

## Investigation on factors contributing to high staff turnover among secondary school teachers in Ohangwena region, Namibia

<sup>1</sup>Moses Chirimbana, <sup>2</sup>Ester Soondaha Elago and <sup>3</sup>Leena Lahja Nghipandulwa

<sup>1&3</sup>University of Namibia, Oshakati Campus and <sup>2</sup>Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Oshana Directorate of Education

<sup>1</sup>[mchirimbana@unam.na](mailto:mchirimbana@unam.na), <sup>2</sup>[sundayelago@gmail.com](mailto:sundayelago@gmail.com) and <sup>3</sup>[lnghipandulwa@unam.na](mailto:lnghipandulwa@unam.na)

### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors contributing to high staff turnover in Ohangwena educational region in Namibia. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the life cycle theory of staff retention underpinned this study. The study design was exploratory research design within a qualitative approach. Ten teachers were selected from three purposefully selected secondary schools in Ohangwena educational region. Data were collected by means of semi-structured face-to-face in depth interviews with the aid of an interview guide. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and field notes were taken. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data. The participants indicated that poor working conditions in Ohangwena regional schools were fuelling the staff turnover. The researchers concluded that the government should improve the working conditions of the teachers in Ohangwena educational region, construct staff houses and provide piped water and electricity.*

**Keywords:** *staff turnover, working conditions, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, life cycle theory*

### Introduction

The records of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2019) reflect that most of the graduate teachers who worked for the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Ohangwena region as teachers in the year 2017-2022 have either moved to other regions or have left the profession (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2019). This high staff turnover suggests that there might be a problem with Ohangwena region (Shikongo, Chimanyiwa, & Ndemulunde, 2020). Records of the human resources for the Ohangwena educational region shows that the number of teachers who moved out of Ohangwena region was 245 in 2022, 311 in 2014, and 403 in 2015 (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). In the past, educational management sought to explain this anomaly by suggesting that the poor remunerations and poor working conditions offered to its teachers could have been the fuelling factor influencing the high rate of labour turnover in Ohangwena. On this note, Warren (2020) argues that workers will, to a considerable degree, want to retain their jobs if the pay is good.

Ashforth and Humphrey (2020) stated that workers will always look over their shoulders to find out how other workers with similar qualifications and job grade earn elsewhere. Shikongo, Chimanyiwa, and Ndemulunde (2020) maintain that some workers who have left Ohangwena region have

joined different ministries while others joined better paying parastatals in the Namibian business community. The institutional history continues to be lost as new teachers continue to occupy the empty positions that are created by the leaving employees (Briscoe & Claus, 2022).

After a thorough search for teacher employment records, the human resource personnel at the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture in Ohangwena have shifted many times, losing track of the data utilized by their predecessors (Khandwalla, 2019). The research investigated the factors that were contributing to the increase in staff turnover in Ohangwena region. The study sort answers to the following research questions: (1) What are the factors contributing to high teacher turnover in Ohangwena region secondary schools? (2) How is the high staff turnover affecting the schools in Ohangwena region? (3) What mitigation strategies are in place to improve the high teacher turnover and development in Ohangwena region? The results of this study provided an understanding into the factors contributing to high teacher turnover in Ohangwena region secondary schools.

### Literature review

#### *Theoretical framework of the study*

The researchers selected Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the life cycle factor theory of

employment dropouts to provide the theoretical frameworks for this study. These theories are important for explaining some of the factors which influence staff turnover and development in an organization. Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains more convincingly that in the workplace there could be factors, such as lack of support from administration, dissatisfaction with salary and benefits, dissatisfaction with job responsibilities, heavy workloads, frustration due to poor results and problematic client behaviour that could influence staff turnover and development (Bassey, 2022). Maslow sub-divided these needs into two broad categories namely deficiency needs and growth needs (Briscoe & Claus, 2022). Deficiency needs are physiological needs, such as food, water, shelter, safety, love and esteem needs. Maslow reasoned that once these needs are satisfied, the needs at the next level emerge. Growth needs are the needs to know and comprehend things, to gain beauty or to grow and develop in appreciation of others. Maslow is of the opinion that growth needs are never completely satisfied. In fact, the more the person is able to meet the need to know and understand the world, the greater the motivation towards self-actualization (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 2021).

