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EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF TEACHER MOBILITY ON LEARNERS' RIGHTS TO BASIC EDUCATION

(Research article)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of teacher mobility on learners' rights to basic education. The qualitative research design of this study offers a comprehensive framework for the examination of the academic, social, and affective consequences that learners experience when teachers transition between institutions. This study employs qualitative methodologies, such as document analysis and interviews, to elucidate the intricate relationship between teacher mobility and the preservation or potential infringement of learners' rights within the educational landscape. The results suggested that teachers who have been declared additional are no longer prioritising their teaching responsibilities and are missing classes. The most effective teachers are frequently lost as a consequence of rationalisation and redeployment. The governing body of a public school is required to ensure the development of the school and to advance its best interests by providing a quality education to all learners.

Keywords: exploring the effects, learners' rights, redeployment cases, teacher mobility.

1. Introduction

In South African schools, a large number of permanent teachers are declared additional, with fewer vacant posts during rationalisation and redeployment in line with operational requirements. The redeployment of teachers is not a challenge unique to South Africa; it is a global phenomenon affecting education systems worldwide. In support of this assertion, the persistent issue of teacher shortages in England and Wales has led to an increasing reliance on teaching assistants (TAs) to assume teaching responsibilities in place of qualified teachers (Webster, 2024). Another study conducted by Ismail et al. (2020) found that Malaysia's current redeployment policies have many grey areas that could hamper their effective implementation. In the guidelines, teachers were not selected for redeployment based on any standard criteria. In South Africa, a notable issue (the Governing Body of Thuthukani Special School and Thuthukani Special School v the Head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, Case No: 2550/2021P) is that in 2021, the Department identified more than 3,000 teachers as additional. These teachers continue to receive their regular monthly salaries, yet the department has failed to initiate any efforts to advertise the vacant posts that would allow these teachers to apply for them and recommend some of them to be placed in the vacant posts. Consequently, schools with vacancies that are not filled will continue to suffer, as well as their learners. To achieve the right of children to access primary and secondary education, all public schools are expected to have fair deployment and allocation of teachers (Siddiqui & Shaukat, 2021; Francis et al., 2019). The Department of Education is expected to have a clear policy on teacher redeployment that applies to all public schools. In contrast, a significant issue in the educational

systems of developing countries for the past few years has been the shortage of teachers and limitations in the allocation of educational resources (Shaturaev, 2021).

The operational requirements of educational institutions in South Africa are shaped by changes in learner enrolment, implementation of new post-establishments, closures or mergers of institutions/sectors, changes in school types, and efforts towards equity and redress. This study aims to balance the right to education with the necessity of redeploying teachers by focusing on changes in learner enrolment as a key factor. According to regulations, principals are responsible for matching permanent staff members with suitable positions based on their experience, rank, and qualifications. They also determine any additional teachers in a school and fill vacant positions accordingly.

Education systems in every country aim to provide high-quality education to their citizens, which depends on a supply of high-quality teachers (See et al., 2020). Educational systems must strive for professional agility among teachers to attain quality education. Teachers who are agile in both mindset and skills are considered to have a greater ability to adapt to new responsibilities, changing work environments, and professional obligations. Hard-to-staff schools face several important staffing problems that arise from either a failure of candidates to apply for these vacancies or a higher rate of turnover among teachers at these schools (Evans & Acosta, 2023). The solution for these schools is to redeploy teachers to fill those vacancies to rescue vulnerable learners.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How does teacher mobility impact learners' rights to basic education?
- What can school principals do to prevent teaching and learning disruptions during teachers' transfer and reintegration?
- Is the school's governing body involved in the rationalisation and redeployment process?

