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Rural Teacher Shortages and Home-grown Solutions: A Ugandan Case Study

Gilbert Arinaitwe
University of Tasmania
arinaitweg16@gmail.com

Michael Corbett
Acadia University
michael.corbett@acadiau.ca

Abstract

This paper provides a case study of teacher retention in rural Uganda focussing on the importance of rural experience and cultural connections. We argue that this study illustrates how rural parents and teachers reciprocally influence each other, and that homegrown and culturally-similar rural teachers bridge parents with the school both linguistically and through engagement in common community and cultural practices. While this case study illustrates the uniqueness of a particularly understudied African context, we suggest that the phenomenon of attracting homegrown and culturally-similar teachers is a complex and socio-culturally specific practice that, if intentionally supported, holds potential benefits for hard-to-staff schools. This work suggests the value of international case studies of teacher retention in diverse contexts.

Keywords: *homegrown teachers, culturally-similar teachers, teacher retention, rural education*

Introduction: Toward a Topology of Rural Education

A longstanding concern for rural education has been the attraction and retention of teachers (Halsey, 2018). While some rural communities face teacher recruitment and retention challenges, not all do, and the problem of rural teacher shortages is one face of the problem of teacher shortages more generally. This is a complex issue with a particular topology, and broad-brush approaches can distort the nature of teacher shortages and fail to distinguish between teacher mobility and attrition (Hanita et al., 2021) or indeed, explore the local nuances of particular rural communities in diverse contexts. The idea that all rural places experience teacher shortages, which some policy and academic literature contends is simply not supported. Yet, in the rural education literature as well as in policy documents around the world, are persistent calls for programs that address the empirically supported 'problem' of rural teacher shortages (Bradley et al., 2007; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Ingersoll, 2004; Rice et al., 2017).

There are a number of problems in this sort of analysis, not the least of which is the definition of rural itself. Contemporary human geography, other social sciences, as well as policy and state actors use multi-faceted ways of thinking about space and place. To draw on Lefebvre's spatial trialectic, rurality is perceived (imagine a rural landscape), conceived symbolically (for instance population density and distance to dense population metrics), and lived (taking a focus the experience of rural life) (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991). Rural is a relational concept that only has meaning in relation to other ideas such as urban and urbanisation. This complexity however is

seldom found in the state definitional processes which are designed to produce high-level analysis of large territories and populations. While these definitions are essential to the development of social policy, they can also obscure specific problems like how teacher shortages are addressed in different communities.

The idea of topology centres on the complexity of space and how the flat landscape of demographic analysis is complicated by social, economic, infrastructural, transportation, communication, institutional and lifestyle factors that play into which rural places are able to retain teachers, and which struggle to do so (Green, 2008; Reid et al., 2010, 2011). In addition to the diversity of rural communities within a given national or bioregional context, there are crucial differences between nation states relating to both physical geography and national policy and governance. Qualitative research and case studies can provide detail about how communities support teacher retention.

At present, most of the current research on rural teacher shortages comes from 'settler societies' such as the United States, Australia, and Canada where vast non-metropolitan geographies have long posed problems for modernisation and the educational systems which support it. For instance, one solution to this problem is that of the home-grown teacher (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Esparza et al., 2019; Gereluk et al., 2020; Irvin et al., 2020; Mahler, 2019). New research is also beginning to address problems of rural schooling and teacher shortages in China as well, but there is little analysis of the issue in other geographically vast jurisdictions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and in Eastern Europe. This case study focuses on teachers in rural Uganda and is part of a larger study that investigated the attraction and retention of teachers in four remote rural regions of the country. Rather than focussing on the reasons why teachers avoid and/or leave rural places, we seek to understand better why particular teachers stay through a case study of two Ugandan rural school districts.

The Context: Uganda

Because teacher retention is always place specific (Green, 2008; Green & Letts, 2007; Reid et al., 2010; Roberts & Green, 2013), it is appropriate to situate the study geographically. We describe the particular and some of the broader context in which the research was conducted and provides some links to the broader African context.

