



Tanzanian Head Teachers' Coping Strategies in Situations of Critical Shortages of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

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Abstract

The government effort to expand secondary schooling in Tanzania has resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of secondary schools. However, this positive achievement has resulted in a critical shortage of both teaching and non-teaching staff. Yet, despite this shortage, schools continue to operate and many students are attending and completing their secondary education. This paper presents the qualitative findings of a study of the coping strategies used by head teachers in situations of critical shortages of teaching and non-teaching staff, which enable them to continue to offer teaching and learning services. The paper also discusses the implications of the strategies used in the teaching and learning process. The study was conducted in ten secondary schools in the Temeke District, Dar es salaam region. The study sample was selected using purposeful, simple random sampling techniques and convenience sampling strategies, and included 10 head teachers, 1 District Educational Officer, 70 teachers and 12 non-teaching staff. The findings suggest that, in the studied schools there was an acute shortage of teachers and non-teaching staff, and that the head teachers cope by: (1) overloading the existing staff by assigning them multiple responsibilities; (2) leaving some duties neglected; (3) assigning roles to staff members who are unqualified to perform them; and (4) recruiting form six graduates to serve as part-time teachers. On the basis of these findings, the researcher proposed ways forward for minimizing the shortage of staff and the negative consequences of the mechanisms used in situations of acute shortage of staff to facilitate the teaching and learning processes.

Introduction

The launch of the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) in 2004 contributed greatly to increasing access to secondary education in Tanzania.

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The evidence suggests that the number of secondary school rose from 937 in 2001 to 4367 in 2011, whereas the total enrolment in government secondary schools rose from 829,094 in 2007 to 1,515,671 in 2011 (United Republic of Tanzania URT 2011). To achieve the goal of Universal Secondary Education, this increase in the number of students and secondary schools is required to go hand in hand with an increase in human and physical resources. Regarding human resources, the data at the national level are convincing, suggesting that the number of teachers in public secondary schools increased from 14,352 (Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) 1:20) in 2001 to 39,934 (PTR 1:38) in 2011 (URT 2011). Looking at individual regions, the data are also convincing, whereby the PTR ranges from 1:26 to 1:46 (URT 2011). Indeed, these data suggest that the country is not experiencing problems in terms of number of teachers. Yet, the situation in individual schools is alarming. The various evidence from the newspapers, politicians and activists' speeches and reports (see, for example, Hakielimu 2007 and Tanzania Media Women's Association TAMWA 2012) and researchers (see, for example, Mwaipopo 2010) suggests that a number of the newly established community secondary schools are operating under an acute shortage of teaching staff, to the extent that some schools have only one or two teachers. Hence, by comparing the national data with the schools' evidence, one can argue that the teachers have been poorly distributed and that some schools, especially those located in urban areas, have more teachers than their rural counterparts.

It is worth remembering that a school performs both teaching and non-teaching activities, and that the non-teaching activities provide support and expertise for mainstreaming the performance process of an educational organization. Hence, this suggests the need to recognise the crucial roles performed by non-teaching staff in enhancing the teaching and learning process. The government of Tanzania recognises the need for non-teaching staff in educational organizations and has clearly stated that these include: registrars, typists, accountants, laboratory technicians, matrons, secretaries, cooks, watchmen, drivers, janitors, and cleaners (URT 1997). The government went further to specify the ratio of non-teaching staff in schools, stating that schools with no less than 320 students are required to have: three registrars, two typists, one accountant, four laboratory technicians, one matron, one secretary, five cooks (for boarding schools), two watchmen, one driver, and three janitors. However, despite this commitment, in most cases, the public secondary schools are experiencing an inadequate number or lack of non-teaching staff, which suggests that the necessity for these in schools is, in most cases, being ignored. Indeed, the government does not prioritize the need to recruit and employ an adequate number of non-teaching staff in

secondary schools. This tendency means that the teachers are expected to perform both the teaching and non-teaching activities. Given the shortage of teachers in schools, engaging teachers in non-teaching activities means overloading them and affecting their effectiveness in performing their teaching activities. Yet, despite the existing shortage of both teaching and non-teaching staff, the evidence suggests that school activities are proceeding and that many students are attending and completing their education. It is against this backdrop that the present inquiry attempts to explore how the head teachers are coping and providing services in situations of acute shortage of teaching and non-teaching staff in secondary schools.

