

## EXAMINING CHALLENGES NOVICE FEMALE PRINCIPALS ENCOUNTER REGARDING TEACHER ATTRITION: RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

This conceptualized paper sought to examine the challenges novice female principals encounter regarding teacher attrition in rural primary schools. Teacher attrition, particularly in rural areas poses a significant threat to the stability and performance of schools. The main question guiding this study is: What are the key challenges that novice female principals face in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools? A qualitative approach is adopted, encompassing an intensive review of scholarly books and articles from (2018-2024) on the topic under discussion. An interpretive paradigm is utilized to understand the academic perspectives focusing on principals in their unique rural contexts. Findings revealed that novice female principals face multiple challenges which include limited resources, professional isolation, lack of mentorship and cultural dynamics that exacerbate teacher turnover. In addition, inadequate support from local education authorities further complicates their ability to retain staff. The significance of the study lies in its potential to inform policy and leadership training programs designed to the needs of female principals within the rural settings. Limitations include the exclusive reliance on literature-based data which may require future empirical studies to validate the findings. The study highlights the need for targeted strategies to support novice female principals in mitigating teacher attrition and enhancing school stability

**Keywords:** *novice female principals, teacher attrition, rural primary schools, leadership challenges, educational leadership*

### Introduction and background

Connolly & James (2024) assert that novice female principals fulfil a variety of essential responsibilities for the efficient operation of educational institutions. Kilag et al. (2024) believe that these roles include establishing a vision for the school, overseeing staff, ensuring adherence to educational standards, cultivating a healthy school culture and connecting with the community. Principals are unequivocally responsible for establishing an environment that fosters teaching and learning thereby influencing student outcomes and overall school success. Consequently, Uy (2024) discovered that they are crucial not only for administrative and professional monitoring but also for inspiring, developing and supporting teachers, which is vital for retaining good teachers.

Teacher attrition, defined as the phenomena of teachers leaving their profession or migrating to other schools has emerged as a major issue in educational institutions around the world (Miller, 2024). Job discontent, a lack of support, insufficient resources and difficult working conditions are among the causes of teacher turnover (Van Eycken et al., 2024). Clearly, in the United States, high stakes testing and accountability systems have been associated to higher teacher turnover (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2024). Similarly, in the African setting, teachers frequently face additional problems such as poor incomes and limited professional development opportunities, which lead to high attrition rates (David & Naparan, 2024). In South Africa, socioeconomic inequities and apartheid's historical legacy heighten the challenge of retaining talented teachers (Steyn, 2024). Teacher attrition has adverse consequences that can significantly compromise instructional quality and students' academic achievement. Consequently, elevated turnover rates impede educational continuity, resulting in inconsistent teaching methodologies and diminished confidence between students and staff (Torres et al., 2024). This unpredictability might negatively impact students' learning experiences, perhaps leading to diminished academic performance and less motivation (Liu et al., 2024). As a result, the quality of education is negatively impacted

especially in rural areas where resources and qualified teachers are already scarce and limited. The challenges that female principals encounter in managing teacher turnover are most profound in primary schools located in rural areas. These leaders frequently encounter distinctive challenges including as gender prejudices and restricted access to professional development opportunities, which could impede their ability to effectively manage employee turnover (Adams-Harmon, 2024). In contrast, female principals may contribute various qualities to their leadership responsibilities such as relational leadership styles that can create collaboration and support among staff members (Zhang et al., 2024). These attributes may be brought to their capable management by female principals. Understanding the specific issues that they confront is therefore essential for the development of effective strategies for mitigating such challenges.

### **Significance related to relational leadership in teacher attrition context.**

Investigating the challenges faced by novice female principals regarding teacher attrition in rural primary schools is crucial for understanding how relational leadership could mitigate the issue of this phenomenon. Relational leadership (RL) highlights the need of trust, collaboration and mutual respect as critical factors for teacher retention in complex contexts (Francis et al., 2024). Novice female principals frequently encounter increased challenges encompassing isolation and insufficient resources which intensify teacher turnover. In contrast, relational leadership may cultivate a supportive school culture by potentially decreasing attrition rates (Gay, 2018; Scheide & Giblin, 2024). Similarly, research shows that leaders who prioritize relationships and emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate the complexities of teacher retention. Nonetheless, rural settings pose unique challenges that relational leadership alone may not resolve such as geographical isolation and lack of infrastructure. Thus, understanding how novice female principals implement relational leadership to manage attrition offers crucial insights into effective leadership practices in rural contexts.

