



TEACHER ATTRITION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The purpose of the article was to examine the way female principals experienced teacher attrition in their schools. The purpose about this study was not to generalise but to better understand how female principals experienced teacher attrition. The main question that this article wanted to understand was: What are the causes of teacher attrition in public schools?" The study was conducted in the Tshwane West District of Gauteng Province. The Tshwane West District is one of the fifteen districts of Gauteng Province, situated to the West of Pretoria. Qualitative approach was used, and method of data collected was through interviews. Fourteen (14) female school principals were selected as key informants who could provide information on teacher attrition. Of the fourteen female principals, nine (9) were primary school principals and five secondary school principals. These participants were chosen because they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about teacher attrition. Analysis: Data was coded, and it was ensured that data that corresponded to the codes which were identified as the analysis was done. Patterns and themes emerged as the coding continued. Then interpretive paradigm was used to understand the participants experiences. It was found that the cause of teacher attrition was due to factors beyond the control of the schools such as legislation, technology, economy, retirement, dismissals, and redundancies in schools.

Keywords: *Retirement, resignation, dismissals, attrition, female principal.*

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Introduction

The purpose of the article was to examine the way female principals experienced teacher attrition in their schools. The purpose of this paper was to better understand how female principals experienced teacher attrition. The study was conducted in the Tshwane West District of Gauteng Province. The Tshwane West District is one of the fifteen districts of Gauteng Province, situated to the West of Pretoria. The question that was asked is” What are the causes of teacher attrition in public schools?”.

The teacher shortage and its spatial and temporal dimensions have been a persistent problem in the education sector for many years. It is not just a problem of a shortage of educational resources in the education sector but also a problem of the spatial and temporal distribution of these resources, which affect student achievement and teacher attrition. The student-teacher rate could be used as a key indicator to measure the spatiotemporal disparity in teacher supply and demand (Wu & Zhang, 2024).

Teacher shortages, and the widespread reports about teacher salaries could worsen teacher morale, and persistent student enrollment declines might be factors that discourage teacher to stay in schools. It is assumed that teacher compensation reform, could be a critical factor to minimise teacher turnover and attrition. The strategy to circumvent teacher attrition could be through an inflation-adjusted public school teachers’ salary (Cameron- Anglum et al., 2024). Karnovsky and Gobby (2024) found that the wellbeing of teachers is a growing concern internationally. They think that teachers’ work is increasingly complex and demanding. This is the case with teachers in Tshwane West District of Gauteng Province.

Literature Review

Effective educational leadership becomes a more relevant and necessary condition for developing and sustaining school improvement processes in low-performing schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged students. It is expected that school principals would drive and sustain improvements by creating sustainable career pathways for teachers. Although leadership stretches across various stakeholders and positions in a school, the principal’s leadership is crucial to initiating and controlling teacher attrition (Kuzmanic et al., 2024)

Rocque et al., (2024) found that despite the critical role of teachers, they often face a lack of appreciation, inadequate compensation, and a general undervaluation of their profession. Both a high attrition rate and lack of expertise negatively affect the educational outcomes of students (Barnett & Huang, 2024). Teacher attrition and mobility could result in a loss of

schools' social capital, especially if experienced and competent teachers decide to leave schools and their job. When these teachers leave, social ties and networks of support collapse, which could result in loss of knowledge in schools with negative impacts on student achievement (Van Eycken et al., 2024).

The role of principals in shaping and maintaining a healthy school culture is necessary because the lack of positive interactions, feeling undervalued, and a perceived absence of support from school principals could lead to teacher attrition (Marino, 2024). Teacher burnout because of additional tasks, such as the teaching of additional lessons with additional preparation requirements, could negatively impact teachers' wellbeing and this might lead to teacher attrition (Selland, 2024). Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal job stressors. If teachers are expected to be the agents of intervention and if those experiencing burnout are possibly doing so at low levels of fidelity, this could result in negligible, null, or even harmful effects on stakeholders in schools (Deger et al., 2024).

