

Teachers' Exodus In South African Schools: A Smoke With Burning Fire

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ABSTRACT

African teachers in general and South Africans in particular face tremendous challenges, several of which are curriculum related. These challenges manifest themselves at various levels and in various areas, that is, from national level to within the classroom. There are various role players who may make a contribution towards overcoming these challenges. It is imperative that each role player must be able to make a significant contribution. Clair and Adgers (2001:17) are of the opinion that school reform efforts must ensure that schools become centres of excellence for all students. This creates certain challenges for teachers, and in turn, demands a certain empowerment of them in order to achieve the vision of excellence in a diverse society with diverse needs (Carl, 2002:03). The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by South African teachers in the school curriculum and the causes of their poor performance in the teaching-learning situation. It became evident that some of the challenges are as a result of current and recurrent changes in the school curriculum. The researcher used a qualitative research methodology whereby a case study design was followed. The study used purposive sampling where four schools including both primary and secondary schools from the Eastern Cape (hereafter referred to as EC) Province were selected as sites for the study. EC Province is more disadvantaged in terms of resources as compared to the other Provinces in South Africa. Four teachers from each school were chosen as respondents. Data was collected through interviews and observations. Although the study was conducted in EC, it became evident from the findings that it is still a mammoth task country wide for teachers to implement the curriculum effectively. In the South African context, the problem manifests itself in a special way and the question remains, namely, what challenges do teachers in primary and secondary schools experience? The following challenges were identified when research was conducted; inadequate resources, a poor career path, HIV and AIDS pandemic, contractual employment, low remuneration, heavy workload and placement. These are critical issues of compliance if South Africa is going to overcome its past and build a culture of learning and tolerance that embraces and defines its political and educational future. The imbalances of international influences at the expense of teachers need to be rigorously redefined at school level. The study recommends that the National Ministry of Education (MOE) should have some mechanisms in place for remedying this unenviable situation.

Keywords:

Teachers' exodus: Teachers' turnover or mass departure of teachers from the profession of teaching

Career path: Professional growth such as promotions

Contractual employment: Temporary appointments for a fixed term e.g. 6-12 months or 2 years

Placement: Teachers do not have a choice of place of employment. They are posted without a choice

Unattractive remuneration: poor salary

Workload: Excessive amount of work to be done is (extremely) heavy

1. AIMS OF STUDY

The following aims were set forth for this research project:

- To identify the kind of teaching and learning challenges that South African teachers encounter in primary and secondary schools.
- To establish some considerations that would address the problems and challenges experienced by teachers when developing a curriculum.

2. METHODOLOGY

Focus group interviews were conducted in the Province. Due to time and cost constraints, it became impossible to conduct interviews in the other South African Provinces. Schools selected from the above areas were chosen on the basis that they had a high staff turnover. Cassette recordings eased the burden on the interviewer and enabled him to concentrate on conducting the discussions. Transcriptions were taken back to the respondents to verify their reliability. Apart from the principal decoder, there was also an independent decoder. Transcriptions were decoded by the principal decoder, and then given to the independent decoder for analysis. Conclusions from the two decoders were then compared. Where there was a discrepancy, a final conclusion was reached after a discussion among the decoders. This was done in order to guarantee the reliability of the data.

3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Goody and Brophy (2003:260) maintain that the attitudes, skills and understanding of the teacher in the classroom, as well as the work context itself, determine what problems will be faced. In the following discussion, the researcher will shed light on various challenges identified in the study.

3.1 Inadequate Resources

Morrison (2002:101) shows that resources may either be physical, human or financial.

Teaching and learning cannot occur in an environment which is lackadaisical, unpredictable and not directed towards optimising quality classroom time. Conditions in the schools in which the research was conducted were far from conducive to learning for substantial periods of time. Classrooms had broken windows, cracked walls, no doors for a long period; some buildings were collapsing, whilst those that were incomplete yet available were without roofs, which warrant classes to be cancelled during bad weather.