2. Theoretical Framework: social justice and the right to education

This research investigation is grounded in social justice theory and the entitlement to basic education. Teachers' redeployment poses social justice issues as it affects learners' right to basic education. Ganegoda et al. (2024) argue that social justice advocates for a procedure founded on respect, care, recognition, and empathy. In the same way, social justice incorporates a variety of concepts, including inclusivity, proactive measures, disparity, parity, and fairness (Muñoz & Ruiz, 2025). When teachers are redeployed from one school to another, the transition often creates social challenges for learners, arising from the disruption of established relationships, the loss of familiar teaching styles, and the emotional impact of separation from trusted educators. Schools can strive to establish a more equitable and inclusive society by advocating for the right to education within the framework of social justice. This will enable all individuals to realise their potential, make meaningful contributions to society, and participate in life-changing decision-making. Social justice entails imagining a society in which resources are allocated equitably and every person experiences a sense of physical and psychological safety and protection (Shriberg et al., 2024). Everyone in South Africa is entitled to a basic education, including adult learners. Teacher mobility, particularly when educators are redeployed or transferred between schools, can result in the violation of learners' right to

education. Learners are emotionally and psychologically impacted by the redeployment of a teacher who is responsible for the curriculum of a specific school. Section 29 of the South African Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to education to all individuals, including minors. This privilege is violated by redeployment, which deprives learners of an expert teacher who possesses a profound comprehension and knowledge of the subject matter.

"A child's best interests are of paramount importance in all matters concerning the child," according to Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). Fundamental educational ideas that guide policy creation, decision-making, and activities within educational institutions are the learner's best interest and their entitlement to a basic education. Educational institutions and authorities frequently use methods like rationalisation and redeployment to make sure that these values are followed and that the educational system is effective, fair, and flexible enough to meet changing requirements. On the contrary, the best teachers are often removed, while poor educators are redeployed within schools. Therefore, teacher mobility contradicts the principles of social justice, particularly in the context of equitable access to education. The best interest of the child principle is founded on the principle that the needs, development, and well-being of each learner should be prioritised in all educational system decisions. It emphasises how each learner's unique needs and goals should be taken into account when designing educational policy, curriculum, teaching strategies, and resource allocation. Governments and educational institutions must guarantee that all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, or other factors, have equal access to high-quality basic education (Veriava & Paterson, 2020). In educational contexts, Section 28 mandates that government institutions, including schools, safeguard and honour the rights of children.

3. Review of the literature

A robust literature has been created around the issue of teacher mobility through rationalisation and redeployment and its threat to learners' rights to basic education. Similarly, similar problems arise about how to retain and sustain the best teachers without compromising both teachers' and learners' rights.

3.1. Leaving classes without a teacher

The call to governments for quality education is to redeploy teachers where they are needed most. In these circumstances, the recruitment and deployment of teachers must guarantee that the teaching force is diverse and that qualified teachers are redistributed to schools in remote rural communities or areas afflicted by conflict (León et al., 2024). The process of redeployment has resulted in several learners being without the presence of a teacher in the classrooms (Rapeta, 2024), which creates social injustice on the side of learners. By diminishing the quality of teacher-learner interaction, increasing the burden of teachers, and disrupting the consistency of learning, the distribution and transfer of teachers have had an impact on learners' performance (Muthengi & Romata, 2023). These consequences directly challenge the principles of social justice in education, which advocate for fairness, equity, and equal access to quality learning opportunities for all learners.

In the case of Thuthukani Special School, qualified and experienced teachers were permitted to submit applications, allowing the initial applicant to identify surplus educators who were well-suited for the available positions, in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Act. However, despite compliance with due process, learners classified as severely and profoundly

intellectually disabled, with cognitive abilities comparable to those of individuals aged one to eight, were ultimately denied access to appropriately qualified teachers. These learners are affected by a diverse array of conditions, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, physical disabilities, and cognitive, auditory, and visual impairments. Ensuring social justice requires that all learners, especially those with exceptional needs, receive equitable access to quality education and the resources necessary for their development.

The Court observed that the Department has designated over 3,000 teachers as additional, which is a matter of grave concern. The respondents have not taken any measures to advertise the vacant posts, which would allow the applicants to consider and recommend some of these teachers for the vacant posts at the second applicant, should they apply. Nevertheless, these teachers receive their monthly salaries. Despite the fact that the second appellant is home to learners who are exceedingly vulnerable and compromised, the respondents are unable to fulfil their statutory and mandated obligations to ensure the right of these children to an education. The inquiry that arises is, "What is the best interest of the child, particularly one with special needs?" It was indicated that teachers from the mainstream could be redeployed to this special school as a result of operational requirements. While this process may have followed administrative guidelines, it raises important concerns from a social justice perspective.