Marino (2024), found that public schools are faced with the challenge of a growing number of teachers choosing to leave the profession every year, leaving schools struggling to recruit and retain qualified teachers. Negative school culture contributes to teachers' job dissatisfaction, which is among the primary reasons behind teachers' decisions to leave and dissuade others from joining the profession. Relationships and interactions among teacher-student, colleagues, school leaders, and other workers in the school workplace is one of the building blocks of teacher well-being. Possessing positive social relationships among those parties can increase the quality of teachers' well-being. However, social dynamics in the workplace could cause friction among those parties. This could lead to depersonalization then causing them to experience burnout, and in some cases job attrition (Fauzan et al., 2024). Attrition is a natural occurrence within all professions.

There are different types of teacher attrition such as voluntary attrition, involuntary attrition, retirement attrition, internal attrition, and demographic specific attrition. The causes of teacher attrition amongst others could be the result of low salary, poor working condition, leadership style and rural posting of teachers (Ineye-Briggs, 2024).

Mishra, et al., (2024) found that there are numerous factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave their jobs. These may include job satisfaction, work-life balance, career advancement opportunities, organizational culture, and compensation.

Barber and Literat (2024) are of the opinion that teacher attrition is a complex issue shaped by individuals and contextual circumstances, but often reflective of the characteristics of teachers' perceived working conditions in schools. Teachers who leave schools are dictated by the contexts in schools and they finally make their decisions to leave. Media coverage suggests that schools would be facing a critical dearth of teachers due to teacher attrition. Teachers' mental and physical health are affected, and this could drive them to leave the profession. Symptoms that teachers might display due to fatigue are headaches, insomnia, panic attacks, eating disorders, gastrointestinal issues and kidney and heart problems (Barber & Literat, 2024).

Nerlino (2024) believe that teachers are the most critical school-level variables impacting student achievement in schools. Teachers' widespread perception of a lack of support from their school principals lead to their feelings that the schools' working conditions made their circumstances worse. Teachers' perceptions about their working conditions could be an overwhelming negative experience on their teaching activities. Also, teachers could experience the effects of issues related to demoralization and lack of voice in decision-making capacity when it comes to issues within the realms of their work.

Teacher attrition would always be a challenge because changes in financial incentives are always paired with other changes that may also influence exit behavior of teachers, e.g., adjustments to age and service retirement eligibility thresholds being revised. Teachers' responsiveness to traditional *pension plans and financial incentives* could suffer from this issue. To overcome this challenge could be by focusing on reforms that could substantially change financial incentives that would be consistent with teachers' retirement plans (Goldhaber et al., 2024).

Method

Data collection

The data collection for this study utilized a qualitative research approach, with semi-structured interviews serving as the main method for gathering in-depth insights. This approach allowed for flexibility during the interviews, enabling participants to share detailed and nuanced perspectives while still guiding the conversation around the core topic of teacher attrition. Fourteen female school principals were purposively selected as key informants, chosen specifically for their expertise and likely deep understanding of the issues surrounding teacher attrition in public schools. The purposive sampling method ensured that only individuals with

relevant experience and knowledge were included, which increased the likelihood of obtaining meaningful and accurate data.

The sample included nine principals from primary schools and five from secondary schools, representing a balanced mix that would offer a comprehensive view of the factors influencing teacher retention across different educational levels. The selection of both primary and secondary school principals was intentional, as it provided a broader understanding of how teacher attrition might differ depending on the school setting and the unique challenges each educational level presents. This careful participant selection added credibility to the research, as these principals were not only in leadership positions but also directly involved in managing teachers and dealing with the day-to-day realities of teacher turnover. Their positions allowed them to provide rich, experiential insights into the systemic, institutional, and personal factors that contribute to teacher attrition in their schools. Throughout the study, the participants' experiences were interpreted using an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on understanding how individuals construct meaning from their experiences. This paradigm was critical to the study's objectives, as it allowed for a deeper exploration of the subjective realities of the principals. The interpretive approach enabled the researcher to grasp how these school leaders perceived teacher attrition, its causes, and its impact on their institutions, as well as how they navigated and responded to these challenges within their specific contexts.

