

CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL AREAS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING DYNAMICS

ELOCK EMVULA SHIKALEPO

Namibia University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish the factors that characterised rural areas and how these factors influenced teaching and learning activities. A case study design was employed as a methodology for the study, consisting of five rural schools. The collected data was analysed by establishing themes and emerging categories. The major findings of the study revealed that commuting, climatic changes, hygiene, facilities and literacy levels, were the major factors that shaped rural areas. The study concluded that these factors have negatively influenced teaching and learning activities. The study recommended that educational stakeholders should confront these factors to mitigate their detrimental effects on teaching and learning at rural schools.

Keywords: Rural, Rural areas, Rural schools, Commuting, Working conditions, quality teaching, Learning outcomes.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Most educational context lack a precise definition of the concept 'rural' causing a confusion of the concept among scholars (Lingam, 2012). Due to this deficiency, little research attention is devoted to rural environments and their circumstances, subsequently depriving rural areas of the research attention they deserves. The concept of 'rural' needs to be well conceptualised so that such an environment is dealt with accordingly with all the attention it deserve. Various researchers have attempted to define the concept 'rural' from different perspectives.

Aziz (2011) explain 'rural' as an area that is outside the city and with low population density. Other authors explain 'rural' as a place outside a metropolitan city, with a rural population density under 2500 people and distinguished by adverse living conditions (Johnson & Strange, 2005; Kulkarni & Mitra, 2015). Monk (2007) disputes the location and population density factors, arguing that 'rural' refers to an area with economic dependence on agricultural and tourism activities, regardless of population density and location. Lingam (2012) and Heeralal (2014) view 'rural' as a place characterised by isolation in different regards, distance from cities and services and smallness in population density. Other researchers contend that defining rural communities is not only about the size or location of the area, but it also concerns place-based issues such as the geographic, economic, social and cultural aspects of the specific place or environment (Howley & Howley, 2010). It is the place-based issues that define whether an area is considered 'urban' or 'rural' area.

This study, comprehensively considers the defining parameters of the concept 'rural' as outlined by various authors above, to conceptualise 'rural' as an area located distant from towns regardless of its population density, and characterised by prevailing adverse working and living conditions as place-based issues. The locality of the rural environment is distant from townships where there are essential services. The absence of essential goods and services in a rural setting equals adverse working and living conditions that are typically the defining parameters as they shaped the environment. Rural areas are also referred to as 'remote' areas due to their distance from cities and urban centres resulting in these areas being far from resources, services and facilities which are associated with urban life (Kulkarni & Mitra 2015).

Living in rural areas needs to be well understood in terms of the living conditions prevailing in such a rural environment. Equally, working in rural areas especially when a person did not have prior experience and exposure working under such conditions presents challenges. Living and working in rural areas has not been researched extensively with the result that the needs of the residents of rural areas are not adequately addressed, depriving rural residents of well-being and not realising their full potential (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005). The place-based issues existing in rural areas needs to be established and confronted insofar as they have the potential to influence teaching and learning activities negatively.

In many developing countries of the world, rural areas are the most populous areas, yet the most neglected region in the provision of basic amenities such as good roads, primary and affordable health care, electricity supply, potable water, well-equipped schools and other essential infrastructural facilities (Adedeji & Olaniyan 2011). The isolation of rural areas presents the areas with diverse challenges. Rural environments can be geographically, socially, culturally, personally, and professionally isolating (Beutel, Adie & Hudson, 2011; McCormack & Thomas, 2003).

Rural areas are geographically situated far from main urban areas and cities and accessibility to these areas is not always easy due to rocky, sandy and bushy areas which make transportation difficult. The isolation associated with rural areas implies that teachers have limited interaction with other teachers with whom they can share teaching resources and practices. Rocky, sandy and bushy areas implies that teachers' mobility is negatively affected and they cannot access resources and services when needed.