Countries on the African continent have varied colonial legacies, and as such, most have inherited colonial educational systems. The schools are patterned after French, Portuguese, German, Dutch, or British Educational systems. Instituted by missionaries and supported by colonial government, colonial education aimed to provide literary education for indoctrination purposes or to prepare students for jobs in a western styled economy. Due to colonial rule, western style education was adopted and maintained in most nations even though a need was recognized to reintroduce national languages (Alidou, 2003) and cultural components that emphasized African heritage (Madeira & Correia, 2019). Nevertheless, since the colonial period, Ugandan students are taught the Geography, and History of Europe and of the United States of America. Science is taught from the European and American background. Mathematics is taught using European cultural numeracy. Students are taught religion emanating from Europe and Asia.

In terms of governance, as through the British colonial period, the Ugandan national government is responsible for the whole education system and for giving financial assistance to 34 per cent of the secondary schools while 40 per cent of the schools are established and managed by the various religious bodies, 54 per cent by individuals and community and six per cent by the Ugandan Government.

Uganda is a landlocked country in the eastern part of Africa. It shares borders with South Sudan in the north, Kenya in the east, Tanzania in the south, Rwanda in the southwest, and Democratic Republic of Congo in the west. Uganda's population is predominantly rural with an average

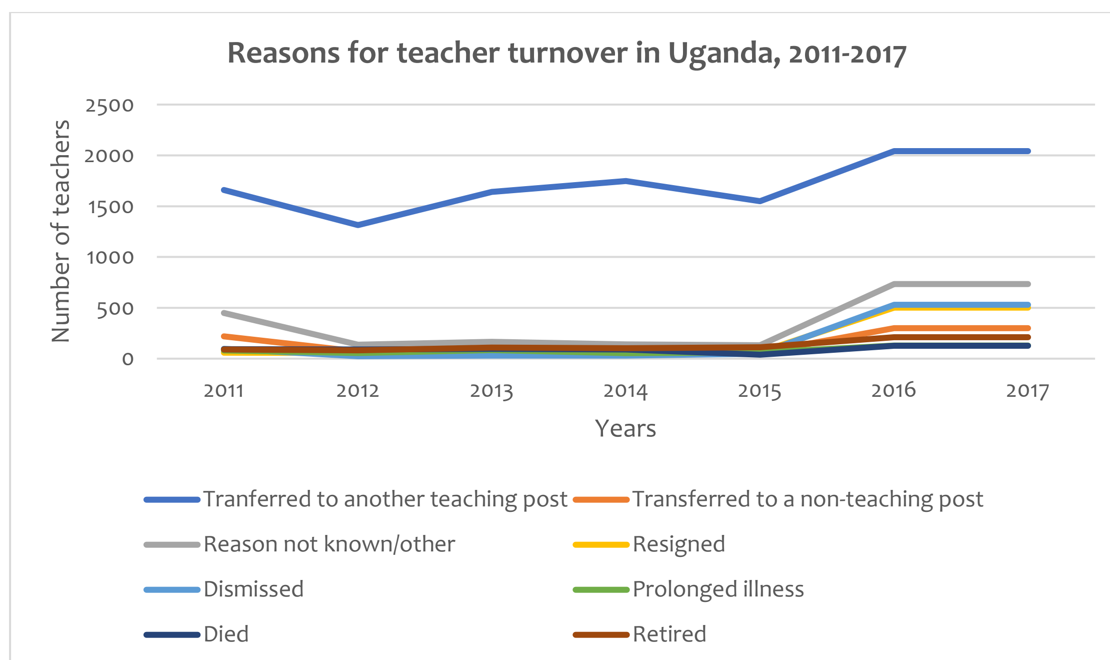
growth rate of 2.7% for the period between 2008 to 2018. The proportion of rural population has decreased from 81% to 76% over this period. Despite recent urbanisation trends, most Ugandans maintain dual identities with place of domicile and place of residence. Place of domicile includes the place where a person maintains a permanent home, typically the ancestral home where a person has property, and where the person is buried. Place of residence is the place where a person lives currently.