Research purpose and questions

The overall goal of the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) is to increase the proportion of Tanzania youths completing secondary education with acceptable learning outcomes. However, the assessment of the achievement of this plan suggests that one of the key challenges facing it is the acute shortage of teachers in the newly established schools. A lack of sufficient teachers has become a concern among politicians, parents, activists and government leaders, and raises doubt on the quality of the form four students who are graduating from these schools. Indeed, it has been noted that the mass failure at secondary school is attributable, to a great extent, to the shortage of teachers in ward secondary schools. Several members of the public media and researchers have identified various schools with a lot of students but with only one to three teachers, who are expected to teach all subjects from forms one to four and perform all of the schools' responsibilities (see, for example, a report by the Tanzanian Media Women's Association, TAMWA 2012). Nevertheless, despite this shortage, school activities continue, and students are graduating from school. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to explore the strategies used by head teachers to manage their schools in situations of acute shortage of teachers and to determine the implications of the strategies used for the teaching and learning processes employed in the schools. This study specifically sought to provide answers to three research questions: (1) Is the number of teaching and non-teaching staff adequate in schools? (2) How do the head teachers cope with the critical shortage of teaching and non-teaching staff? (3) What is the implication of the coping strategies used for the teaching and learning processes employed in schools?

Review of the Related Literature

The head teachers are very important in facilitating the teaching and learning processes in schools. They are expected to perform various functions, including to: (1) oversee the main and non main streaming tasks in schools; (2) ensure that the schools perform their role of teaching and learning; (3) interpret and monitor the implementation of educational policies at their level of administration; and (4) lead, monitor and evaluate curriculum implementation. The head teachers are instructional leaders, whose key role is to ensure that the teaching and learning processes are proceeding according to the envisaged national educational objectives. However, the heads of the school on their own cannot effectively facilitate the achievement of the instructional goals in the school. Among other things, they need adequate, committed and competent teaching and non-teaching staff.

The teaching staff are responsible for providing the teaching and learning services in schools. The literature holds that the quality of these services depends on the quality of the teaching staff (Clarke 2007). Generally, it is argued that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other school-based factor. Acknowledging the crucial roles of teachers, the Tanzanian Education and Training Policy of 1995 stipulates that teachers are the most important actors in education and training, as they are the ones responsible for organizing, guiding and promoting the students' learning (URT, 1995). Teachers are regarded as a processing device, knowledge workers and capital assets, who own the means of production. This suggests that having well qualified, committed and motivated teachers who are provided with a conducive working environment with sufficient teaching tools may result in a positive improvement in pupils' school performance. Apart from teaching, teachers are also expected to perform various administrative roles, like: classroom master; academic and discipline master; counselling and guidance services; introducing school procedures to students in school orientation; and coordinating extra-curricular activities (Campbell & Nystrand 1977). Indeed, the teachers in schools perform leadership, management and teaching roles, which include planning and setting lesson objectives, teaching and managing students' learning, assessing and evaluating students' achievement, developing and managing the relationship with the parents and community members, and managing the school resources (Clarke 2007)

In Tanzania, teachers in secondary schools usually specialize in teaching two subjects. Considering the above general roles of a teacher, it is not expected that teachers will assume several other administrative tasks, such as collecting and keeping students' fees and contributions as well as ordering and supplying equipment. Hence, the non-teaching staff are expected to play very crucial roles in any educational organization and, thus, their roles must be seen within the context of an integral educational system. They are responsible for undertaking all of the non-teaching tasks in schools and hence supporting both the pupils and teachers. By providing support services, the non-teaching staff release the teachers and so allow them to focus more on teaching. Indeed, the non-teaching staff help the teachers to spend more time on issues directly related to teaching and learning. The non-teaching staff play an important role in schools and, as such, their recruitment and management should be streamlined in order to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of the services they render.

Research Methodology

This part presents the methodology of the study and covers the study area, research design, data collection instruments, the sample and the data analysis strategies. The study was conducted in the Temeke District, Dar es Salaam region. In recent times, the district comprises of 38 public secondary schools commonly referred to as ward secondary schools; hence, this provided the researcher with an adequate population from which to select the sample. Within the Temeke district, the data were collected from 10 secondary schools located in rural areas.