If the allocation of resources remains as skewed as it is, where the majority of rural schools are made of grass and thatched grass, with no piped water, no electricity, no modern technical equipment, no affordable transport for both learners and teachers, effective teaching will not take place (*manifesto on values*).

It was a disaster during the heavy rainfalls in February and March 2000 when the Province was flooded. Some classrooms became kraals and kennels for domestic animals. Only 33% of the school buildings were in an immaculate and excellent condition (*See figure 3.1.1 for conditions of buildings*).

A shortage of teaching and learning materials prevents students from learning. The chalkboard was found to be the only dominant media used by most schools. "*In this school there is absolutely nothing and teaching is no longer interesting. The only teaching aid the teacher can rely on is a chalkboard*". In some areas there is no electricity. Often teaching aids such as overhead projectors are available, but cannot be utilised because there is no electricity.

Teachers complained about overcrowded classrooms where large numbers of learners are gathered without an orderly arrangement. Abnormal ratios of one teacher to 94 learners and even 1:120 in grade 8 were mentioned. In some cases, teachers have to teach under trees. Teachers pointed out that they do not control the learners' work regularly because they find it difficult to handle such big groups and that they are not able to pay special attention to individual learners. Some learners need the teacher's attention in order to understand. Teachers are also frustrated because they believe the Government is dragging its feet about addressing this challenge.