3.2. Engagement and sustainability of teachers through redeployment

Engaging and supporting teachers through redeployment involves a strategic and thoughtful approach to ensure that teachers not only transition smoothly into new roles but also find fulfilment and professional growth in their revised positions. To address the shortage of teachers and the inability to secure external supply teachers, teacher assistants (TAs) are frequently employed as substitutes in the United Kingdom (UK) (Webster, 2024). In rural areas of South Africa where schools are unable to attract and retain teachers, the recruitment and retention of new teachers are of the utmost significance in order to address persistent shortages (Muremela et al., 2023). A well-thought-out recruitment process ensures that schools are staffed with individuals who possess the necessary qualifications, skills, and passion for teaching. The principal of the school is responsible for the identification of additional staff and the administration of these instructors in the context of rationalisation and redeployment (Mashele & Mafuwane, 2024). The principal plays a crucial role in school staffing decisions, from identifying additional teachers to managing them once they are retained. Principals have the ability to influence the decisions of specific teachers regarding their decision to remain in the profession. That can be achieved by encouraging open communication, actively listening to teachers' concerns, and valuing their input to foster a positive working relationship. By prioritising fair treatment, transparency, and responsiveness to teachers' concerns, principals help uphold the social justice principle that every learner deserves access to qualified, motivated educators in a nurturing and equitable learning environment.

3.3. The effect of the transition of teachers on teaching and learning

The decision to relocate teachers has sparked considerable apprehension among various educational stakeholders regarding the justification for the move. Many are concerned that the distribution of teachers across the country is not equitable, prompting questions about the rationale behind the exercise (Bellibaş et al., 2023). According to Marangu et al. (2024), several countries lack well-defined guidelines for teacher transfers, often resulting in transfers that are haphazard and influenced by personal preferences, political interventions, and various indirect factors. Unfortunately, there is often a disregard for improving the overall quality of education

in this process. Muremela et al. (2023) added that the movement of teachers from one school to another negatively impacts the smooth continuity of teaching and learning in the subjects. Social justice demands that all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographic location, receive uninterrupted, quality teaching that supports their right to learn and thrive. On the contrary, the departure of experienced teachers can create a void of wisdom and knowledge in the school. The availability and mobility of teachers are crucial for the effective administration of education, as they directly influence the quality, accessibility, and consistency of learners' learning experiences (Thelma et al., 2024). Mobility allows for the distribution of experienced teachers to areas with teacher shortages, ensuring a more equitable distribution of teaching talent. Learners may experience varying degrees of attachment and rapport with different teachers, affecting their levels of motivation and engagement. Additionally, the adjustment period for learners and teachers alike can temporarily disrupt the learning process as relationships are established and classroom routines are redefined.

3.4. Navigating challenges with an incompetent teacher

Incompetent teachers may struggle to convey complex concepts clearly, leaving learners confused and frustrated. Principals may implement a variety of strategies, including professional development plans, assignment modifications, contract non-renewal, or resignation, in the event that an ineffective teacher is identified (Maloney, 2024). While the best teachers are retained in schools, incompetent ones are released during rationalisation and redeployment so that they can be absorbed into other schools. Learners in needy schools are more likely to experience an incompetent teacher taken from the pool, which mostly impacts negatively on school performance. Upholding social justice in education requires that staffing decisions be guided not only by operational efficiency but also by a commitment to fairness, inclusion, and the right of every learner to receive high-quality education. According to Li's findings (2024), a significant number of educators who have earned university degrees have shown a distinct lack of proficiency in teaching mathematics to primary school learners.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was employed for this study, as it offers a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-life context (Dźwigoł, 2024). This design is particularly well-suited for exploring teachers' mobility, where multiple variables, such as rationalisation, redeployment, learners, and teachers, interact in dynamic and nuanced ways. The qualitative approach enables the collection of rich, descriptive data through methods such as interviews and document analysis, allowing the researcher to capture participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and interpretations (Lim, 2024). The case study component, in particular, facilitates a focused examination of a specific group, institution, or context, allowing for the uncovering of patterns, relationships, and meanings that might be overlooked in broader quantitative studies. This design was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the process of teacher redeployment and its effects on learners' right to basic education. This research endeavours to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the diverse

effects, academic, social, and emotional, that learners experience when teachers transition between institutions.