Apart from geographical isolation, living in rural areas also implies lack of social interaction (McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Towse, Kent, Osaki & Kirua, 2002). Entertainment, recreational services and sporting facilities are limited in rural communities, resulting in restrictions on social interaction and on opportunities to realise potential in different spheres of human existence such as sport achievements. As rural environments are often severely impoverished and are associated with an aging population, unemployment and low quality of life, many teachers particularly those from urban backgrounds are faced with challenges regarding recreation and socialising, which adds to their job dissatisfaction (Monk, 2007). The lack of opportunities to meet-new friends and to socialise hampers teachers' quality of life in rural areas.

This results in qualified teachers aspiring for recreational opportunities declining employment at rural schools or getting transferred to urban schools that may cater for recreational services. The availability of essential goods and services in urban areas means that schools in

urban areas are well established in terms of resources and facilities, which then attracts good quality teachers to urban schools due to good working conditions (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Therefore, most teachers prefer to work in urban schools to enjoy the positive experiences associated with an urban environment, which then widen resource disparities between urban and rural schools (Marwan, Sumintono & Mislán, 2012). This disparity diminish learning opportunities at rural schools, resulting in learning outcomes not successfully met.

Teacher training curricula also posed threat regarding educating student teachers about the place-based issues in rural environments, as most of the students graduating in teacher training institutions are not adequately trained and prepared to live and teach in rural areas (Hellsten, McIntyre & Prytula, 2011; Lingam, 2012). This inadequacy in teacher training and the realities of rural area conditions not well researched, results in newly appointed teachers' disappointment and deterrence from accepting teaching positions at rural areas (Hellsten et al, 2011). Many teacher training institutions are located in urban areas and teaching practice for students often take place at schools in urban localities (Heeralal, 2014). Some students do their teaching practice in rural community as their community of origin (Lingam, 2012). However, these students may not go back to their community of origin for work after graduating as they may regard their education as a means of social mobility to locate to rural areas (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Those teachers who live in rural areas will then remain disadvantaged professionally due to lack of opportunities for professional growth, resulting in teacher turnover.

Rural school teachers are often overloaded with both teaching and administrative work which can be in conflict with their professional development ambitions (Hudson & Hudson, 2008). The result is then that rural school teachers do not have sufficient time to devote to their career development endeavours to help them with improved teaching abilities. These results in learners who live in rural areas generally exposed to schools where lesson presentations are not provided by qualified teachers (Jarzabkowski, 2003). Teachers' suitability to rural areas can be attained by specifically improving teachers' professional competencies for the circumstances experienced in rural areas (Hu, 2007). This can be done by ensuring that teacher training curricula is inclusive of the realities at rural areas and that student teachers are prepared for rural school teachings.

In addition to unqualified teachers, most rural schools face unique challenges related to lower salary levels and lack of facilities (Owusu-Acheampong & Williams 2015). These challenges prohibits successful learning by rural school learners. Successful learning in rural areas is also affected by its population density as in some cases there are too few learners to justify the establishment of the school in the area (Hannum, Irvin, Banks & Farmer, 2009). The result is that living in rural areas does not provide opportunities for rural residents to attain high-level education and be able to provide essential services for their rural communities.

In the absence of high-level of education, life in rural areas is therefore related to experiencing harsh living conditions manifested by poverty, as a lack of resources with which to acquire a set of basic goods and services (National Planning Commission, 2015). The lack of resources affect the provision of education including aspects such as learners' attendance of classes, teachers' motivation and parents' understanding of education and the roles they have to play towards the education of their children. Consequently, living in rural areas presents adverse living and working conditions that should be researched extensively, with a

view of developing measures on how to cope with these conditions so that their effects on teaching and learning is kept at minimum.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The mastery of learning outcomes ought to be met satisfactorily by all learners regardless of the place where their learning takes place. This will help learners, not only pass examinations and progress to the next grade, but subsequently become competent and productive citizens required to propel socio-economic growth. Despite this significance, learning outcomes at schools located in rural areas are not mastered optimally, owing to the conditions that shaped rural areas and not confronted to keep their effects on teaching and learning minimal. This study sought to establish the conditions characterising schools in rural areas and their effects on teaching and learning, with a view to raise awareness of these conditions so that measures can be taken to minimize their detrimental effects on teaching and learning activities in rural schools.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this study is described according to the following layout.