In Uganda, rural people tend to identify with the mother-tongue for their tribe (Sseremba, 2019) but normally learn English which is the official national language and medium of instruction retained from the colonial era (Alidou, 2003). However, most rural areas are predominantly monolingual, and typically, English literacy levels are low. Most rural areas are associated with specific ethnic groups. For instance, rural areas in western and central regions of Uganda are predominantly inhabited by Bantu speaking people; the eastern region by Nilotic speaking people, while the northern region is predominantly Sudanic speaking (Byaruhanga, 2013).

Teacher Shortage in Uganda

The demand for teachers in Uganda has increased due to the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) (Asankha & Takashi, 2011). The MoE (2014) reported that only 53 per cent of public secondary schools met official student teacher ratio (STR) guidelines. Available data show that Uganda's secondary teacher turnover increased from four per cent to eight per cent from 2011 to 2016 and decreased to six per cent in 2017 (see Figure 1). This turnover rate is in line with the five per cent African continental average (Mulkeen & Crowe, 2010). It is likely that the reporting of aggregated data rather than separating by urban/rural and specialist curricula probably hides the greater turnover rates in rural schools, particularly teachers of English, Mathematics and Science.

Figure 1: ***Recorded Reasons for Teacher Turnover in Uganda, 2011-2017***



Source. MoE Annual Education Statistical Abstracts of 2011-2017

The Ministry of Public Service [MoPS] observed that rural areas in 24 districts consistently failed to attract and retain quality teachers (MoPS, 2010) for a variety of reasons. Some rural areas experience conflict and have security challenges. Rural areas located along international

boarders have experienced insurgencies and host refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Rwanda. The rebel insurgency by *Lord's Resistance Army* in northern Uganda since 1987 and the *Allied Democratic Forces* in western Uganda since 1996, both contributed to the insecurity in most Ugandan border districts. These heavily forested and sparsely populated border areas are more open to insurgency illustrating the government's inability to exercise authority over vast territories (Day, 2019). Rural districts in the north-eastern subregion experience cattle rustling (Agade, 2010) and tensions with the government's disarmament efforts (Mkutu, 2008).

Rural areas in central and eastern part of Uganda are an amalgamation of tiny island areas within Lake Victoria accessible only by canoe. These areas carry additional risk of diseases less common in mainland Uganda (Kabatereine et al., 2011). The combination of lack of easy and safe travel and higher incidence of disease has implications for teachers' safety in such regions. In the southwestern part and the highland areas in eastern Uganda experience temperatures that fall below 4°C which is very unusual for Uganda where normal temperature varies from 25°C to 34°C.

Rural areas have restricted access to services, including teacher training institutions, banks and hospitals. Teacher education institutions are mostly located in larger towns that act as regional centres to smaller districts. Teachers' salaries are available only through banks which in rural areas are often inaccessible. The lack of hospitals, banks and teacher training institutions reinforces teachers' decisions to commute to rural areas. The absence of utilities such as electricity and running water greatly affects rural communities. Only two per cent of rural areas are connected to the national electricity grid (Gore, 2009). Not surprisingly, teachers seek to reside in urban areas with reliable electricity and clean, piped water and rural teacher shortages are a chronic problem in many areas.

Case Study of two Rural Ugandan Districts

Rural areas in Kanungu and Kisoro districts were selected from the 24 districts identified by MoE as hard-to-staff areas. The two districts are adjacent in the extreme southwestern corner of Uganda's international borders with Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the west, and Rwanda in the south. They border the districts of Kabale and Rubanda in the east and Rukungiri in the north. They are approximately 7-8 hours' drive by road from Kampala, the capital of Uganda and its largest city. Road transport to districts is vastly different. Kisoro district has sealed, all-weather tarmac roads that connects it to other districts and two international borders. Kanungu's tarmac highway road from Kampala ends in adjacent districts and a 'marram' or non-sealed road of 44 km takes three hours to travel the distance to Kanungu. All roads connecting the highway road to the schools within the two districts are marram roads. Therefore, schools far away from the highway roads might have no public transport. Commuting to these communities is not reliable or even possible for teachers.