4.2. Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Techniques

The population under investigation encompasses the entirety of individuals or entities that the researcher aims to study and potentially includes the management and governance of schools. The principals and governing bodies of public secondary schools situated in the Mopani district of Limpopo province (South Africa) are the focus of this specific instance as managers and governors of schools. Sampling methods are employed to choose a representative subset (sample) from this larger population. The governing body members and principals in this study were selected using purposive sampling, a method that is frequently employed in qualitative research to obtain detailed insights from experts or specific cohorts, based on their specific governance and managerial attributes (Kalu, 2019). Two secretaries of the governing body with two years of experience serving in the SGB within the circuit were chosen, responsible for recommending additional teachers for vacant positions. Moreover, secondary school principals were identified as the leaders of their respective schools, entrusted with overall leadership and management responsibilities to facilitate smooth rationalisation and redeployment processes within their schools. Ethical protocols were followed before the study was conducted. I sought the ethics approval from the Unisa College of Education Ethics Review Committee, and a certificate was granted: 2017/04/12/30135079/12/MC. I then sought approval from the Department of Education in Limpopo to conduct a study in their schools. Prior to the interviews, participants provided their consent by signing a form indicating their agreement to take part in the study.

4.3. Data gathering tools

For this research, I conducted in-person interviews to gather information from nine school principals and two secretaries of school governing bodies (SGB) in secondary education. Principals were selected based on their ability to manage the process of rationalisation and redeployment, while the School Governing Body (SGB) is responsible for recommending the appointment of teachers in schools. Semi-structured questions were employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives on rationalisation and redeployment and their implications for the fundamental right of learners to receive basic education. Interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience on the designated day. I introduced myself and clarified my role as a researcher at the beginning of each interview. The participants were guaranteed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Before recording, I sought permission to ensure accurate documentation of the conversation (Creswell, 2015).

4.4. Data analysis

In order to explore the influence of teacher mobility on learners' right to fundamental education during the redeployment of teachers, this study employs qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis refers to a technique within qualitative research where textual or visual data undergoes systematic analysis (Zeynivandnezhad et al., 2024; Birkenmaier et al., 2023). It involves a rigorous and systematic approach to understanding the content within the data, extracting meaningful patterns, themes (Huang et al., 2025), and insights without relying on statistical methods. Content analysis entails a disciplined method for comprehending the content within the data, revealing significant patterns, themes, and insights without leaning on

statistical techniques (Kumar et al., 2024). A diverse array of data was collected from interviews and document analysis that were relevant to the research question. Additionally, a range of information that was pertinent to the study question was gathered through indirect observation of participants and environments. I listened to each recording to capture every spoken word. The content was transcribed word-for-word into text format. The text was then cleaned to remove filler words. I immersed myself in the data by reading and rereading before generating codes. Data were encoded by methodically breaking the information down into smaller parts and giving each of these parts names (codes) that were either interpretive or descriptive. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The codes were sorted into larger groupings or themes according to the similarities or patterns they shared. These groupings aid in structuring the data and grasping the connections between various codes. The relationships between these categories were scrutinised, seeking out connections, inconsistencies, or new ideas. The goal of this step is to identify overarching themes or patterns in the data that shed light on the research question. Themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives supported by the literature.

5. Results of the findings

The findings are arranged according to the categories that the analysis produced. Below is an overview of the respondents' demographic profile:

Table 1: Brief Description of the Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Participants Pseudonym	Position	Gender	School Quintile	Redeployment Status
P1	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Released
P2	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Released
P3	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Received
P4	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Released
P5	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Released
P6	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Released
P7	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Released
P8	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Received
P9	Principal	Male	Quintile 2	Received
SGB1	SGB Secretary	Male	Quintile 2	Received
SGB2	SGB Secretary	Male	Quintile 2	Released

It is clear from the demographic profile of the respondents that secondary school principals and secretaries are predominantly male. According to the National Norms and Standards for School Financing, a Quintile 2 school is a school that is considered underprivileged and receives

moderate financing. The chart shows that despite a very small number of schools having open positions, most institutions have extra teachers who can be freed during redeployment. This implies that there may not be enough positions to accommodate all of the extra teachers.