3.1 Research design

The purpose of this study was to establish the conditions that shaped rural environments and their implications on teaching and learning activities. In executing this purpose, a qualitative case study design was conducted. A case study allows an exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project or programmes functioning in a real-life context, and provides specific and contextually rich data (Simons, 2009). In case studies, the aim is to provide an explicit context of a phenomenon, out of which new insights can be developed (Moriarty, 2011). Insights from the case study can then be transferred to other situations with similar conditions. An explanatory case study design was relevant to this study, as the study was characterised by 'how' and 'why' research questions, address more contextual issues, and sought to explain why certain behaviors have occurred, their causes and effects in a particular setting (Yin, 2009).

3.2 Sampling and participants

Participants consisted of five school principals, two education officials and twenty eight teachers. Participants were sampled from two education offices and five rural schools of Omusati region, Namibia. Participants were sampled using non-probability sampling techniques. In non-probability sampling, the researcher has no way of forecasting or guaranteeing that each member of the population will be represented in the sample and some members of the population have little or no chance of being sampled (Leedy & Omrod, 2005). In non-probability sampling, the researcher has the prerogative to judge the population and produce the sample. School principal participants were sampled by means of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves researchers handpicking the participants to be included in the sample on the basis of the researcher's judgments of participants' typicality to the phenomenon of study (Chiromo, 2009). As principals were in charge of schools as learning institution in rural areas, they were better positioned to articulate rural-based issues and how they influenced teaching and learning activities at their schools.

Teacher participants and two education officials were sampled using snowball. Snowball sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique where the sampled members indicate other members who could provide rich information for the study (Chiromo, 2009). School principals and education officials assisted in getting hold of long-serving teachers and education officials in the region. Long-serving teachers in the teaching fraternity in a rural setting were well-positioned to outline the conditions that contorted successful teaching and learning in rural areas. Similarly, long-serving education officials who discharge education administration and management in Omusati region could equally contribute meaningfully to the research intentions.

3.3 Data collection methods

Data was collected by means of a literature study and an empirical investigation. The researcher reviewed existing literature pertaining to rural communities, rural schools as well as teaching and learning in rural areas. To complement the data from the literature study, an empirical investigation was commissioned, which used individual and focus group interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with school principals, on a voluntary basis, at their respective schools, as well as with two education officials at their respective offices. During the presentation of data, the anonymity of school principals were safeguarded by using names such as Principal one (P1), Principal two (P2), and so on. Schools were referred to as School A, School B, and so on. The names used for education officials were C1 and R1 respectively. Their offices were regarded as Office A and Office B.

Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with teachers at their respective schools, in a focus group of six teachers. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to generate a considerable amount of data about the participants' collective opinions and experiences with regard to the phenomenon of study (Moriarty, 2011). Focus group participation was voluntary, and all members of the focus group and other participants were given background information about the study, that the Regional Director has granted permission, the aim of the focus group interview, and anonymity and confidentiality surrounding the research. In conducting the interviews, researcher followed an interview guide and written down the responses from the participants. For anonymity of teacher participants, the researcher used names as Teacher one (T1), Teacher two, (T2), and so on, to relate specific data to participants during presentation.