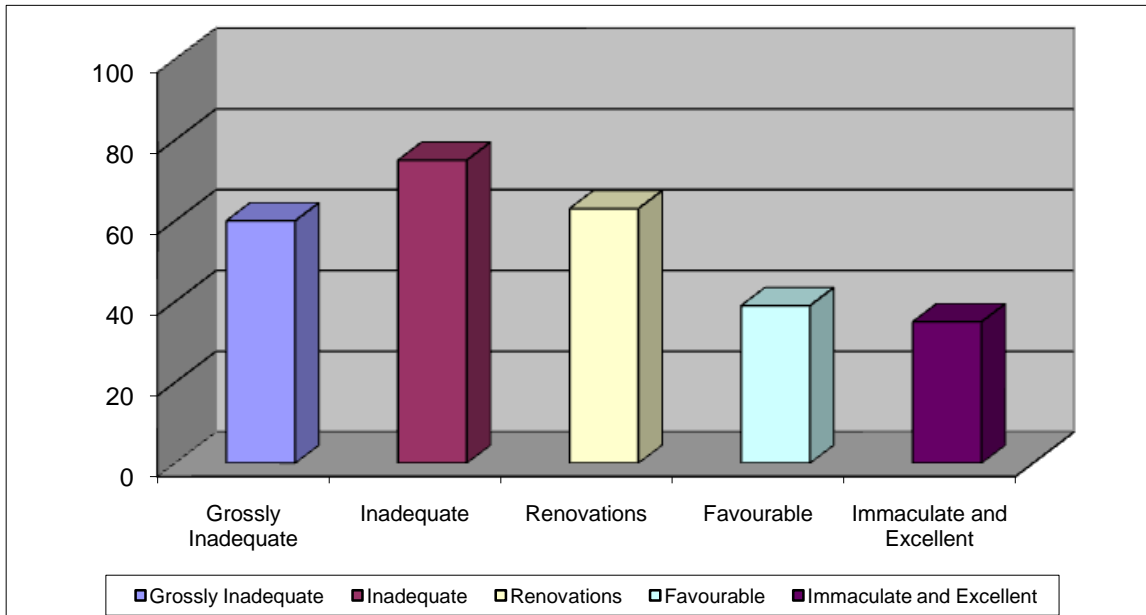


Figure 3.1.1: Conditions of buildings

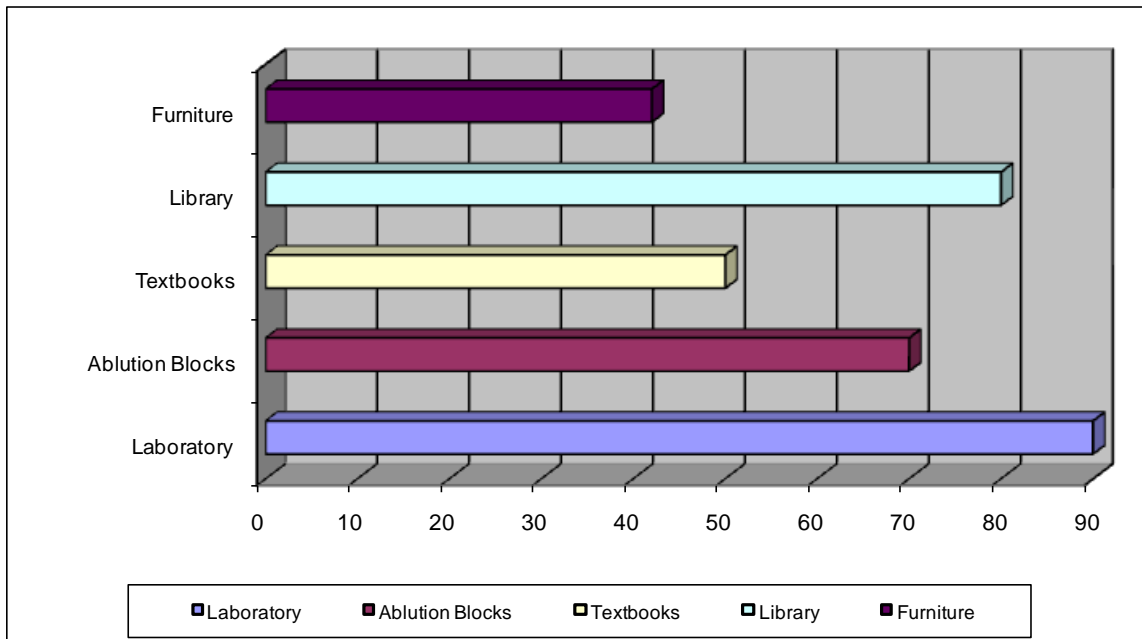


Figure 3.1.2: Percentage of schools without facilities

In most schools there is also a shortage of other facilities such as libraries, ablution blocks, furniture and textbooks (See figure 3.1.2). In a certain region, the whole school with 18 classes shares the same duster. Grade 1 and 2 learners share chairs. The books used by most teachers are obsolete and they have nothing to do with Outcomes-Based Education. In extreme cases up to 10 students share a textbook. Subjects like Physical Science, which require laboratories with apparatus, are taught theoretically, while the practical part is ignored. Students

memorise the steps to follow in order to get good results. Although teachers showed some dissatisfaction regarding the issue, the status quo remains.

As highlighted earlier, the issue of resources includes problems that cannot be solved in the Higher Education and Training (HET) curriculum, but the goal should be to train the new students teachers in such a way that they can still teach in the absence of basic facilities such as libraries, textbooks and teaching aids. The students' teachers should be skilled in the use of Educational Technology media such as overhead projectors and cassette players but should also be able to improvise. So-called low technology should be included in the curriculum.

3.2 Poor Career Path

Beane (2005:88) maintains that in the past, teaching has often been viewed as a noble profession, which deserved respect. Teachers' qualifications and experiences were taken into account for promotion purposes. However, things changed dramatically as time went on. Incentives are no longer in place and this discourages teachers from being productive in the teaching-learning situation. In view of these barriers, it would be unethical to rely on teachers' extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors to promote effective teaching. South African teachers need access to a transparent career path in order to best develop themselves and the learners they are responsible for

The Department of Education's (DOE) current statistics state that 40% of male teachers and 60% of all female teachers currently struggle to meet the basic requirements of Category C (M+3) or a three-year tertiary qualification (Government Gazette, 2000:18). Although this may appear unacceptable on a superficial level, the fact that these teachers struggle to perform competencies they are not adequately trained for is in fact a testament to their commitment and to their profession. The DOE has realised the necessity of upgrading teachers' qualifications without removing them from an already overburdened educational system. Programmes such as Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) and National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) are now offered at Higher Education and Training Institutions. This however, puts additional pressure on teachers as they juggle their professional obligations with study commitments. Highly qualified teachers who do not get promotions that match their qualifications quit the teaching profession in search of greener pastures. (*See table 3.2.1, for positions of teachers regardless of their qualifications.*)

The following table shows respondents' qualification and positions in teaching.