The study employed the qualitative research methodology. Data were collected using structured interviews, documents and observation. The documents provided information regarding the number of teachers, students and non-teaching staff. The sample was selected using purposeful, simple random sampling techniques and convenience sampling. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 ward secondary schools. Two criteria were used to select the schools: firstly, schools that had been established between five and six years ago and, secondly, schools located in rural parts of the district. The researcher listed the names of all of the schools with these characteristics and thereafter picked the first ten schools which fall in even numbers. Likewise, the strategy was used to select 70 teachers (seven from each school with more than 10 teachers). Purposive sampling procedures were used to select the district, the District Education Officer (secondary), school heads and non-teaching staff. On the other hand,

the researcher used the convenience sampling strategy to select teachers from those schools that had less than 10 teachers, whereby all of the teachers who were available participated in the study.

The data collected from the interviews were analysed following Miles and Huberman's (1994) model of qualitative data analysis. It follows three steps: firstly, data reduction, which involves re-examining the verbatim transcriptions, then reducing and compressing them; secondly, data display, which involves organizing the summarized information into data display sheets; and, finally, conclusion drawing and verification. The documents and data collected through the observation were analysed using qualitative content analysis. These were used to verify the information collected through the interviews.

Findings and Discussion

The availability of teaching and non-teaching staff

The documents reviewed, the interviews conducted with the heads of school and District Education Officer (secondary) and the observations carried out in the schools indicated that the majority of the studied schools lacked non-teaching staff. The data suggest that, for the ten schools studied, there were only twelve non-teaching staff (4 accountants, three store keepers, two secretaries, one registrar and two office attendants). These data suggest that all of the studied schools lacked laboratory technicians and indeed some had no non-teaching staff at all. However, despite this shortage the schools were expected to perform a number of activities which could have been performed by the non-teaching staff. Regarding the teachers, the finding revealed that the number of teachers was disproportional to the schools' needs and that there was a critical shortage of teachers. The documents suggest that a normal PTR for public secondary schools is 1:40 however, the real situation is as indicated in Table one.

Table 1: Number of Teachers in the studied schools

School	Number of Teachers	No of students	PTR
S1	13	1110	1:85
S2	8	1300	1:62
S3	31	1561	1:50
S4	10	1600	1:160
S5	10	1341	1:134

S6	39	1385	1:36
S7	13	1720	1:132
S8	28	1600	1:57
S9	6	850	1:142
S10	22	1403	1: 63
Total	180	13870	1:77

As indicated in table one, some schools had a ratio of up to 1:160. Hence, this finding suggests that the schools were suffering from a critical shortage of teachers.

The coping strategies used and their implications for teaching and learning

In an interview, the head teachers were asked to explain the strategies that they used to cope with this shortage of staff. The findings suggest that the existing staff were requested to perform all of the existing activities. Hence, this means that the staff were assigned multiple responsibilities. The teachers, for example, were required to teach their subject to all classes, from form one up to form four. In an interview, the majority of teachers noted that they teach more than 30 periods per week, which is above the normal requirement of 24 periods per week. The findings show that the teachers complain of their heavy work load and noted that it is difficult for them to teach and assess the subject effectively. Explaining how school 2 copes with the shortage of staff, the head teacher had this to say:

“The school has ten teachers and only one office attendant. To cope with the shortage, each teacher, including the head of the school, is the class teacher of more than one class, since the school has 34 streams. The teachers are also assigned to teach a subject from form one to form four and are also assigned other duties, such as: sports and games coordination; academic supervision, accountant storekeeping and registrar roles” (interview, head teacher).

In the same vein, another head teacher noted:

“no non-teaching staff has been posted to our school by the municipal council. What we normally do is to use the few teachers

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we have to take over the other responsibilities, especially store keeping and accountancy. Also, we recruit part-time workers, both teaching and non-teaching staff. This is our only way of minimizing the shortage of workers" (interview, head teacher, S4).

This response suggests two things: firstly, the teachers were overworked, and given many different responsibilities. For example, the teachers were acting as the class teachers for more than one class and were expected to teach more periods than is normally expected. In this situation, it is difficult for them to perform their duties as classroom teachers or subject teachers effectively. Secondly, due to the severe shortage of non-teaching staff, the teachers were required to perform some non-academic activities, like accountancy, storekeeping and acting as laboratory technicians. This tendency reduces the time available for them to spend on performing their key functions and may affect their ability to teach effectively. Indeed, these findings raise concerns regarding the teachers' ability to both teach and perform their other non-teaching activities effectively. In an interview, the teachers were asked to explain how they were managing to perform their non-teaching activities and teach a subject to all classes. The finding concurs with that of Mwaipopo (2010). It was found that the teachers manage by opting to use the lecture method of teaching. It was further revealed that, while teaching, their main focus was on completing the syllabus rather on whether the students understood its content. The teachers further noted that, because of their heavy workload, they were unable to offer any time at all to slower learners. From this finding, it is obvious that the lack of sufficient teaching and non-teaching staff in secondary schools affects the teaching and learning process, a factor which may contribute to the pupils' poor performance in their final national examinations.