As focus group interviewing explores the views of diverse groups of people, the researcher was able to unpack different perspectives within the group in relation to the topic of discussion (Choy, 2014). In addition, asking a group of people to respond jointly to common questions can yield varied and detailed data on the same topic (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones & Woolcock, 2006). The questions for both the individual and focus group interviews were open-ended questions in order to provide opportunities for both the interviewer and participants to discuss certain topics in more detail (Hancock, 2002). The open-ended nature of the questions provided opportunities for the participants to provide as much information as possible regarding the phenomenon of study and for the researcher to prompt participants for a deeper understanding of the subject that was studied (Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

The data was analysed according to the themes and patterns which emerged as a result of a process of inductive categorisation (Atieno 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The findings were interpreted and discussed in relation to the existing literature findings. The

interpretation and discussion also made use of the verbatim excerpts from the interview data because they carry authenticity and weight of the research findings.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The research sites consisted of five schools in Tsandi Circuit, and two Education Offices. All the research sites belong to Omusati Education Region. The Regional Director granted approval for conducting the study. The researcher visited research sites and explained the research intentions to all participants, and obtained informed consent from the participants. After an appointment schedule was agreed with the participants, the researcher started collecting data by starting with rural schools. The researcher firstly interviewed school principals and then held focus group interviews with teachers at every rural school sampled. When all participants were interviewed at all rural schools, the researcher then visited the two education offices, which were in different towns and interviewed the education officials.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The significance of conceptualising the conditions in rural areas cannot be over-emphasised. An in-depth comprehension of the challenges facing living, teaching at learning at rural schools can help designing measures for improving the quality of education at rural schools. In addition, informed teachers are better able to determine the extent to which they fit in with rural environment teaching. Rural areas were characterised by the following key issues:

4.1 Commuting

The study established that teachers at rural schools commute far distances on a daily basis to and from work, because they do not reside in villages close to their schools and no accommodation facilities at their schools. Within a third world rural context, commuting implies making use of the limited public transport available, or travelling by foot or with own car. Participants emphasised the nature and strenuousness of this daily commuting and the influence thereof on teachers' work performance.

Commuting on a daily basis presents unbearable effects on teachers, as *"commuting from town and other far places to come to school and go back exhaust teachers a lot"*. In addition, *"teachers were frustrated as they have to come to school from town and still go back, and this made them tired and not having enough time and energy to prepare their lessons"*. Since rural schools are far from towns *"the travelling distance exhausted teachers and when they arrive at school they were tired and not in the mood to teach"*. This negatively affected the mastery of learning outcomes by learners at rural schools.

The impact of the rainy season on harsh commuting arrangements, and the fact that rural teaching in a third world context did not necessarily imply ownership of one's own car, was illustrated as follows:

A teacher may get a hike from town and get dropped off at the roadside. If a teacher did not get a transport heading to the direction of the rural school, the teacher will have to walk at least ten kilometres arriving late and tired. This is a very big challenge especially during the rainy season.

It was clear from the interviews with participants that rural living circumstances in a third world context included many challenges. To cope with commuting challenges, some teachers erected informal housing structure made of corrugated iron sheets (zinc shacks) at schools to reduce distance and commuting costs. Apart from being too hot in summer and too cold in winter, teachers suffered during the rainy season as they could not cook their food, because of a lack of electricity and wet wood not suited for combustion.

Furthermore, commuting to school was exacerbated by extreme weather conditions such as floods when both teachers and learners were not able to reach schools. The implication was that during the rainy season with its periodic floods, commuting teachers were not able to reach school which has negatively influenced lesson presentation and the covering the complete curriculum. It was clear that commuting to schools in rural areas included severe challenges influencing teaching and learning negatively and causing frustrations for all stakeholders.

4.2 Climatic Changes

Extreme climatic occurrences such as floods, were experienced more heavily at rural schools due to poor housing and commuting conditions. During the rainy season when area were flooded *"even school principal camped at school because cars got stuck oftenly"*. Floods forced teachers to reside at school as *"during floods our teachers cannot move anywhere, they are forced to stay at schools due to poor road infrastructure that was worsened by floods"*. During such periods and due to scarce accommodation options, *"some teachers constructed shacks and shared the shacks with learners"*. This camping at rural schools in the absence of basic necessities needed for life caused low morale among teachers and principals, subsequently affecting negatively their teaching commitments.

During focus group interviewing at school D, the researcher was introduced to a video on a recent flood where teachers and learners were walking through flood water exceeding their knee level. As a result, school attendance was suspended until the water level has subsidised resulting in learners *"stayed at home for a month as they could not go through the water and this affected their performance negatively"*. It was clear that climatic changes as manifested by floods, was one of the factors challenging effective teaching and learning and teacher motivation to remain at rural schools.