Qualification	Position	Number of respondents	%
BA, BSc, BCom	Assistant teacher	4	25 %
B. Ed Hons, BSc Hons, BCom Hons	Deputy Principal	6	37.5%
M. Ed, MA, MSc	HODs	6	37.5%
Total		16	100 %

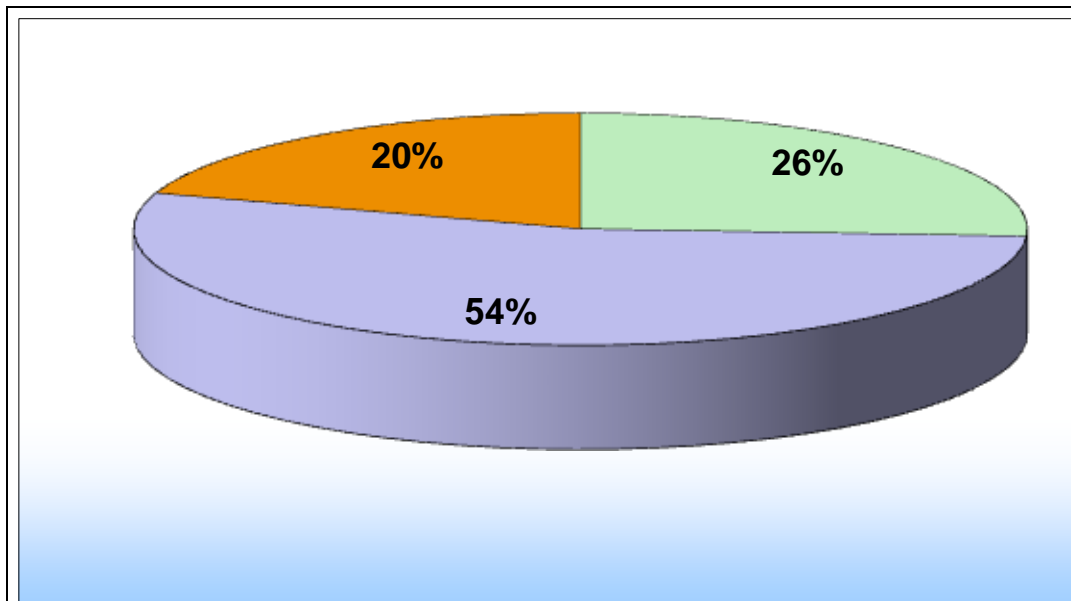
3.3 HIV And AIDS Pandemic

The HIV and AIDS pandemic has become a health issue that has captured the attention of the world. The reasons are obvious; it is fatal and the number of cases diagnosed in South African schools has currently reached 50% of the sexually active population. Certain areas such as Bisho, Mthatha and Port Elizabeth (PE) in the EC Province are already showing an adult prevalence of a high percentage and the figure is increasing at an alarming rate. (*See figure 3.3.1 of the percentage of HIV and AIDS in selected areas of EC Province*). It is evident that the development of an AIDS policy within schools and the design and implementation of education and awareness campaigns, as well as providing AIDS counselling services cannot be delayed any longer. Most teachers who are HIV and AIDS victims resign from teaching and get employment in Non-Governmental Organisations where they have good medical treatment schemes.

