncovered results could be explained by the educational policy in Eritrea, and the overall context of the country. Secondly, the factors linked to motives for continuity explains the actual experience of novice, mid-career, and experienced teachers contrary to previous studies which mainly focus on one of them. Particularly, the unavailability of alternative employment in the market which kept teachers in their profession seems unique for the Eritrean context.

Our study used limited participant teachers and schools, where conclusions could not be made to the overall teachers' retention status. Therefore, there should be a careful interpretation of our findings. The researchers believe that a mixed-methods study could provide additional data on teachers' attrition/retention. Moreover, a longitudinal study could also provide additional perspective regarding the issue as it enables us to gather information from the same respondents at different times, it might give us a concrete view that accounts for the time and context dynamism.

Acknowledgement

References

Auguste, B., Kihn, P., & Miller, M. (2010). *Closing the talent gap: Attracting and retaining top-third graduates to careers in teaching*. https://doi.org/http://mckinseyonsociety.com/closing-the-talent-gap/

Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, *78*(3), 367–409. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308321455

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., & Wyckoff, J. (2009). The influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions, 1–37. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/

publication/33386/1001287-The-Influence-of-School-Administrators-on-Teacher-Retention-Decisions.PDF

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(3), 77–101. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, K. M., & Wynn, S. R. (2007). Teacher retention issues: How some principals are supporting and keeping new teachers. *Journal of School Leadership*, *17*(6), 664–698. https://doi.org/10.1177 /105268460701700601

Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., & Rockoff, J. E. (2014). Measuring the impacts of teachers I: Evaluating bias in theacher value-added estimates. *The American Economic Review*, *104*(9), 2633–2679.

Clandinin, D. J., Long, J., Schaefer, L., Downey, C. A., Steeves, P., Pinnegar, E., Wnuk, S. (2015). Early career teacher attrition : intentions of teachers beginning. *Teaching Education*, *26*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2014.996746

Cochran-Smith, M. (2004). Editorial taking stock in 2004 teacher education in dangerous times. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *55*(1), 3–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487103261227

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The sage handbook of qualitative reserach* (5th Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication Inc.

Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *22*(2), 219–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/ j.tate.2005.09.002

Fontaine, S., & Kane, R. (2012). New teachers ' career intentions: Factors influencing new teachers ' decisions to stay or to leave the profession. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *57*(4), 379–408.

Geiger, T., & Pivovarova, M. (2018). The effects of working conditions on teacher retention. *Teachers and Teaching*, *24*(6), 604–625. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1457524

GNAT & TEWU. (2009). *Teacher attrition in Ghana: Results of a questionnaire survey, 2009*.Accra.

Gomba, C. (2015). Why Do They Stay : Factors influencing teacher retention in rural zimbabwe. *International Journal of Instruction*, *8*(2), 55–68. https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2015.825a

Guarino, C. M., Santibanez, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research*, *76*(2), 173–208.

Hancock, C. B., & Scherff, L. (2010). Who will stay and who will leave? Predicting secondary english teacher attrition risk. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *61*(4), 328–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487110372214

Hanushek, E. A., Kain, J. F., & Rivkin, S. G. (2004). Why public schools lose teachers. *Journal of Human Resources*, *39*(2), 326–354. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.xxxix.2.326

Harrell, P. E., Thompson, R., Brooks, K., & Harrell, P. E. (2019). Leaving schools behind: The impact of school student body and working conditions on teacher retention and migration. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *30*(2), 144–158. https://doi.org/10.1080/1046560X.2018.1538300

Hughes, G. D. (2012). Teacher retention: teacher characteristics, school characteristics, organizational characteristics, and teacher efficacy. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *105*(4), 245–255. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2011.584922

Imazeki, J. (2005). Teacher salaries and teacher attrition. *Economic of Education Review*, *24*, 431–449. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2004.07.014

Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(3), 499–534. Retrieved from http://hdl.library.upenn.edu/1017/13673

Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. M. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, *60*(8), 30–33.

Jungert, T., Alm, F., & Thornberg, R. (2014). Motives for becoming a teacher and their relations to academic engagement and dropout among student teachers. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *40*(2), 173–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2013.869971

Kelchtermans, G. (2017). Should I stay or should I go?: Unpacking teacher attrition / retention as an educational issue. *Teachers and Teaching*, *0602*, 1470–1278. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1379793

Kokka, K. (2016). Urban Teacher Longevity: What keeps teachers of color in one under-resourced urban school? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *59*, 169–179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.05.014

Kukla-Acevedo, S., & Kukla-Acevedo, S. (2009). Teacher Mobility Decisions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *102*(6), 443–452. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.102.6.443-452

Lindqvist, P., & Karin, U. (2016). Already elsewhere - A study of (skilled) teachers ' choice to leave teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *54*, 88–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.010

McIntyre, J. (2010). Why they sat still: The ideas and values of long-serving teachers in challenging inner-city schools in England. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *16*(5), 595–614. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2010.507968

Ministry of Education (MoE). (2004). *Eritrean national curriculum framewrok*. Asmara, Eritrea.

Ministry of Education (MoE). (2018). *Eritrea education sector plan*. Asmara, Eritrea.

Ministry of Education (MoE). (2009). *National educational policy*. Asmara, Eritrea.

Ministry of Education (MoE). (2012). *MOE position paper on teacher education & development*. Asmara, Eritrea.

Mulkeen, A. (2010). *Teachers in Anglophone Africa: Issues in Teacher Supply, Training and Management*. Washington DC, USA. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8053-6

Mulkeen, A., Chapman, D. W., Dejaeghere, J. G., Elizabeth Leu, & Bryner, K. (2005). *Recruiting , retaining , and retraining secondary school teachers and principals in Sub-Saharan Africa academy for educational development* (No. Working Paper Series 2005/#3). Washington DC. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-7066-7

Olsen, B. B. (2008). For entry into the profession illuminate teacher identity development. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *35*, 23–40.

Peters, J., & Pearce, J. (2012). Theory and practice relationships and early career teacher resilience: A role for school principals, *0602*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.632266

Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educ*, *50*(1), 4–36. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212463813

Schaefer, L., Long, J. S., & Clandinin, D. J. (2012). Questioning the research on early career teacher attrition and retention. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *58*(1), 106–121.

Stockard, J., & Lehman, M. B. (2004). Influences on the satisfaction and retention of 1st-year teachers: The importance of effective school management. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *40*(5), 742–771. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X04268844

Towers, E., & Maguire, M. (2017). Leaving or staying in teaching: A 'vignette' of an experienced urban teacher 'leaver' of a London primary school. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *23*(8), 946–960. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1358703

UNESCO-UIS. (2013). *A teacher for every child: Projecting global teacher needs from 2015 to 2030*. Paris.

Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2012). An introduction to teaching motivations in different countries: Comparisons using the FIT-choice scale. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *40*(3), 185–197. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2012.700049

Watts, J. (2016). An exploration of teacher retention in rural school districts in eastern Kentucky. Theses and Dissertations-- Education Science. 13 http://dx.doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2016.212

Worth, J., Lazzari, G. De, & Hillary, J. (2017). *Teacher retention and turnover research : Interim Report*. Slough, UK. Retrieved from www.nfer.ac.uk

Author Information

Petros Woldu Fessehatsion

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4227-6737

HuaZhong University of Science and Technology

P. O. Box 1037 Louyu Road, 430074 Wuhan

China

Pai Peng

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2823-440X

HuaZhong University of Science and Technology

P. O. Box 1037 Louyu Road, 430074 Wuhan

China

Contact e-mail: *pengpai@hust.edu.cn*