4.3 Hygiene

Hygiene in terms of sanitary arrangements posed a major challenge at rural schools. Some of the research sites had no proper toilet and participants complained that *"the use of a pit latrine was not healthy and snakes could hide there as these latrines were poorly constructed"*. As there were no toilets at some rural schools, *"teachers went to nearby bushes to relieve themselves"*. The lack of proper toilet facilities was partially caused by the rural parents' economy, as most of the parents were unemployed and thus unable to voluntarily advance funds for the improvement of the schools. This correlates with literature evidence, that conditions at rural schools consisted of typical rural environment circumstances such as excessively populated areas of poor people who are uneducated and unemployed, thus unable to provide basic services to their communities (Legotlo, 2014; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008).

The sampled rural schools were without flushing toilets, but were situated in areas of dense bushes, which were beneficial for relieving purposes. Participants experienced lack of proper sanitation as undignified for qualified personnel and for that reason *"the government could have recruited unqualified teachers because they were the ones who could tolerate working under harsh conditions, but I could not come from the university only to use the bushes"*.

These undignified harsh sanitary arrangements resulted in poor retention of qualified teachers at rural schools, because *"if you got qualified teachers at rural school, they only stayed for a short period of time and then got a transfer. This caused a gap already, making the school to appoint new teachers every year"*. This indicates that poor sanitary arrangements at rural schools served as a major factor influencing the retention of qualified teachers negatively.

The low standard of hygiene at rural schools with its negative impacts on qualified teachers' retention, influenced learner performance at rural schools adversely. Lack of talented and quality teachers culminated in poor quality teaching at rural schools as only capable and professionally qualified teachers engender quality teaching in schools (Aziz 2011; Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves & Salgado, 2005; Jimerson, 2003).

4.4 Facilities and Services

All rural schools that participated in the study lacked accommodation facilities for teachers and learners. Teachers erected shacks, and sometimes with little support from the school coffers. However, these shacks were not enough, resulting in male teachers sharing shacks with male learners and female teachers sharing shacks with female learners. This housing arrangements demotivated teachers as their dignity and status were jeopardised with such an arrangements.

Government's attempt to provide accommodation for teachers was not adequate to accommodate all teachers in need of housing. *"Government only constructed a house that can accommodate two teachers"*, resulting in teachers having to share rooms such as *"sharing a room three of us [them]"*, and having *"one bachelor flat only that accommodates those teachers from far"*, while the rest of the teachers have to commute. The insufficiency of accommodation at rural schools caused tensions between staff members about whom to be accommodated in the bachelor flat as many teachers were hailing from far areas. The result was jeopardised good relationships between staff members, which ultimately culminated into unproductive working relationship with its related decrease in quality of teaching.

Apart from inadequate housing for teachers, rural schools also *"lacked facilities such as classrooms, staffrooms, libraries and laboratories"*, which correlated with literature findings that facilities and instructional material were inadequate in most rural schools (Ncube, 2013). The researcher observed teachers presenting lesson under trees at School A. A shortage of facilities inhibited proper teaching and learning, as they are the medium through which these activities could be realised. Classrooms were essential for lesson presentation, staffrooms for teacher interaction and lesson preparation, libraries for accessing learning resources and laboratories for supplementing theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

The absence of these facilities and services caused poor working conditions at rural schools. Poor working conditions were found to be less in developed countries due to the availability of resources to provide good working conditions, and severe in developing countries as there

was lack of infrastructure and financial resources especially at rural areas (Akyeampong & Bennel, 2007; Pitsoe 2013). These difficult working conditions intensified the lack of capacity for schools to improve the working conditions of teachers for improved quality teaching and learning (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011).