Data analysis

For data analysis, the collected information was systematically coded to ensure that the data aligned with the identified categories and themes that were developed during the process. Each piece of data was meticulously examined and assigned to specific codes, which were designed to capture the essence of the participants' responses. This coding process allowed the researcher to organize the data in a structured way and facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and themes. As coding progressed, these patterns and themes began to surface more clearly, revealing insights into common issues, concerns, and experiences related to teacher attrition. The continuous refinement of the codes ensured that all relevant data was captured and categorized appropriately, aiding in a deeper understanding of the key factors influencing teacher turnover in public schools.

To further interpret the findings, an interpretive paradigm was applied, which emphasized understanding the subjective experiences and perspectives of the participants. This approach was particularly useful in exploring how the female principals, as key informants, perceived

and made sense of teacher attrition in their respective schools. The interpretive framework enabled the researcher to delve into the meanings the participants assigned to their experiences, providing a richer and more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics behind teacher attrition.

Findings

The names of the participants provided are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. There are different types of teacher attrition, for example, voluntary and involuntary teacher attrition. Teacher attrition may occur in the form of resignation, retirement, Ill-health and death, transfer and redeployment, and dismissal.

Teacher attrition may occur in the form of resignation which is classified as voluntary. In this article the term resignation will refer to the teacher when terminating their employment contract voluntarily.

Resignation

Data revealed that all the participants experienced teachers' attrition through resignation, as reported by participants. The pseudonyms used below are to protect the identity of the participants and the names used are not the participants' real names.

"Ohh, resignation is the most thing I have experienced". (Doris)

"I have experienced teachers leaving the school because they wanted to do what we call withdrawal, they resigned". (Adelaide)

"I experienced resignations because now it's on fashion because people need to cash up their pensions". (Mavis)

In addition, another participant said the following about resignation:

"Luckily at my school they are not really leaving the school. So, I am very thankful and privileged. I am thankful for that". (Cathy).

Participants also indicated that teachers resign in order to have access to their pension funds to ensure that they have ready money:

I think the reason is monetary gains. They wanted to cash their pension. I think in this case, you know, educators are pressed for money. That's what I'm thinking because I know of one who just wanted to get the pension fund, so that she can beautify her house and thereafter she went back to teaching.
(Mercy)

Yes, monetary problems because all of them went back to the system except for one. But all of them raising monetary challenges. They wanted to have cash to do all these, whatever they were experiencing. It was just voluntarily. I think you know that system of teachers leaving the system for financial gain and coming back to the system also. (Gemma)

Alice explained what happened with many teachers:

It is because they wanted to get their money and come back to the system, so all of them those who resigned, and they are back in the different schools, teaching.

Retirement

Teachers generally retire and stop teaching when they reach the retirement age. Normal retirement in the education system in South Africa takes place in the year that a teacher turns 65, but teachers can retire as early as 55 years of age.

The data revealed that participants had teachers who left the schools due to retirement.

those were the only three who left the school through pension (retirement), (Daisy).

I think retirements are two. (Gemma).

[Laughing]. Those who went on pension I can safely say about four. (Mercy)

It is apparent from the above evidence that teachers retire because they have reached the retirement age of 65 years. There is nothing the participants can do except to let the teacher leave because the Department does not allow teacher to serve beyond retirement age. The finding aligns with literature (RSA,1998), that compulsory retirement age is 65 years. Optional retirement age is from 55 years and thus teachers may take early retirement at that age. The data presented above also showed that there were no teachers who took early retirement.