### **Available strategies for implementation under such contexts**

Conversely, the study of female principals managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools highlights the need for targeted interactive interventions (Rashid & Shirima, 2024). Therefore, strategies such as mentorship programs, professional development workshops and improved communication channels can empower female leaders and enhance teacher retention (Farris, 2024). However, these strategies require systemic support from educational authorities to be successful. Thus, addressing the factors contributing to teacher attrition is essential for improving the quality of education and ensuring that students receive the support they need to succeed (Miller, 2024). In many instances, the challenges female principals face in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools are complex and multifaceted. By examining the causal factors and implementing effective mitigation strategies, educational stakeholders can work towards creating a more stable and supportive environment for teachers and students alike. Ultimately, improving teacher retention is pivotal for enhancing instructional quality and fostering academic success in schools.

### **Teacher attrition through the Deontological lens**

Notably, Deontological ethics are rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant which emphasizes duty, moral principles and the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions regardless of consequences (Burkhardt & Nathaniel, 2024). In the context of teacher attrition, deontology suggests that school leaders including novice female principals have an ethical duty to support teachers by creating a stable and conducive work environment. Unequivocally, mitigating teacher attrition is not just about outcomes but about fulfilling the moral obligation to ensure the well-being and professional growth of teachers (Rashid & Shirima, 2024). On the other hand, teacher attrition in rural primary schools raises ethical concerns when leadership fails to provide adequate support thus, breaching this duty. Similarly, the duty to retain teachers aligns with promoting student welfare as high turnover can negatively impact the delivery of quality education (Masson et al., 2024). Conversely, deontological ethics compels leaders to act based on principles of fairness and respect regardless of the challenges posed by rural contexts. Thus, examining these challenges through a deontological lens highlight the moral responsibility novice female principals hold in managing teacher attrition effectively. **The purpose** of this study explores the challenges female principals face in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools focusing on contributing factors and mitigation strategies. **The main question** is: What challenges do female principals face in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools and how do they mitigate its impact on school performance?

## Theoretical framework

In the context of examining the challenges novice female principals encounter regarding teacher attrition in rural primary schools, Empowerment Theory, Transformational Leadership Theory and Organizational Support Theory are interconnected in shaping a comprehensive approach to managing teacher turnover. Thus, Empowerment Theory (ET) focuses on giving individuals control over their work environment, leading to greater motivation and job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2023). By empowering teachers through participation in decision-making and providing professional development opportunities novice female principals not only improve teacher morale but also enhance the overall school environment. This empowerment is crucial in rural schools, where resources and support may be limited and teachers often face isolation. Similarly, empowered teachers feel valued which directly impacts their commitment to the school and reduces their likelihood of leaving (Miller, 2024).

On the other hand, Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) complements this by emphasizing the role of the leader in inspiring and motivating their team to perform at higher levels. Novice female principals who adopt transformational leadership practices such as fostering trust and promoting a shared vision, can create a school culture that is conducive to retention (Huang, 2024). Undoubtedly, transformational leaders help empower their staff by aligning with Empowerment Theory and through encouraging growth and development, which further reduces teacher attrition. In the same vein, Organizational Support Theory (OST) connects with both theories by highlighting the importance of perceived support from the leader and the organization in influencing teachers' loyalty and retention (Mathebula, 2021). Thus, a school environment where principals provide emotional and professional support reinforces both empowerment and transformational leadership. As a result, novice female principals who integrate these theories in their leadership approach are more likely to cultivate a supportive, empowered and motivated teaching staff by reducing teacher attrition in rural schools.