External to school settings, infrastructure and services such as transportation, protection, medical and banking services were required for basic sufficiency. Road networks as the backbone of economic functioning was experienced as significantly hampering teaching and learning at the selected rural schools. Interviews revealed that *"roads infrastructure really affected learning because sometimes teachers need to travel long distances to town to collect materials for experiments. The teacher may take long because the road infrastructures and networks were poor and distances were long"*.

The geographical locations of rural schools deprived teachers of access to support services, as these schools were difficult to reach resulting in teachers at rural schools being deprived of support services such as visits by advisory officials or school inspectors (Hammer et al, 2005). The lack of monitoring in rural schools caused by poor road infrastructures and networks, contributed to poor teacher performance and absenteeism (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008).

Transport challenges at rural areas undermined teacher mobility, demotivating teachers from retained rural school teaching. This was due to lack of reliable transport at rural areas as some schools were only reachable by crossing rivers that might be hard for teachers to cross without being transported (Marwan et al, 2012; Monk, 2007). This type of mobility demotivated teachers and detracted their attention from teaching at rural schools. In addition, teachers who drove long distances to school because of a lack of housing were more likely to leave their positions than teachers who lived in or near the community where the school was located (Lowe, 2006).

Poor road networks also affected the health and safety of both teachers and learners as the poor road condition hampered speedy access to medication and police services in town, as observed that:

Lack of clinics, hospitals and police stations in rural areas put the health and safety of the teachers and learners at risk, given poor road infrastructure and long distance they need to travel to access medical facilities and police assistance at towns.

As noted by Akyeampong and Stephens (2002), as well as Towse et al (2002), teachers perceived that living in a rural area involved a greater risk of disease and less access to health care. A visit to a doctor that might take a day in an urban area, can involve an absence of three or four days in rural areas (Mulkeen, 2006). This lengthy absence from work because of schools being isolated from essential health services, negatively affected teaching in rural schools. Teachers have raised health concerns in accepting offers to teach in rural schools, as most rural health service centres were not easily accessible.

In addition to the absence of medical facilities at rural areas, participants also expressed dissatisfaction with the unavailability of banking institutions in rural areas. To access their salaries, teachers travelled to urban areas for financial institutions. These actions resulted in

the absence of teachers from schools for more than one day because when teachers go to financial institutions to access their payment, they used the opportunity to do their shopping before returning to rural areas (Holloway, 2002). This arrangement impacted negatively on the quality of teaching in the sense of losing all the possible time needed for teaching lessons.

Due to the absence of physical banking facilities at selected schools, participants envisioned accessing financial institutions via the internet. However, limited internet access caused online banking to be difficult to achieve. The gridlock situation of a lack of basic facilities, the time frames with facility access, improper road networks and limited internet access were voiced as follows:

"In terms of accessing financial institutions, we cannot go to town due to long distance, and again we cannot use services such as internet banking due to poor network coverage. Teachers may only have to visit banks on weekends. Unfortunately, banks close early on weekends and teachers may not be helped given the distance they have to travel to town and sometimes lack of transport from rural areas to town.

Limited internet access also affected teaching and learning as internet connectivity was important *"to assist teachers to browse online content to facilitate teaching and learning activities"*. Considering the large proportion of young graduates at rural schools, participants emphasised the lack of sport facilities at rural schools as a major factor hindering the quality of life of especially young graduates, thereby impacting negatively on opportunities for social interaction. The lack of basic services at rural environment impacted on the limited resources of schools in rural areas, thereby affecting the potential to attract good teachers for good quality teaching at rural areas. Teachers shy away of schools in rural environments with their challenging working circumstances, resulting in a lack of good quality teachers with related good learner achievement.

The findings of this study proves that teaching in developing countries such as in Sub-Saharan Africa, was defined by poor working conditions that had also been established by other studies, such as the struggle to cope with the absence of basic teaching and learning resources, teachers overloaded with teaching and administrative duties, underfunding to schools and poor teacher salaries (Weber, 2007; Thakrar & Zinn, 2009). These were all basic factors that were considered as part of a poor working environment, which in many instances, were exacerbated by desolated rural environments and which hampered the provision of good quality teaching.