In most countries, the public service provides people with secure and stable jobs. Many people have entered various jobs because of security and stability. On the need for love and belonging, Marr (2022) indicates that when employees are asked to serve on various committees of the school, such as the Sports Committee, Social Committee or Cultural Committee, it helps such employees to meet their need for belonging. They will develop a sense of belonging and as such they will feel loved in their various workplaces. Teachers who do not get any appointments to serve in any committee will not feel welcome, they will not feel to be part of the workforce and this may prompt them to move to other work stations or even quitting the job. Self-esteem needs are very important in boosting staff performance (De Beer, 2018).

Marr (2022) highlighted that there is a need for school managers to provide their subordinates with timely and specific feedback and that this can satisfy their self-esteem. Sometimes teachers are given some tasks to accomplish and the school managers may take long to provide feedback to the teachers, this destroys the teachers' morale and self-esteem

(Warren, 2020). Once a teacher's self-esteem is destroyed they may not be comfortable to stay at the same duty station. Employees need challenging jobs for them to realize their full potential, thereby meeting their self-actualization needs. Teachers who continue teaching the same grade level may feel bored and may not feel challenged by their jobs. If this boredom comes, they may fail to reach self-actualisation. On this note, De Beer (2018) notes that school managers need to keep changing the teachers teaching grade levels so that they may not be bored by doing the same task everyday. Self actualisation is reached by teachers when they are also given positions of power and authority. If they are given opportunities to rule over other teachers, they will feel empowered and such an act will empower them and they will feel that they are also capable of taking charge of the school environment. This makes them stay longer in their work place than if they are not accorded such an opportunity.

Collis and Hussey (2019) suggest that school managers should provide job enrichment and empower staff to participate in decision-making. The researchers acknowledge that there are many ways in which employees can be motivated in a work environment. Maslow's hierarchy provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that can be used to explain and justify the issues related to high staff turnover and development in Ohangwena region.

#### ***The life cycle factor theory of staff retention***

The other theoretical framework which was used to inform this study is the Life cycle factor theory by Cranny, Smith, and Stone (2020). With regards to human retention and development, Ashforth and Humphrey (2015) state that staff retention is influenced by the changes in the life cycle of people. Ashforth and Humphrey (2015) further indicate that the initial decision to accept a certain job is conditioned on the existing family status and the choice of residential location. A change in either of these would cause the individuals to re-evaluate their decisions. Teachers may accept teaching positions even in those schools they feel are too remote based on their current needs. Some might not really be qualified to teach and may accept teaching positions in poorly resourced schools or remote rural schools. But with the passage of time these teachers might advance themselves academically and acquire higher qualifications

and might then feel that they deserve better working conditions than the initial conditions they had before.

On this note Bass and Yammarino (2016) state that professionals' lives are not static but are in continual vissituation and every day each professional aims at becoming better than what they were yesterday. For this reason the factors which might have compelled them to join certain jobs will be overridden and they will move to new challenging professional endeavours (Ashforth & Humphrey, 2015). Some may be pushed into some jobs because they want to take care of their younger brothers. Even if the prevailing conditions may not be favourable for them but for the sake of saving and rescuing the family they will work in such conditions but once they have accomplished their professional mandate and goals, they will move to better jobs or better work places.

The likelihood of changes in family status or residence tends to be fairly high for individuals in the early stages of their career (Daniel, 2022). The movement of teachers tends to be higher when they are younger than when they grow older. The older they become the more stable they become. The life cycle factor theory is in a better position to explain the poor retention and development of teachers in Ohangwena region.

### ***Concept of employee retention***

Bass and Yammarino (2016) state that labour or employee retention refers to the ability of an organization to retain its employees. Cranny, Smith, and Stone (2020) state that the human resources are the lifeblood of any organization's existence and success. As a result, an organization must make all efforts possible to keep this valuable asset so as to keep the organization successful. It is often cited that employee high turnover and development is the most important factor that causes failure and retarded productivity of the organization/ company (Bass & Yammarino, 2016; Aguinis, 2017; Ashforth & Humphrey, 2015).