Additional teachers show a reluctance to teach.

Additional teachers are advised to stay at their present school and carry out their assigned tasks until further instructions. Principals should actively oversee classroom activities by physically visiting them to ensure effective teaching and learning. During these visits, principals observed that some additional teachers were present in classrooms but were not effectively engaged in teaching.

“At times, even when you manage to walk around, you discover that minimal teaching and learning are taking place. It is more of a physical arrival in the classroom, and no meaningful learning is taking place. Teachers become demoralised. They struggle to maintain focus and often procrastinate when it comes to attending their classes.” (P3 interviews)

According to the data, teachers who are declared additional regularly miss class and no longer value their teaching responsibilities. Following their identification as additional throughout the redeployment process, these teachers show a lack of dedication and a hesitancy to teach learners (Frelin & Fransson, 2017; Tshinnane et al., 2017). Teachers who disregard their periods are infringing on learners' access to a basic education, as stated in Section 29 of the South African Constitution. By skipping classes while awaiting redeployment to another school, additional teachers violate learners' educational rights. From a social justice perspective, educators have a moral and professional obligation to uphold the rights of learners. Skipping classes not only breaches this duty but also reflects a lack of commitment to the values of fairness, equity, and respect for learners' dignity.

Principals redeploy teachers who are ineffective and cause problems.

Principals frequently redistribute ineffective and troublesome teachers. One of the participants acknowledged that he had used redeployment to discharge a subpar teacher the year before. The participant acknowledged that the previous year, they had sent a teacher who was not doing well to another school.

“The experiences are very different. We usually receive teachers who are not good at teaching the curriculum and also with respect to human relations. Schools typically do not release hard-working teachers. Therefore, we are given problem teachers. I had the experience of working with a teacher who was always absent from work and was not doing the job correctly. So my experience is that schools will never release any teacher who is right with respect to rationalisation and redeployment processes. I got that experience. We also released one last year who was not doing well, and that teacher, I understand, has even resigned now as I speak. I know these things.” (P8: Interview).

Principals say that they redeploy teachers who lack the necessary skills and competence for effective curriculum delivery. To achieve positive outcomes, principals rely on the performance of teachers in the school who possess expertise in both their subjects and teaching methods, as they play a crucial role in providing high-quality education (Bragg et al., 2021; Tonich, 2021). There have been waves of efforts to bring greater accountability to American schools and classrooms throughout history (Kraft et al., 2020), and now principals in South

Africa are doing the same. As a result of quarterly accountability meetings, school principals are encouraged to retain their best teachers during redeployments. Bringing greater accountability to schools and classrooms involves implementing measures and strategies aimed at improving transparency, effectiveness, and responsibility at all levels of education. Nixon et al. (2020) assert that school principals are under pressure from state accountability laws to demonstrate learners' learning outcomes, frequently relying on standardised tests. This pressure comes from the increased emphasis placed on educational performance metrics and benchmarks mandated by the Department of Education. The managerial abilities of the principal may determine whether a particular teacher can be retained or not (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Every learner should be equitably taught by experienced, caring, competent, and proficient teachers who hold appropriate certification to teach in the relevant subject matter (Chu, 2019; Muremela et al., 2023).

Schools struggle to retain quality teachers.

According to this study, the most successful teachers are usually lost as a result of redeployment and rationalisation. The loss of the brightest teachers due to rationalisation and redeployment is one distressing reality in educational institutions. Speaking with members of the school governing body, they revealed that redeployment often results in the teachers they recruited as the best match leaving for another school.