Ill-health and death

Let me start with those who start by being sick. The participant said:

“Then the person will be sick for a week, and then you know you have a hope because you can’t substitute such a teacher. Then you just substitute internally, just say okay mam so and so, Mr: so and so will be coming in but mam so and so this week she is not in then according to the doctor’s note

it's up to maybe Friday. Then you are expecting the teacher to come back on Monday, come Monday, no, another extension of another week. Then you are just waiting, what about the learners. Because you cannot, even you take teachers to say no substitute this class, substitute, it's just a monitoring it's not substitution per se where they are going to teach those classes".
(Victoria).

In addition to the teachers who take short sick leave, some teachers become sick for an extended time, as indicated by the participants below:

"Ohh, the last one was in 2018, she was sick for a long time. (Letia)

"the latest one that left, was ill, ehh, you know he was frequently absent because she was on PILIR (long leave)". (Mavis)

"But at this point in time, we have a teacher who has been on sick leave since 2016 (PILIR). Ehhm thus far that's the most worrying also had quite a number of teachers who went on sick leave, long period, sick leave. Five so far". (Anna)

"She came to our school in 2015, and ever since, she has been on and off, on and off and in and out of the hospital". (Kate)

When teachers have to be medically boarded due to ill-health, the Department processes the paperwork, which takes time, causing a delay that makes it difficult to find a replacement.

"I have a teacher who has been sick for a long time. I am waiting for the approval letter from the province. Letter from Gauteng province to release the teacher. So, everything, paperwork, was done but the only problem is that the province is very slow in doing things, it takes long for them to solve some other problems. So, all in all, we believe they will send that as soon as possible but I've been waiting". (Hazel)

The data showed that it is not only the Department that delays the process of appointments but also the doctors of the teachers who are sick, as they take time to complete the necessary forms needed to start the process of appointing another teacher or a substitute teacher.

"In the case of long sick leave, we experience delays because doctors are giving us a hard time in getting those forms and without that form, you cannot appoint a teacher. You need to have those forms for you to submit to the District office. It's then that they can allow you to appoint but it depends

on an individual doctor, medical doctor as to how they interact with those forms". (Fiona)

In some cases, teachers who are sick and have been on extended sick leave do not recover and pass on. This is reported by the participants below:

"I had two teachers who passed on, they were both not well". (Fiona)

I lost two teachers in the same month on consecutive days. And all of them it was death. (Iris)

I experienced only one death case. A female teacher. She got sick just for a short time and she passed on. (Nancy)

Iris was able to disclose the cause of the passing of two teachers at her school:

All of them was death through stress. Uhhh, it was hectic. Uhhh, I didn't take it well. So, it was a difficult moment, to lose such people and then finding out afterwards that it was eh financial stress related.

Transfer and Redeployment

Transfer and redeployment are some of the factors that influence teacher attrition. Transfer tends to be a voluntary action which is sought by the teachers. This is what participants said:

Ehhmmm, teachers that left the school through transfer, actually, two teachers got cross transfers, the first one is staying next to the school where she went to. (Elsa)

Ja, I just experienced one teacher who left on transfer, [silence] whom maybe eh, had a challenge with her peers, they did not see eye to eye and then I advised her not to resign, I then sat down with her and advised her to do a cross transfer and she agreed and left.

Fiona showed her caring nature by advising one of her teachers, who seemed to be unhappy, not to resign but to consider taking a cross transfer. This meant cross transferring with another teacher who was working in a school close to where Fiona's teacher lived, so this transfer would be a convenient one for her.

Judy had a teacher who was moved to another schools through redeployment. She explained that:

So, we actually sat with her personally and put her in excess. She was currently put to another school where there is a need for her subject.