### ***Factors contributing to high staff turnover in schools***

Teacher productivity and retention is said to be associated with the way the school management addresses the personal problems of the teachers (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2019; Shikongo, Chimanyiwa, & Ndemulunde, 2011). Troubled teachers whose

personal problems are not attended to are likely to become ineffective in their delivery of duty. Such teachers may end up having low pass rates and will be frustrated by the working environment (Warren, 2020). This may in turn push them to transfer or move to other far away schools or regions where they feel safe. The teachers' social problems need to be managed by the school, or region so as to keep the teachers out of social problems. This will go a long way in retaining them in their various schools (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2015). Bass and Yammarino (2016) argue that the management of employees' personal problems in an organisation keeps the organisational staff happy and healthy and makes them more productive than when their personal problems are not managed.

### ***Effects of high staff turnover in schools***

Schools with high staff turnover face several challenges. One of the challenges is poor learner performance (Bass & Yammarino, 2016). This poor performance comes as a result of the learners being left for several days without a teacher while the school awaits a suitable replacement for the teacher who had left the school. Learners' failure can also lead to learners' frustration and dropout of school, thus increasing crime rates in the vicinities the learners are staying, since learners would have failed to pass their grade level. This challenge in the long run can lead to high levels of unemployment in the region because of learner drop out. Rampant movement of teachers from school to school leads to the destruction of school institutional memory (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 2020). Institutional memory is a reputation of an institution over a long period of time (Bass & Yammarino, 2016). This reputation is built when the same employees stay in their current place of work. This is an important aspect in building institutional ethics and norms over a period of time. If the school is always having new teachers as a result of high staff turnover, it cannot build a traceable memory and reputation (Yuchtman & Seashore, 2019).

### ***Possible solutions to staff turnover and development improvement***

In an increasingly competitive business world, top talent is in high demand. If a school is not making its teachers happy, another school may come along to steal them away (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 2020). Finding teachers who

will feel a strong bond with the school starts with creating an environment that attracts those teachers. The school culture should match the type of teachers the school wants to employ, whether it opts for a by-the-book, strict workplace or a more casual, laid-back atmosphere (Shikongo, Chimanyiwa, & Ndemulunde, 2020).

Schools expect their teachers to arrive fully trained and certified. Yet too many schools aren't willing to invest in helping teachers maintain those credentials (Harry, 2013). Whether the schools send teachers to learning centres or provide membership to one of the many e-learning sites available, they are taking their employees' education seriously, and see it as an investment in their career (Hatcher, 2018). The school should enable teachers to develop an attachment with the school. A successful school should invest in its manpower (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 2020).

Teachers should be fully aware of their job duties and how they're doing in performing them (Shopala, 2022). The school can accomplish this by first having a job plan in place and providing regular feedback on teachers' performance. If a teacher feels confused about his/her role in the organization, he or she is more likely to feel disgruntled and begin searching for something else (Harry, 2019). School principals should have appropriate integration programmes for all new staff members in their schools so that they are well supported in everything that they do.

As difficult as it is to pay competitive salaries when funds are low and budgets are tight, the organization should calculate the cost to replace employees (Bass & Yammarino, 2016). It can cost as much as 30 percent to 50 percent of an entry-level employee's annual salary just to replace him. Employees often find that they can enjoy a 10 to 20 percent salary increase by simply moving from one company to the next, which makes jumping ship attractive (De Beer, 2018). Schools should have meaningful salaries and allowances to pay their teachers especially those schools which are in the remotest villages. School principals need to understand that replacing a teacher is not easy and as such it is better for them to pay their teachers' salaries and benefits that match their commitment to stay at the current school.

School principals often spend much of their time on teachers who are struggling, leaving the talented ones completely neglected (Warren, 2020). Over time, this can lead to

resentment as star employees start to feel unnoticed and unsupported. Principals must make an effort to let top performers know their hard work isn't going unnoticed (Hatcher, 2018). Such hard working employees need to be rewarded of their hard work and efforts.

As much as schools' principals try to make their schools attractive to talented people, it has been noted in many schools that employees might be leaving because of their supervisors (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Sport and Culture, 2019). In fact, research has shown that teachers tend to quit their bosses, not schools (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 2020; Warren, 2020). If schools can cultivate an environment where teachers feel rewarded and gratified, they will already be ahead of a great deal of other bosses in most organisations (Yuchtman & Seashore, 2019). Improving retention rates doesn't have to be difficult. By being a positive role model and directly connecting with employees, one will be more likely to understand what they need to continue to help the organisation or business thrive. It remains unknown whether Ohangwena teachers might stay in the region if they are offered some or all of the above benefits.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The qualitative exploratory research design allows the researcher through the use of the interviews, conversations, field notes, recordings and photographs to observe, interpret and make sense of participants' engagement responses towards a phenomenon under consideration in a given natural setting (Marr, 2022). This study adopted the interpretivist world view by virtue of the fact that the problem of high staff turnover is a real life problem derived from real or realistic life scenarios (Baker, 2022).