“Therefore, our school was one of the schools affected by the redeployment. In my experience as an SGB member, redeployment affects teachers who are most needed in the school due to the principle of last in, first out (LIFO). You will find that the old teacher is not so effective in terms of teaching, but because he came first, he must be retained, and the one who came in last must go irrespective of the good results he/she is producing.” (SGB 2: interview)

According to the SGB's statement, excellent teachers may be impacted by redeployment and compelled to relocate, particularly when the Last In, First Out (LIFO) policy is applied. Using the same quality and equitable lens reveals that schools struggle to fill teacher positions and, in certain situations, are forced to keep them unfilled even while they actively seek new teachers (García & Weiss, 2020; Evans & Acosta, 2023). This continuous battle highlights the urgent need for all-encompassing approaches to deal with the underlying causes of teacher shortages and guarantee that every student has fair access to high-quality education. Sayed and Badroodien (2017) and Fessehatsion and Peng (2021) confirmed this finding by highlighting that the redeployment policy forced many experienced teachers and school principals to leave underprivileged communities. The loss of such a significant cadre of teachers not only depleted the institutional knowledge base but also undermined the continuity and quality of education in the underprivileged areas they served. Muthengi and Romata (2023) contend that maintaining a stable and consistent allocation of proficient and experienced teachers is crucial to providing optimal education to learners. This strategic approach is fundamental to cultivating an environment conducive to effective learning and academic growth.

Schools receive incompetent teachers through redeployment.

During the redeployment process, the Head of the Department provides a list of teachers, and the school management team (SMT) is responsible for proposing their employment for the school. Seniority determines the priority for additional permanent teachers who fulfil the minimum appointment requirements. The School Governing Body's responsibility is to guarantee the growth of the school by offering high-quality education; they are not actively

involved in the redeployment process. Their only responsibility is to suggest that particular teachers be assigned to roles. Members of the SGB do not take part in choosing the best applicant for the school, according to interviews conducted with them. Their task is to recommend the appointment of teachers. This situation is succinctly summarised by SGB 1.

“Unfortunately, we are just called to say, ‘Come and sign this, teacher.’ We do not interview the individual teacher before signing. When we are satisfied with the details, we endorse this teacher to come to our school. Most of the time we received a report from the principal that said that the teacher we received was terrible. He has a problem with coming late and not attending classes.” (SGB 1: interview)

School governing bodies (SGBs) are discontented with the redeployment of teachers to their schools, expressing concern that these teachers might lack quality and that there's no opportunity to assess them through interviews before their appointment. Teachers who are deemed inefficient are often redeployed to schools for reasons related to learner enrolment without consideration of their subject specialisation. This observation aligns with Maringe et al.'s (2015) argument, suggesting that disadvantaged schools frequently end up with unqualified and below-par teachers due to redeployment. For example, even when there are specific vacancies for mathematics and science teachers, schools still receive redeployed teachers who are not proficient in teaching these subjects.

6. Discussion

According to this study, learners' rights to a basic education are adversely affected when teachers are transferred between schools for operational requirements. Additional teachers are experiencing emotional distress and struggling to adapt to being redeployed. While waiting to relocate to a new school, they bunk classes, a practice that results in learners being left without a teacher for some periods. This absence not only disrupts the continuity of learning but also undermines educational rights by depriving learners of essential teaching and learning. This undermines the learners' right to education and violates the principles of equity and justice. This behaviour not only impacts individual academic progress but also fosters a culture of irresponsibility and disregard for the value of education. According to ELRC Resolution No. 6 (1998), a teacher who is declared additional under this procedure and who is unable to be redeployed for no fault of their own would remain additional to their current staff establishment until they can be appropriately redeployed. This simply means that those teachers who are declared additional, while waiting to be matched, should continue giving their services at that school. In addition, teachers in a new school can feel unprepared or unsupported in their transition to a different role or environment, leading to a reluctance to fully participate in the teaching process. Given these challenges, it starves them of their human rights, fosters professional injustice, and stifles their career growth, ultimately undermining their ability to contribute meaningfully to an equitable and inclusive education system. Khumalo (2019) emphasises that school principals must adopt leadership practices grounded in the principles of fairness, justice, and democracy that empower both teachers and learners within a socially just educational framework.