In view of the social and organizational ramifications of HIV and AIDS, a proactive organizational policy addressing the rights of HIV and AIDS victims and the training of co-workers is necessary in institutions. Some schools however are reluctant to come to grips with the HIV and AIDS issue because of the fear and anxiety it provokes. However, failure to deal with it carries possible high economic and morale costs such as;

- Absence from work and worker attrition are increasing as teachers fall ill
- Teachers require sick and compassionate leave to care for sick family members and attend funerals of family members
- Productivity is declining because of time off but also teachers are less healthy which has a higher impact on the medical aid budget
- Supply and cost of labour is affected
- Higher recruitment and training costs are expected

The Ministry of Education should be committed to minimize the social, economic and developmental effects of HIV and AIDS on education in schools by implementing an adequate policy. This policy should contribute towards promoting effective prevention and care within the context of the public education system (Government Gazette, Volume no. 20372 August 2000).



Bisho: 26%, PE: 54%, Mthata: 20%
Figure 3.3.1 Percentage of HIV and AIDS

3.4 Contractual Employment

Marsh (2002:67) is of the opinion that a contract is only valuable if it is upheld. Teachers, who feel they are being denied the basic rights of employment legislation as well as their individual terms of conditions of employment, will be demotivated and under perform. All teachers need to be members of the South African Council of Teachers (SACE). However, teachers employed without being fully qualified are denied membership of this organization. This places teachers and all stakeholders at risk and need to be challenged if teachers are going to be held accountable for their teaching behaviour as well as to receive professional guidance and protection.

Teachers' posts are to be renewed annually, their increment is negotiated individually and their fringe benefits are so limited. This puts an additional burden on the teacher in terms of job security and career

advancement. Teachers’ fresh from HET seek employment that will employ them on permanent basis. Contracted teachers exercise patience for a period of two to three years in schools and thereafter end up absorbed by big companies. They attend interviews for senior positions on weekly basis. Students who pass grade 12 view it as a futile exercise to pursue teaching as a profession because the future thereof looks bleak. The intake at HET institutions dwindles year by year. Sooner or later many academics especially in Faculties of Education will find themselves being jobless. The following graph shows teachers’ views regarding job security. They range from agreeing to strongly disagreeing that job security affects teachers’ performance in the classroom situation.