Further findings suggest that some of the duties were left unattended. The head teachers noted that, in some cases, some subjects without teachers were not taught. In some schools, for example the head teacher noted that the students were not learning mathematics, civics, geography, physics or chemistry because there were no teachers, and the head teachers noted that they had no money to pay part-time teachers. In some schools, the findings indicate that the students never had an opportunity to learn certain subjects throughout their entire secondary schooling and relied solely on discussions with their peers from schools where these subjects were taught. The findings

also show that, in some schools, there was an arrangement whereby the students were taught during the vacations. It was revealed that, in schools with sufficient finance or where the parents were willing to contribute, the head teachers hired teachers from the nearby schools during the vacations to come and teach the subjects which were not taught during the normal school term. This finding raises doubts about whether the teachers hired during the vacations were capable of covering the syllabus and enabling the students to understand the content rather than merely assisting the students to memorize the examination answers. This finding concurs with what has been frequently highlighted by the mass media, that some schools in various regions have only one or two teachers, and that these teachers teach only the subjects which they specialize in, so the students never studied any other subjects. Similarly, in these schools, the students learnt nothing when the teachers were away for either social or official reasons.

Another strategy employed, as revealed in the research findings, is to assign teachers to teach subjects in which they are not specialized. The findings show that, in most of the studied schools, teachers who specialize in teaching history and geography were assigned to teach civics, those who specialize in teaching commerce and book keeping were assigned to teach mathematics, and those who specialize in teaching nutrition were assigned to teach biology. These findings raise doubts about the extent to which the teachers were knowledgeable and capable of teaching subjects in which they were not specialized.

The research findings also suggest that the head teachers recruited part-time workers to serve as both teaching and non-teaching staff. Regarding the teaching staff, the findings show that the majority of the studied schools employed form six graduates, who were in transition to accessing higher education. The head teachers acknowledge the fact that form six graduates helped greatly to ease the impact of the lack of teachers in schools and that, given the existing financial difficulties in schools, it was cheaper to employ form six graduates rather than professional teachers from the nearby public and private schools. The tendency to engage form six graduates to teach in secondary schools is a common mechanism used across the country. Yet, the extent to which the head teachers are capable of employing qualified form six graduates, who are competent to assume teaching responsibilities, remains questionable. It is well-known that, in Tanzania, all hiring is usually done centrally, suggesting that the head teachers have never been involved in the hiring process. It has been noted that, in other schools, the various inspection reports have spotted cases whereby schools have been found to

employ form six graduates who scored division zero on their form six national examination. This raises concern about the ability of some of the employed form six graduates to teach effectively in secondary schools. Similarly, the research findings show that, given the shortage of time available to the form six graduates, most of them focused on answering the examination questions. This style of teaching does not assist students to graduate with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to become self-employed or compete in the world of employment.

Recommendations

This study examined the strategies used by head teachers to operate school activities in situations of critical shortages of teaching and non-teaching staff. The data suggest two key findings. Firstly, the ward community secondary schools are experiencing a great shortage of both teaching and non-teaching staff, Secondly, in situations of shortages of staff, the head teachers: assign the existing activities to the available staff and hence the staff are overloaded with responsibilities; leave some duties unattended and hence not all subjects are taught; assign roles to staff who were unqualified to perform them; and recruit form six graduates to serve as part-time teachers. It has been noted that these strategies affected the teaching and learning processes in schools and may have contributed towards the mass failures in form four examinations. On the basis of these findings, the following measures are recommended: (1) the government should recruit more teaching and non-teaching staff, and the non-teaching staff should be distributed across schools so that the teachers can concentrate on their key function of leading teaching and learning activities; (2) there is also a need to improve the teachers' working conditions in order to retain the existing staff and to encourage more people to join the teaching profession; (3) there is a need to ensure that the teachers are evenly distributed by improving the schools' working environment, especially in rural areas; (4) since the head teachers are now involved in employing part-time teachers, then there is a need to provide seminars which would enable them to recruit and employ form six graduates who are competent and capable of teaching; and (5) if the government wants to save money by minimizing the employment of non-teaching staff, then there is a need to review the teachers' curriculum at the diploma and university levels in order to train teachers to fulfil both teaching and non-teaching roles, like accounting and store keeping.

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