Elsa explained that identifying only one person out of the whole staff for deployment was difficult and something she did not relish doing:

“I only experienced it once, while I have been here at this school, to declare a teacher in excess, that to me was very difficult. I lost a teacher once at this school through redeployment. It was 2011 beginning of 2012. We had to lose one teacher and that is so difficult because if you must start to think of your teachers who do you want to declare in excess. So, it’s not a nice experience. But that was the first and the last time I had to declare somebody in excess I did not appreciate that, but you know you have your SMT support to say it wasn’t my decision alone we collectively came to decide that this is the teacher.” (Elsa)

The above-mentioned findings are supported by Fauzan et al., (2024), who found that social dynamics in the workplace could cause friction among those parties involved. This could lead to depersonalization then causing them to experience burnout, and in some cases job attrition.

Dismissal

Only one participant reported having a teacher who was dismissed due to incapacity. This is how Judy explained the situation:

“Ehh, so since my appointment last year we had ehhe, one teacher who had a disciplinary hearing, ehhe, he was not performing and as a principal, what can I say, the expectations of the Department and my own, I would like the school to become the best school in this area. So ehhe, we are looking at teacher performance, so we had a hearing, and he was dismissed after a hearing.”

Maria, as the principal is responsible for the quality and effectiveness of the school, had reason to dismiss a teacher due to incapacity. Dismissing a teacher in this manner must follow set procedures and there are protocols that need to be observed, as Maria further mentioned:

“Ehh, there is a few that I would like to leave, ehhe, that we are working on because for me as a principal, I want the best teacher in the class. I did not appoint them, I inherited them. They are struggling with discipline; we have done intervention. They are Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), so I also involved the district, ehhe but you know how the district works. It’s you know hearing, development, another hearing so it’s going to take time, but

I have currently four people that I actually would like to leave but, that is a process". (Maria)

Discussion

Resignation

Resignation refers to when the employee terminates his/her employment contract out of his/her own accord. Data revealed that all the participants experienced teachers leaving their employment through resignation, as reported by participants:

"Ohh, resignation is the most thing I have experienced ". (Yvonne).

The experience of Yvonne is real because it is supported by Goldhaber et al., (2024) who found that teacher attrition would always be a challenge because changes in financial incentives would always influence exit behavior of teachers. Teachers' responsiveness to their pension plans financial incentives could suffer from this issue. To overcome this challenge could be by focusing on reforms that could change financial incentives that would be consistent with teachers' retirement plans and wishes (Goldhaber et al., 2024).

"I have experienced teachers leaving the school because they wanted to do what we call withdrawal, they resigned". (Alice)

"I experienced resignations because now it's on fashion because people need to cash up their pensions" (Fiona).

The assertion by Alice is supported by Rocque, Goswami, et al., (2024) who found that despite the critical role of teachers, they are forced to resign to get pay-out of their pension because of inadequate compensation. Both a high attrition rate and lack of expertise negatively affect the educational outcomes of schools (Barnett & Huang, 2024).

In addition, another participant said the following about resignation:

"Luckily at my school they are not really leaving the school. So, I am very thankful and privileged. I am thankful for that". (Cathy).

Cathy's response to the question showed that she regards her school as blessed because not many teachers resign and leave the school. She further regards herself and the school as being in a fortunate position regarding staffing. Mishra et al., (2024) found that there are numerous factors that contribute to teachers' decisions to leave their jobs.

In many cases, teachers resign to cash in or withdraw their pension. This may be influenced by the fact that teachers are in debt, and they need additional finances to settle their debts. One

other issue might be that teachers are no longer happy in their job. When teachers are unhappy, they are likely to resign and look for something better elsewhere.

The data revealed that some of the teachers left their work because they had financial problems thus, they left their positions to cash in their pension, to attend to their financial challenges or crisis.

Retirement

Teachers generally retire and stop teaching when they reach the retirement age. Normal retirement in the education system in South Africa takes place in the year that a teacher turns 65, but teachers can retire as early as 55 years of age.

The data revealed that participants had teachers who left the schools due to retirement.

„(...)those were the only three who left the school through pension.”

(retirement) (Daisy).

“I think retirements are two”. (Gemma).

[Laughing]. *“Those who went on pension I can safely say about four”*.