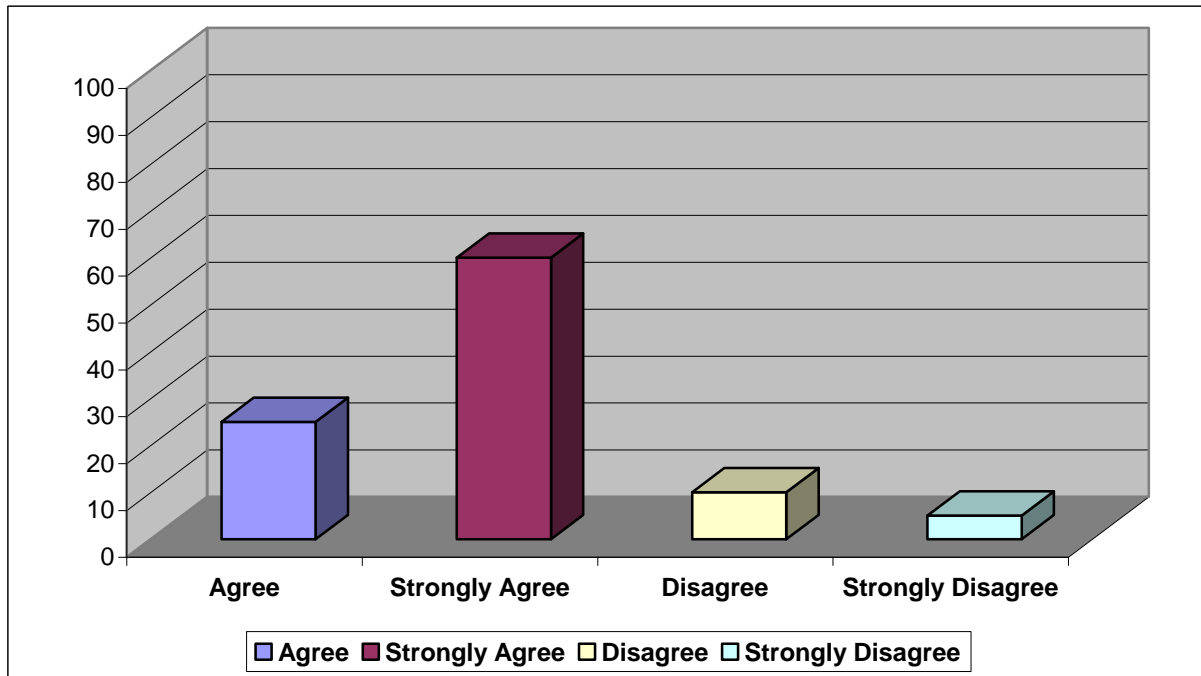


Figure 3.4.1: Teachers’ perception regarding job security

3.5 Unattractive Remuneration

In a society that values its teachers and role they play in developing the future of its country, remuneration needs to be addressed on a national level. If teachers are to be financially rewarded for good performance, then they need to be assessed by the same criteria and circumstances. This is patently impossible in the current educational climate in South Africa. Teachers are exposed to a myriad of conflicting factors and experiences within the classroom that impact directly on both the performance of the teacher and the learner. It is grossly unfair to further discriminate against the teachers already facing huge challenges by using the same performance indicators as used in a more privileged school to determine salary progression. The DOE receives resignation letters from experienced teachers on a daily basis. Although the Minister of Education promised to address this challenge with immediate effect, teachers still maintain that the revised salary scale is still unpleasant.

In addition to the financial implications of a salary that reflects the needs of teachers, there is an invisible element of self-esteem that is much harder to calculate and dangerous to ignore. Teachers’ university qualifications do not have an impact any longer in terms of remuneration and this discourages teachers from furthering their studies. Moreover, in an ever-transforming education system that needs dedicated teachers to provide an environment of stability and continuity, adequate remuneration is an essential aspect of determining the quality of teachers South Africa has a long-term access to.

3.6 Workload

South African teachers find themselves fatally overwhelmed by their workload as they are expected to fulfil many classroom and administrative functions, often with very little support. In order to develop an effective curriculum, the following factors need to be considered under workload;

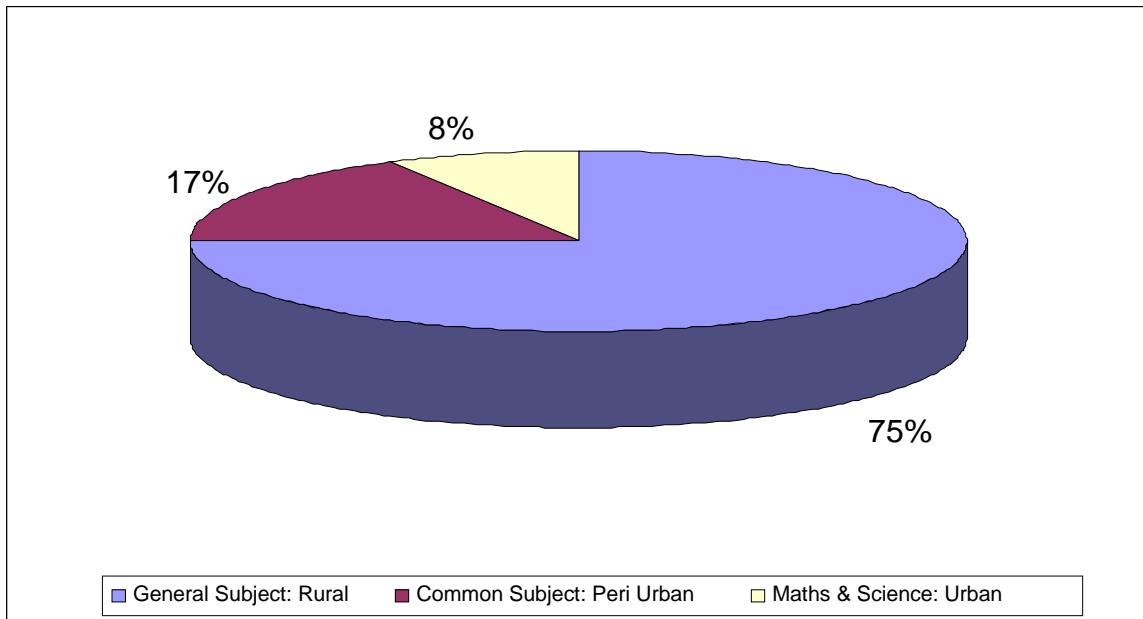
- Managing and assessing learner's portfolios
- Teaching in an Outcomes-Based approach
- Controlling work of classrooms that are overcrowded
- Catering for mixed grades
- Extracurricular responsibilities
- Implementation of curriculum policy
- Managing diversity
- Addressing pastoral needs of learners