The study was conducted among the teachers and school principals from 9 Secondary Schools in Ohangwena Education region. All teachers stood an equal chance of participating in the study. The population comprised the 9 school principals and 180 teachers in the junior and senior secondary schools in the Ohangwena region. Purposeful sampling was used to select three school principals and seven teachers. An in-depth face to face interview on the factors contributing to high staff turnover in Ohangwena educational region was used to collect data from the 10 participants.

Data were collected from school

principals and teachers from the three purposefully selected secondary schools in Ohangwena educational region. The researchers sought permission from the Directorate of Education, Ohangwena region before collecting data for the study. Each of the participating staff members completed an informed consent form before participating in the study. The researchers gathered the data, grouped, coded and tabulated it to make sense out of it. Semantic codes and themes emerging from the interviews were generated and discussed and aligned to answer the research questions of the study.

**Research questions**

The study sought to answer the following main

research questions.

1. What are the factors contributing to high teacher turnover in Ohangwena educational region secondary schools?
2. How is the high staff turnover and development affecting the schools in Ohangwena region?
3. What mitigation strategies are in place to improve the high teacher turnover and development in Ohangwena region?

**Results**

**Participants’ biographical information**

The study elicited the biographical information from the participants. Table 1 presents the biographical information of the participants.

**Table 1: Biographical information of the participants**

Participant	Age	Qualification	Teaching experience at current school	Sex
A	24	Degree (BSc)	2	Male
B	54	Degree (BED) + Diploma (Dip. ED)	6	Female
C	59	Diploma (ED)	3	Male
D	29	Masters (MED)	1	Female
E	56	Degree(BSc)	2	Female
F	54	Masters (MED)	2	Female
G	38	Diploma (ED)	7	Female
H	39	Masters (MED)	2	Male
I	25	Degree (BED)	2	Female
J	41	Degree (BED)	7	Male

Table 1 shows that the 10 teachers’ ages ranged from 24 to 59 years and that the minimum qualification was a diploma and the maximum was a master degree. Table 1 also shows that all the participants had stayed at the school for a period between one and seven years. There were Four male and six female teachers participated in the study.

**Unfavourable working conditions**

All the participants in the study indicated that their work environments were not conducive. These findings are similar to earlier findings by Ashforth and Humphrey (2020) who indicated that school management should treat their teachers with fairness at all times. These findings further concur with the sentiments of Shikongo, Chimanyiwa, and Ndemulunde (2011) who stated that organisational managers need to treat all employees equally and reward them equally and with fairness.

**Poor geographical location of the schools**

All the teachers in the study indicated that the

geographical locations of their schools were not favourable in retaining them in the schools. The above findings concur with the earlier findings by Shopala (2022) who indicated that geographical locations of the schools had the potential to attract and keep teachers in such schools.

**Poor administration**

The teachers in the study indicated that some of the types of leadership styles which were being used in their schools were not good enough to retain them in such schools. The findings corroborate with the findings of Ashforth and Humphrey (2015) who stated that school leadership needs to treat its manpower with respect and dignity and should also allow the subordinates to have a say over the running of the school rather than being autocratic and selfish.

**Poor motivation**

The participants in the study indicated that their motivation levels in their schools and the

region were low and could be attributed to poor teacher retention. Employees need appreciations or acknowledgement of their good work if they have met targets or performed well. The finding above corresponds to the findings of Warren (2020) who argued that poor staff motivation affects on staff morale and impacts negatively on employees' performance. Teachers need to have high motivation for them to perform well in their teaching. If the motivation is low, it can lead to absenteeism among the staff members and this lowers production.

#### ***Increased poverty***

Teachers in the study indicated that high teacher turnover was increasing the poverty levels for Ohangwena region. These finding concurs with the findings by Warren (2020) who stated that high staff turnover among teachers can lead to generational poverty cycles which are difficult to break. This poverty emanates from the fact that the region is unable to attract well qualified teachers and learners end up failing or being taught by unqualified teachers.