Part of a desolated rural environment was the low economic potential of the rural residents. As a result, rural residents were deprived of basic services such as clean water, electricity, proper housing and roads infrastructure due to their location and inability to afford and maintain such services, which then extended to rural schools. The lack of basic services at rural environment impacted on the limited resources of schools in rural areas, and affected adversely, the potential to attract good teachers for good quality teaching at rural areas. Most teachers preferred urban postings as urban schools has better educational facilities and resources (Shadreck, 2012; Zvavahera, 2012), compared to the limited educational facilities such as accommodation and classroom buildings as well as instructional resources like books and stationeries at rural schools (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002; Towse et al, 2002).

The economic potential of rural parents also affected extra lessons for their children because opportunities for teachers to earn additional income from private coaching of learners which was common in many urban areas, were limited in rural areas, mainly because of widespread poverty in rural areas (Shadreck, 2014). This lack of opportunities in rural areas to supplement low salaries was functioning as a major obstacle for teacher recruitment and retention in rural areas (Osterholm, Horn, Johnson, 2006). This obstacle affected negatively the quality of teaching at rural schools. Most rural schools also lack facilities for leisure and recreational activities (Towse et al, 2002). Together with poor infrastructure and instructional resources, these conditions made teaching at rural schools unbearable to qualified teachers and this diminished the quality of teaching at rural schools (Zvavahera, 2012).

4.5 Level of Literacy

Most of the parents in the rural areas have achieved very low levels of literacy (Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Parents in rural areas were less educated and have less ability to provide educational support for their children, as they were uncomfortable to discuss school work with children due to their lack of knowledge (Legotlo, 2014). As a result, most parents did not attach much significance to education and therefore *"did not assist their children academically as most parents did not know how to read properly, thus lacking an understanding of what learners were doing at schools"*.

Due to lack of understanding the importance of education and their role in assisting their children with proper learning, parents hindered learners' progress with school work by engaging them in excessive household chores. This was because *"parents prioritised learners to fulfil household chores first to school work"*. Participants were aware that to teach at a rural school implied a parent population with low levels of education impacting negatively on learner performance. This was because parents either did not assist their children with their schoolwork, or blatantly hindered their children to be properly engaged in schoolwork, usually by engaging them into household activities at the expense of their learning time.

Comprehensively considered, rural areas were characterised by a host of adverse conditions that negatively affected teaching and learning activities. Acquiring an in-depth comprehension of these conditions could be useful to educational stakeholders in establishing how best these conditions can be addressed, so that they do not interfere with the good quality of teaching and learning at rural schools.

5.0 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF FINDINGS

The trustworthiness of the research findings were established by triangulation and member checking.

5.1 Triangulation

Triangulation Is the use of multiple methods to data collection in order to enable these methods to complement each other and to confirm that the data present common codes and themes (Kahn & Best, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Omrod, 2005). According to Guba (1981) the use of different methods in a study compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits. This study employed data triangulation as one of the types of triangulation.

Data triangulation involves using different sources of information to increase the trustworthiness of the study findings (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation involves using different sources of research instruments, such as interviews, focus group discussions or participant observation that utilises different informants to enhance the quality of the data from different sources (Anney, 2014). The researcher has used different data collection methods in this study, which included individual interviews with school principals and education officials, as well as focus group interviews with teacher participants. These multiple methods all produced data that complemented each other in addressing the research goals. The similarity in responses of the informants represents the authenticity of the research findings.

5.2 Member Checking

Member checking seeks to establish whether the participants agree with what the researcher have written about the data they provided during the inquiry (Ary et al, 2010). Member checks requires that the data interpretations and discussions as they are derived are continuously tested with participants from whom the data was solicited (Guba, 1981).