Freeman (2001:101) argues, in schools with little support, this constitutes an incredible burden on the teacher and impacts negatively on both teaching and learning. This emphasis is driven away from an individual and meaningful interaction between teacher and learner and instead moves towards management of administrative issues. Due to appalling conditions of some educational institutions, it has been left to unpaid volunteers to try and teach certain subjects.

3.7 Placement

This challenge can be discussed in terms of where the teacher finds employment. When the research was conducted, it became evident that teachers prefer to work in urban areas where almost all schools are well resourced. Those who find employment in remote area do not last. Within a period of a year, they terminate their services. Schools that are in rural areas are not attractive to most teachers and those who are placed there find it difficult to acclimatize to the working conditions. Most teachers who find teaching posts in urban areas are those who have specialised in the field of Mathematics and Science. Those who followed commercial stream are in most cases employed in peri-urban areas whilst those who are generalists are likely to be absorbed in rural schools (*see figure 3.7.1*). The current educational system has a critical disadvantage with the redeployment of teachers. The school lose an important element of choice in its selection and appointment of teachers. This places the teacher in a climate of insecurity and removes the autonomy necessary to plan their personal and professional lives. The teacher is supposed to have a well-developed understanding of content knowledge appropriate to the specialism (Van der Horst & Mc Donald, 2005:81).

Learners, too, are affected by these adverse conditions, often the same learners that are most in need of dedicated teachers. Some schools find themselves unable to fill and pay for necessary teaching posts through the DOE provision, and so employ teachers through the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). Some educational institutions have redundant posts of teachers and this has serious implications as it may warrant that teachers have to relocate to an area that is in need of their expertise. This may be an incredible burden on the teacher and their family with the need for the spouse to also find alternative employment. Children, too, have to change schools and the general move away from their familiar and home environment may affect them psychologically.



General Subject: Rural 75%, Common Subject: Peri Urban 17%, Maths & Science: Urban 8%

3.7.1 Location of employment

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the following considerations apply to all the categories of challenges that should be addressed in the school curriculum. The intensity and diversity of the problems that await a teacher in the classroom necessitates practice-directed learning experiences in the curriculum. This does not imply lip service to the traditional approach to Higher Education and Training Institution but a new focus on learning experiences.

Learning experiences should be extended to include extensive practical experience in schools. The interaction between the University as an institution for teacher training and the school as the career-focused arena should be utilised to its full potential. The evaluation of the student teacher’s values and attitudes can never be evaluated by pen and paper tests or simulated situations. The student teacher has to be observed when they make choices, interact with learners, colleagues and the principal. The school has to become a partner in teacher training, in order to produce well-trained teachers who have proven that they are equipped for the challenges that await them in the classrooms.

In conclusion, although the problems that South African teachers experience have been categorised into separate groups, these categories are interrelated and the one cannot be addressed while the others are ignored. When one reflects on the role of the teacher as curriculum agent, the whole question of teacher participation and teacher freedom with regard to curriculum development is also involved. Each teacher must be systematically empowered with regard to curriculum development, to optimise the teaching and learning in the classroom (Carl, 2002:02).

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NOTES