(Mercy)

Attrition is a natural occurrence within all professions and can be the result of retirement, family responsibilities, relocation, mobility, and health (Bradenburg et al., 2024). Also, Rocque, et al. (2024) found that despite the critical role of teachers, they often face a lack of appreciation, inadequate compensation, and a general undervaluation of their profession.

It is apparent from the above evidence that teachers retire because they have reached the retirement age of 65 years. There is nothing the participants can do except to let the teacher leave because the Department does not allow teacher to serve beyond retirement age. The finding aligns with literature (RSA,1998), that compulsory retirement age is 65 years. Optional retirement age is from 55 years and thus teachers may take early retirement at that age. The data presented above also showed that there were no teachers who took early retirement.

Ill-health and death

“Let me start with those who start by being sick. Then the person will be sick for a week, and then you know you have a hope because you can’t substitute such a teacher. Then you just substitute internally, just say okay mam so and so, Mr. so and so will be coming in but mam so and so this week she is not in then according to the doctor’s note it’s up to maybe Friday.

Then you are expecting the teacher to come back on Monday, come Monday, no, another extension of another week. Then you are just waiting, what about the learners. Because you cannot, even you take teachers to say no substitute this class, substitute, it's just a monitoring it's not substitution per se where they are going to teach those classes". (Nancy).

The finding is supported by Barber and Literat (2024), who are of the opinion that teacher attrition is a complex issue shaped by individuals and contextual circumstances, but often reflective of the characteristics of teachers perceived working conditions in schools.

In addition to the teachers who take short sick leave, some teachers become sick for an extended time, as indicated by the participants below:

"Ohh, the last one was in 2018, she was sick for a long time. (Nancy)

„(...)the latest one that left, was ill, ehh, you know he was frequently absent because she was on PILIR (long leave)". (Judy)

"But at this point in time, we have a teacher who has been on sick leave since 2016 (PILIR). Ehhm thus far that's the most worrying also had quite a number of teachers who went on sick leave, long period, sick leave. Five so far". (Betty)

"She came to our school in 2015, and ever since, she has been on and off, on and off and in and out of the hospital". (Fiona)

Fiona's assertion is in line with Barber and Literat (2024) who maintain that teachers' mental and physical health are affected and this could drive them to leave the profession.

When teachers have to be medically boarded due to ill-health, the Department processes the paperwork, which takes time, causing a delay that makes it difficult to find a replacement.

"I have a teacher who has been sick for a long time. I am waiting for the approval letter from the province. Letter from Gauteng province to release the teacher. So, everything, paperwork, was done but the only problem is that the province is very slow in doing things, it takes long for them to solve some other problems. So, all in all, we believe they will send that as soon as possible but I've been waiting". (Hazel)

The data showed that it is not only the Department that delays the process of appointments but also the doctors of the teachers who are sick, as they take time to complete the necessary forms needed to start the process of appointing another teacher or a substitute teacher.

In the case of long sick leave, we experience delays because doctors are giving us a hard time in getting those forms and without that form, you cannot appoint a teacher. You need to have those forms for you to submit to the district office. It's then that they can allow you to appoint but it depends on an individual doctor, medical doctor as to how they interact with those forms. (Fiona)

In some cases, teachers who are sick and have been on extended sick leave do not recover and pass on. This is reported by the participants below:

"I had two teachers who passed on, they were both not well". (Fiona)

"I lost two teachers in the same month on consecutive days. And all of them it was death". (Iris)

"I experienced only one death case. A female teacher. She got sick just for a short time and she passed on". (Nancy)

Iris was able to disclose the cause of the passing of two teachers at her school:

All of them was death through stress. Uhhh, it was hectic. Uhhh, I didn't take it well. So, it was a difficult moment, to lose such people and then finding out afterwards that it was ehh stress related.