## Findings

### Data collection strategies

The authors adopted a qualitative approach in nature thereby employing an intensive review of scholarly books and articles published between (2018- 2024). The focus of this review is to gather in-depth insights into the challenges novice female principals face regarding teacher attrition in rural primary schools. The utilization of scholarly perspectives enhances the understanding of the intricate dynamics at play regarding the topic under discussion.

### Data analysis

An interpretive paradigm was utilized to understand the academic perspectives of principals within their unique rural contexts. This approach emphasizes the subjective experiences and meanings that novice female principals ascribe to their challenges regarding teacher attrition. Through capturing these scholarly perspectives, the authors sought to gain deeper insight regarding the leadership practices and their impact on teacher retention in rural primary schools.

## Findings

The findings of this study reveal several key challenges that novice female principals face regarding teacher attrition in rural primary schools. Unequivocally, a lack of resources and professional support emerges as a primary concern by limiting their ability to create an engaging and supportive environment for teachers. Conversely, female principals reported that their leadership style often prioritizes relationship-building and empowerment, which positively impacts teacher retention. On the other hand, challenges such as geographical isolation and limited access to professional development opportunities significantly hinder their efforts to retain qualified teachers. Similarly, many principals noted that community engagement plays a crucial role in retention fostering strong ties with parents and local organizations can create a supportive network for teachers. Thus, principals who actively work to enhance community relationships are more likely to see improved teacher morale and reduced attrition rates. However, the emotional burden associated with the challenges of leadership in rural settings can lead to burnout among novice female principals, which may inadvertently affect their effectiveness. As a result, understanding these findings is vital for developing designed support systems that resolve the specific needs of novice female principals ultimately enhancing teacher retention in rural primary schools.

## Discussion and results

According to Zalli (2024) the purpose of education extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, it encompasses the empowerment and holistic development of students as recipients of quality education. Undoubtedly, education serves as a foundation for personal growth, social inclusion and economic opportunity by equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly intricate world of economic activities (Ahmad, 2023; Kayyali, 2024). Unequivocally, access to quality education is essential for fostering critical thinking, creativity and responsible citizenship among students. Clearly, Alao et al., (2024) hold a view that empowered students are better positioned to contribute positively to society thereby enhancing community and national development.

Liu & Hallinger (2024) suggest that leadership and management in education play pivotal roles in shaping effective instructional and learning environments. Clearly, leadership refers to the ability to inspire and guide individuals toward achieving common goals while management involves the organization and coordination of resources to achieve those objectives ( Bolden et al., 2023;Natsir et al., 2024). In an educational context, effective leaders cultivate a shared vision, motivate staff and foster an inclusive atmosphere. Notably, relational leadership emphasizes building strong interpersonal relationships among stakeholders which can enhance collaboration and trust within the school community (Miller, 2024). Notably, such iconic leadership models are crucial in resolving challenges like teacher attrition particularly in rural settings (Yu et al., 2024).

Glassow, (2024) found that globally, the educational leadership faces various challenges particularly in managing teacher attrition which has significant implications for student learning outcomes. In the United States, high turnover rates among teachers have been linked to job dissatisfaction and inadequate support (Winfield & Paris, 2024). Similarly, in the African context, low salaries, poor working conditions and limited professional development opportunities contribute to high attrition rates (Hallett et al., 2024). In South Africa, the historical legacy of apartheid and ongoing socio-economic disparities further exacerbate efforts to retain qualified teachers (Wilkinson, 2024). Thus, the challenges of teacher attrition are both systemic and contextual thereby necessitating designed approaches to resolve them. The adversarial effects of teacher attrition on instruction and student performance are substantial. High turnover disrupts the continuity of education thereby leading to inconsistent teaching practices and diminished trust among students and staff (Miller, 2024). As a result, students may experience lower academic achievement and decreased motivation ultimately compromising the overall quality of education. As a result, Oxenham (2024) found that this phenomenon is particularly pronounced in rural primary schools where resources are often scarce and the ability to attract and retain qualified teachers is minimal.