#### ***Increased learner failure***

The participants felt that schools and the region should be able to attract and keep teachers who are qualified, who know how to perform specific tasks in the school. The findings shown here are in agreement with those presented by Bassey (2022), who found that when learners are not actively engaged in constructive activities, they are more likely to participate in delinquent behaviour.

#### ***Overloading teachers with work***

Participants in the study indicated that the teachers were overloaded as a result of trying to fill the gap that had been left by teachers that had left the profession or have moved to other regions. The findings harmonise with the findings of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Ohangwena Directorate of Education (2015) who stated that teachers' loads remain very high in most of the northern regions of Namibia since teachers were leaving their classes to other schools which were in towns or which offered better amenities.

#### ***Improving teachers' working conditions***

Participants in the study indicated that if their working conditions were improved by providing them with a meaningful "bush allowance" this would motivate them to stay in

their schools. These findings harmonise with the earlier findings of Ashforth and Humphrey (2015) who stated that improving the working conditions for the teachers can help to mitigate against the high teacher turnover which is currently being experienced in most rural schools. Incentives encourage teachers to focus precisely on what they will get for completing a task not what might be gained by taking risks, exploring new ideas and possibilities, and playing hunches (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 2020).

#### ***Need for the improvement of school infrastructure and amenities***

All the participants in the study indicated that they needed support in the provision of infrastructural facilities and other amenities. These findings agree with the findings by Shikongo, Chimanyiwa, and Ndemulunde (2011) who argue that improving the infrastructural amenities for the teachers can help in retaining them in their various schools.

#### ***Need for principals' staff development in modern leadership styles***

Participants in the study proposed that the school principals in their region needed to improve their management strategies so that they promote the spirit of working hard among teachers under them. These findings are in accord to those by Shoopala (2022) who stated that management should be able to resolve disputes with subordinates in an amicable manner. If employees are harrassed, this makes them feel unloved, and uncared for. Once employees feel uncared for, their productive capacity and work performance is affected negatively.

#### ***Increasing employee morale and motivation***

Teachers become motivated if all records are available for them to see rather than not having access to such records of their performance. This finding harmonizes with the findings of Marr (2022) who emphasised the need for schools to have proper communication structures. On this aspect Yuchtman and Seashore (2019) state that employees should not receive organisational information through the grapevines.

#### **Conclusion**

The results of this study provided an understanding into the factors contributing to high staff turnover in Ohangwena region. These findings provide further evidence that

organizational managers need to ensure that all employees are treated equally and that they are rewarded fairly and equally. In addition, the study found that the geographical locations of the schools had the potential to attract and retain teachers in such schools, and that the school leadership needed to treat its manpower with respect and dignity, as well as allowing the subordinates to have a say over the running of the school, rather than being autocratic and selfish. According to the findings of this study, low levels of employees' motivation have a detrimental effect not only on employees' morale but also on employees' performance.

The findings further indicated that in order for teachers to be successful in their jobs, they need to have a high level of motivation. The study also suggested that teachers should encourage learners to concentrate solely on the benefits that will result from successfully completing a given assignment, rather than on the potential benefits that could be obtained from taking chances, investigating novel concepts and opportunities, or using their intuition. It was also proposed in this study that increasing the infrastructure amenities for teachers can aid in the process of retaining them in their various schools. This recommendation was made as a result of the findings of this study.

### **Recommendations and suggestions for further research**

#### ***Recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture***

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Ohangwena Directorate of Education is the one responsible for the management of the public schools in Ohangwena region. The following recommendations are made based on the results of the study:

- There is need to improve the teachers' working conditions in the region by providing decent accommodation and piped water to the teachers in the schools.

#### ***Recommendations to the school principals***

The school principals need to:

- Utilise more friendly leadership styles which caters for the feelings of the teachers they are leading in the schools.

#### **Suggestions for further research**

This study was done in Ohangwena region, in Northern Namibia. Therefore, studies need to be done in other Namibian regions in similar

settings to:

- Compare the findings so as to have a better understanding of the variability of staff turnover in Namibian schools.
- Find ways to engage the learners who would have dropped out of schools to become productive citizens by not engaging in crime.

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