The aim is for researcher to solicit feedback and share his or her interpretations of the data with the participants to help clear up miscommunication, identify inaccuracies and help obtain additional useful data. For this study, the researcher went back to the participants and shared the interpretation and discussion of the findings with them. This was meant to establish common grounds on the research outcomes with participants. This iterative process ensured that the findings that was presented in the report were a true and genuine reflection of the data collected from the participants.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The study sought to establish the conditions that characterised rural areas and their influence on the quality of teaching and learning at rural schools, particularly in the Namibian context. The study established that rural areas were shaped by different conditions that negatively influenced teaching and learning activities. Firstly, commuting was a very prevalent occurrence to most teachers working at rural schools. Commuting was worsened sometimes by the flood, which made it hard for teachers to access rural schools on time, as well as by lack of reliable transport to and from schools. Daily commuting and lack of reliable transport implied that teachers arrived late to work, and often exhausted. This reduced the quality of their lesson presentation, culminating in poor mastery of learning outcomes by learners.

Secondly, periodic floods were common to some rural schools and pose threats to good teaching and learning as well as a dignified way of living at rural schools. During flood times, teachers and learners struggled to cross flood water and often camps at schools, yet these schools did not have proper housing facilities and basic amenities. This situation decreased teachers' motivation to remain with rural school teaching, with related decreased learner performance. Zincs shacks that teachers erected at rural schools were not enough to accommodate both teachers and learners. In addition, the temperature changes in these shacks in different seasons were unbearable for human survival.

Thirdly, the level of hygiene at rural schools was not praiseworthy, owing to the absence of proper ablution and sanitary facilities. At some rural schools, pit latrine were constructed with organic materials that were prone to damage by insects, wear and tear. Small predators

that can pose harm to human life could also find shelter in these organic shelters. Participants therefore indicated that these pit latrines were not fit for human use, especially professional teachers. At some schools, there were no pit latrine at all, and teachers and learners resorted to nearby bushes to relieve themselves. This was a motivating factors to teachers, impacting negatively on their self-esteem and commitment to effect quality teaching.

Fourthly, rural schools were characterised by lack of facilities and essential services. Most rural schools had shortage of classroom facilities, laboratories and libraries and some learners were taught under trees. Rural schools were also faced with shortage of instructional materials to facilitate teaching and learning. This created a challenge for teachers to teach effectively for optimal learning. Essential services such as banking, medical and policing were missing at rural areas, which jeopardised the lives of the rural residents including teachers and learners. Teachers could aspire to use technological innovation, by way of internet banking and online shopping. However, poor network coverage and connectivity made these aspirations impossible. Poor internet coverage also implied that teachers could not access online content to facilitate good teaching and learning.

Fifthly, parents in rural community have attained low level of education, thus attached low level of significance to education. As a result, most parents did not play an active role in the education of their children, by giving them ample time to do their homework. Instead, parents diverted learners' time and attention to house chores that matters most to them. This defeated the mastery of learning outcomes by most learners whose parents did not understand the importance of education.

In view of the above challenges, this study recommended that proper accommodation facilities for both teachers and learners should be constructed at rural schools to address commuting and promote a dignified way of living to teachers during flood times. This is essential in ensuring a motivated teaching team for good quality teaching in rural schools. In addition, good accommodation facilities with proper ablution and sanitary facilities could help to promote hygienic conditions and safety of both teachers and learners in rural schools. Regarding shortage of facilities and services, education stakeholders should mobilise resources for the construction of sufficient classrooms, libraries and laboratories in rural schools, alongside the provision of adequate instructional materials. This is to ensure uninterrupted teaching and learning process in rural schools.

To promote safety and well-being of rural residents, police and medical facilities should be made available in rural communities. Parents should be educated about their roles as primary teachers for their children, and to refrain from distracting learners' attention from their school work and direct them to household chores. Only when parents conceptualised their educational roles that they can become supportive to teachers in helping learners master learning outcomes. Consequently, this study accepts that when educational stakeholders comprehend the established conditions and their effects on teaching and learning in rural areas, it becomes easy to deal with them so that they do not interfere with good quality teaching at rural schools. This will ensure that learners at rural schools are exposed to quality teaching despite the context in which their learning takes place.

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