Female principals face unique challenges in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools. According to Scheide & Giblin (2024) these challenges include gender biases, societal expectations and limited access to professional development opportunities which can impede their effectiveness in resolving attrition. Nonetheless, female leaders can adopt their relational leadership styles to foster a supportive school culture thereby enhancing teacher retention and improving student outcomes (Wilkinson, 2024). There emerges a need to create mentorship programs and encourage collaboration among staff so that female principals can mitigate the negative impacts of attrition on school performance.

According to Chaaban et al., (2024) in the South African educational landscape, the challenges faced by novice female principals are compounded by the socio-economic context. The historical legacy of apartheid has created systemic barriers that affect teacher retention and educational quality (Soeardi et al., 2023; Rashid & Shirima, 2024). Conversely, Butler et al., (2024) believe that novice female principals have the potential to drive transformative change within their schools by fostering an inclusive environment that values collaboration and support. As a result, Wang et al., (2024) believe that resolving the factors contributing to teacher attrition is crucial for enhancing instructional quality and promoting student success.

Ultimately, the authors through this study sought to explore the challenges novice female principals face in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools and to identify effective mitigation strategies. By understanding the causal factors and the adversarial effects of attrition, educational stakeholders can work towards fostering a more stable and supportive environment for both teachers and students. Thus, improving teacher retention is essential for enhancing the overall quality of education.

## **Sustainable empowerment strategies for novice female principals in managing attrition in rural primary schools.**

Novice female principals in rural primary schools can implement several sustainable empowerment strategies to effectively manage teacher attrition. According to Eden et al., (2024) they need to foster a supportive school culture which is crucial. Novice female principals should prioritize open communication, interaction and collaboration among staff (Fazil et al., 2024). Unequivocally, mentorship programs can also play a pivotal role by allowing experienced teachers to guide newly appointed female principals thus, enhancing job satisfaction and retention (Wilkinson, 2024). In the same vein, principals should advocate for professional development opportunities designed to the unique challenges of rural education (Miller, 2024). On the other hand, engaging with the community can strengthen ties and create a sense of belonging among staff (Oxenham, 2024). Ultimately, by employing these strategies female principals can mitigate attrition's adverse effects and promote a stable learning environment.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study highlights the unique challenges novice female principals face regarding teacher attrition in rural primary schools. By adopting a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm the research reveals that limited resources, geographical isolation and inadequate professional support significantly constrain these leaders' efforts to retain qualified teachers. Undoubtedly, the empowerment and relational leadership styles employed by female principals contribute positively to creating supportive environments that can mitigate attrition. Conversely, the emotional burden of their roles coupled with external challenges, can lead to burnout and impact their effectiveness. Thus, it is crucial for educational stakeholders to recognize and mitigate these challenges through designed support and resources by ensuring that novice female principals are equipped to foster a stable teaching workforce. Ultimately, this research highlights the need for further studies that explore effective strategies to enhance teacher retention in rural contexts by contributing to the broader discourse on educational leadership and sustainable practices in primary education.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the authors suggest that substantive ongoing support for the novice female principals in managing teacher attrition in rural primary schools should be provided by experienced school leaders. Educational authorities should provide designed professional development programs that focus on leadership skills and teacher retention strategies on regular basis. There is a need to enhance community engagement initiatives which can foster stronger relationships between schools and local stakeholders thereby improving support for teachers. Clearly, the creation of mentorship programs for novice female principals can help them navigate challenges more effectively by reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction, however it must be sustainable. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to a more sustainable and supportive environment for both principals and teachers in rural settings.

## **Limitations of the study**

This study focused on novice female principals in rural primary schools which may limit the generalizability of findings to other educational contexts. Thus, the qualitative nature of the research may introduce subjective biases in data interpretation.

## **Author biographies**

Dr. Saltiel Khololo Collen Mataboge is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management. Research interests encompasses instructional leadership in schools, Transformative leadership and participative management in schools, relational leadership, school safety, violence and social justice for students in schools, schools' financial management, school governance, mentorship and mentoring. I authored and co-authored several articles regarding contemporary issues in the field of education. Dr Mapula Rebecca Mabusela is a senior Lecturer at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management. Research niche areas involves women empowerment, leadership and management in schools. school safety, nutrition, financial management, school governance, parental involvement in school matters. I authored and co-authored several articles within the educational terrain.

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