It is commonly practised for principals to redeploy inefficient and problematic teachers. Principals take decisive action by strategically redeploying teachers who demonstrate ineffectiveness and pose challenges within the school environment. Social justice demands that

all educators be given opportunities to improve through mentorship, training, and constructive feedback, rather than being sidelined or stigmatised. This proactive approach involves identifying individual teachers whose performance is below expectations and whose behaviour disrupts the smooth functioning of the school. By reassessing their placement and responsibilities, principals aim to optimise the overall effectiveness of a particular subject stream while fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. Through thoughtful redeployment, schools can better leverage the strengths of their staff and mitigate issues that hinder academic progress and institutional harmony.

Otieno (2024) highlights that schools often struggle to retain high-quality teachers, and so is also the case during the redeployment process. 'Redeployment' refers to the strategic reallocation of teaching staff to different roles or locations within the educational system, while 'retention' refers to the efforts made to keep highly skilled and motivated teachers within the school. School principals can establish an environment in which teachers feel appreciated, motivated, and inspired to remain dedicated to the teaching profession for the long term by investing in their retention (Nachshoni, 2024). A good principal should be able to defend and protect the best teachers with scarce skills who are hard to find during redeployment. The best interest of the child is to have quality education from the best teacher. Social justice in education prioritises the learner's right to receive quality education. Retaining skilled teachers ensures that learners, especially in under-resourced schools, have access to competent educators who can deliver the curriculum effectively. This aligns with Section 29 of the South African Constitution, which guarantees the right to basic education.

As a result of the redeployment, schools receive incompetent teachers. During redeployment, schools frequently encounter the difficulty of accommodating teachers who lack the requisite skills or qualifications to effectively teach their assigned subjects or administer their classrooms. Through redeployment, Maringe et al. (2015) argue that underprivileged schools often receive teachers with fewer qualifications and incompetence. This influx of incompetent teachers can significantly hinder the learning progress of learners and create a myriad of problems within the school. When learners are taught by underqualified or ineffective teachers, their right to quality education is undermined, violating the principles of fairness and justice that underpin a democratic society. These deficiencies can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, such as a failure to effectively communicate curriculum content, challenges in regulating classroom behaviour, and a general lack of engagement with learners. Consequently, teaching and learning may suffer, leading to decreased academic performance, increased disciplinary problems, and a general sense of frustration among learners.

The responsibility of the governing body of a public school is to promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school. According to Section 6 of the EEA (3)(a) Subject to paragraph (m), "any appointment, promotion, or transfer to any post on the educator establishment of a public school may only be made on the recommendation of the governing body of the public school, and if there are teachers in the provincial department of education concerned who are in excess of the educator establishment of a public school due to operational requirements, that recommendation may only be made from candidates identified by the Head of Department, who are in excess and suitable for the post concerned." The school governing body, in collaboration with the principals, bears the responsibility of meticulously ensuring that only highly competent teachers are recommended and appointed within their respective schools.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This study explored the effects of teacher mobility on learners' right to basic education in the redeployment of teachers. This study found that teachers who are declared additional due to redeployment and are awaiting placement in another school refrain from actively providing their services in the school where they are no longer needed. Again, principals are redeploying ineffective teachers who are causing problems, but this often results in schools receiving incompetent replacements. As part of the redeployment effort, the department should provide teachers with training, mentoring programmes, and adequate resources that can alleviate reluctance and help facilitate smoother transitions.

The study contributes new epistemological insights into the processes of teacher redeployment and rationalisation, highlighting how these administrative practices intersect with principles of justice in education. Through its findings, the study advances understanding of how equitable leadership and policy implementation can either uphold or undermine social justice within schools, particularly in contexts marked by inequality and resource scarcity. Again, the study provides valuable insights that can inform education policy on teacher redeployment to be amended in line with social justice in education.

Redeployment policies, when implemented fairly, can help correct these imbalances by placing competent educators where they are most needed, thus contributing to social transformation and justice. However, the redeployment process can also marginalise educators, especially when it is used punitively or without adequate support. Teachers may feel disempowered, stigmatised, or unfairly targeted, particularly if the criteria for competence are not transparent or if professional development opportunities are lacking. This undermines the principles of fairness and dignity central to social justice. Furthermore, I recommend that the school governing body, together with the principals, should ensure that competent teachers are recommended in their schools.

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