Transfer and Redeployment

Transfer and redeployment are some of the factors that influence teacher attrition. Transfer tends to be a voluntary action which is sought by the teachers. This is what participants said:

"Ehhmmm, teachers that left the school through transfer, actually, two teachers got cross transfers, the first one is staying next to the school where she went to. (Elsa)"; "Ja, I just experienced one teacher who left on transfer, [silence] whom maybe ehhh, had a challenge with her peers, they did not see eye to eye and then I advised her not to resign, I then sat down with her and advised her to do a cross transfer and she agreed and left". (Fiona)

Fiona showed her caring nature by advising one of her teachers, who seemed to be unhappy, not to resign but to consider taking a cross transfer. This meant cross transferring with another teacher who was working in a school close to where Fiona's teacher lived, so this transfer would be a convenient one for her.

Judy had a teacher who was moved to another schools through redeployment. She explained that:

So, we actually sat with her personally and put her in excess. She was currently put to another school where there is a need for her subject.

Emile explained that identifying only one person out of the whole staff for deployment was difficult and something she did not relish doing:

“I only experienced it once, while I have been here at this school, to declare a teacher in excess, that to me was very difficult. I lost a teacher once at this school through redeployment. It was 2011 beginning of 2012. We had to lose one teacher and that is so difficult because if you must start to think of your teachers who do you want to declare in excess. So, it’s not a nice experience. But that was the first and the last time I had to declare somebody in excess I did not appreciate that, but you know you have your SMT support to say it wasn’t my decision alone we collectively came to decide that this is the teacher” (Emile).

The above-mentioned findings are supported by Marino (2024), who found that public schools are faced with the challenge of a growing number of teachers choosing to leave the profession every year, leaving schools struggling to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

Dismissal

Only one participant reported having a teacher who was dismissed due to incapacity. This is how Judy explained the situation:

“Ehh, so since my appointment last year we had ehhe, one teacher who had a disciplinary hearing, ehhe, he was not performing and as a principal, what can I say, the expectations of the Department and my own, I would like the school to become the best school in this area. So ehhe, we are looking at teacher performance, so we had a hearing, and he was dismissed after a hearing. Teachers’ mental and physical health are affected, and this could drive them to leave the profession” (Cathy).

For example, this assertion by Cathy is supported by Barber and Literat (2024), who found that the symptoms that teachers might display due to fatigue are headaches, insomnia, panic attacks, eating disorders, gastrointestinal issues and kidney and heart problems.

Judy, as the principal is responsible for the quality and effectiveness of the school, had reason to dismiss a teacher due to incapacity. Dismissing a teacher in this manner must follow set procedures and there are protocols that need to be observed, as Judy further mentioned:

Ehh, there is a few that I would like to leave, ehh, that we are working on because for me as a principal, I want the best teacher in the class. I did not appoint them, I inherited them. They are struggling with discipline; we have done intervention. They are Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), so I also involved the district, ehh but you know how the district works. It's you know hearing, development, another hearing so it's going to take time, but I have currently four people that I actually would like to leave but, that is a process.

The above-mentioned findings are supported by Wu and Zhang (2024), who found that the student-teacher rate could be used as a key indicator to measure the spatiotemporal disparity in teacher supply and demand.

Conclusion

Teacher attrition in public schools poses a significant challenge to the stability and effectiveness of educational institutions. A variety of factors contribute to teacher attrition, many of which are beyond the direct control of schools. These factors include legislative changes, technological advancements, economic conditions, retirement, dismissals, and redundancies within schools. Each of these influences can lead to teachers leaving the profession or moving to different schools, disrupting the continuity of instruction and institutional knowledge. One of the critical consequences of teacher attrition is the potential loss of a school's social capital. When experienced and competent teachers leave, schools lose valuable expertise, mentoring capacity, and the relationships that these teachers have built with students and the broader school community. This erosion of social capital can affect school performance, morale, and the quality of education. As such, addressing teacher attrition requires a multifaceted approach that considers both external and internal factors influencing teacher retention.

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