Methodology

Our study explored the lived experiences of teachers in rural public secondary schools in Uganda. We investigated the question: how do rural schools and communities optimise benefits from homegrown and culturally-similar teachers in the context of low rural teacher retention? We designed an embedded single case study (Yin, 2014) conducted over a period of eight months in three phases. We began with a reconnaissance and mapping exercise that identified characteristics of 22 rural public secondary schools in both Kanungu and Kisoro districts. We used inclusion/exclusion retention criteria, which identified seven schools selected for the next phases of the study selecting what Green (2008) called sites of excellence. A total of four schools, two from each district, were selected for an in-depth case study (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2014) because they had relatively high teacher retention for their districts. Participants including 20 teachers, four

headteachers, and seven community members were selected using a combination of opportunistic and purposeful sampling techniques (Ritchie et al., 2003; Robinson, 2014). These techniques allowed for on-the-spot sampling decisions that emerged during fieldwork (Suri, 2011). The 31 participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Finally, we looked beyond the intensive case study sites to two other case study sites by conducting interviews with two headteachers and two focus group discussions comprised of eight teachers in each school.

Verbatim transcription of interviews was followed by member checking (Birt et al., 2016) with all participants. Data were analysed deductively and inductively adapting thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, (2006). An iterative process (Bazeley, 2013) revised and confirmed themes. This paper reports one of the themes: homegrown and culturally-similar teachers. Fictitious names for participants and sites have been used to minimise identifiability and ensure confidentiality.

Homegrown and Culturally-similar Teachers

The principal strategy for teacher retention in the study context is to recruit and support teachers who were born locally or whose home communities are linguistically and culturally similar to the locale of the school. Our findings indicate that teachers retained in the rural schools in the study area were overwhelmingly 'homegrown' and 'culturally-similar' teachers. Homegrown teachers were defined as teachers who 'grew up' in the school district. We define culturally-similar teachers as those who did not grow up in the school district but shared an ethnic identity and a language continuum with the local community.

Attracting homegrown teachers was a deliberate strategy to address teacher employment and turnover. In the words of one head teacher:

> *Some teachers could come and after two years you hear they have been transferred. Most of the teachers who could run away were teachers who are from out of Kisoro district. These people would be posted here, after accessing the (government) payroll, you hear that they are going away, opting for a transfer (back to their home districts). We opted for teachers who come from around here... (Albert, the headteacher Burera High School).*

Albert identified how recent graduates from outside the district accepted rural placements as a stepping-stone to transfer to preferred urban locations after completing the compulsory deployment. To obtain teachers who would stay longer, Albert reported that school authorities preferred teachers seen as homegrown. This view was reported also by Eliot, a community leader Gakenke High School: *"We feel, teachers from the locality should occupy first [sic] because the school is ours, we struggled for it. This issue is a challenge to teachers themselves who work far (away from their place of domicile)."* Eliot indicates how the wider rural community expected the central government to preserve employment for teachers from the local district.

In addition, schools also were able to attract and retain culturally-similar teachers. All culturally-similar teachers interviewed were born from rural areas or adjacent districts, they shared ethnicity, common religious values, and in some cases, had social network ties to the community. For example, Deborah said:

> *I was then in Kampala. Much as I am a Mufumbira, I was not raised here but someone saw it fit that I should come back home… actually I came to Kisoro to go for interviews. I was given the job, so I came to work (Deborah, teacher Gakenke High School).*

Similarly, Fletcher, another culturally-similar teacher, reported:

> *I was born in Kabalole district. My paternal grandparents were coming from Rugyeyo, Kanungu. I studied lower secondary at Gicumbi High School, Kanungu, and upper secondary*

at Musanze high school, Rukungiri and attained my diploma in education at National Teachers College Kakoba, Mbarara district (Fletcher, teacher Rulindo High School).

Both Deborah and Fletcher shared ancestry with the members of the wider rural community. Similarly, Gideon reported:

> *Although my home area is a bit far in Pallisa district, I got an advantage of finding my grandmother in Kabale district. More so, when I was studying in Kabale, I made friends (who are) born from Kanungu district. After our studies, they are the ones who linked me up. They told me of an opportunity here … I was given a job. (Gideon, teacher Kirehe High School).*

The shared culture was further reported by Norman, teacher Rulindo High School: "*I was born in Kabale district. Compared to the place I was born, life in Kanungu is relatively the same because language is the same, food is the same, people socialise the same way, so life is the same.*" Like Norman, many teachers were from districts adjacent to their present workplace and felt some shared culture and history.

Social and Cultural Connections with the Place and People

Teachers stayed because of the established relationships necessary to integrate into the community. Stanley, BOG Chairperson, reported:

> *There is that sense of ownership because the school is theirs. So, they are giving back to community and the other thing is they are teaching their own people. … if something goes wrong you are questioned within the villages and the communities where [sic] you are part of (Stanley, BOG Chairperson Burera High School).*

Similarly, Brian, a teacher put it this way:

> *We are teaching our own people. We are nurturing our own people. They need to benefit from us the commoners of the area. So sometimes, I feel comfortable to work in an area where I am born rather than taking my knowledge somewhere else (Brian, teacher Gakenke High School).*

Brian indicated a feeling of ownership due to shared culture with students and members of the wider community. In the quote below, a related sentiment is expressed as a sense of responsibility:

> *By the issue that I am an old boy (alumni) and even working in my locality, it is where I am born, and which means the children we are handling are our children. Some are brothers, some are close relatives, some are my neighbours – they neighbour the school [sic], at the same time my home (Elvis, teacher Burera High School).*

Elvis' passion to serve is nestled in a desire to support students closest to his place of domicile. He provides an example of reciprocity to local schools in gratitude for support received from school authorities. Teachers were recruited based on fitting in with established community values and social ties with other members of the school community, and a bond with the school that encouraged them to stay longer. Deborah commented:

> *I do not feel any reason to transfer and leave knowing there is no other teacher of English language able to handle the students. These are my people! Why should I leave them stagnant, and I go to teach others? (Deborah, teacher Gakenke High School).*

These teachers illustrate commitment to both professional duty and social connections with community. Social and cultural connections most teachers had towards parents and students were more evident than abstract commitments to professional service.

Bridging the Wider Community with the School

Homegrown and culturally-similar teachers served as a link between parents and the school. Edwin commented:

> *We encourage teachers who are from near [sic] because … (it is) … one way of promoting the school. Parents tend to interact with those teachers, and they are told the whereabouts of the school. So, you find parents having or getting to know and consequently many parents bring their children. (Edwin, teacher Rulindo High School)*

Edwin reported that recruitment of teachers who grew up in the local community support the school in multiple ways and local people expected employment opportunities for these teachers. The ethnic identities, cultural background, and life experiences of homegrown teachers equipped them to establish ties with parents and other community members strengthening the school's ties to the community. These teachers were trusted by parents.

> *Parents find it easier to approach you (the homegrown teacher) than they would if it were a stranger (culturally dissimilar teacher). The parent tries to get close to you so that once you know him and you know his child, then possibly you would guide, counsel the child. (Terry, Community leader Rulindo High School)*

Terry reported that parents preferred teachers who knew both the children and parents. Thus, teachers mediated between the school and parents and were role models for students to emulate.

> *We are like ambassadors of this rural area. Because those people where I come from, most of them trust me with their children and sometimes you find them asking me: how are my children performing? And probably if they have other bad behaviours, then I am a point of reference. I can reach home and talk to their parents. And even the children behave well at school and at home because they know I can tell their parents and school administration. (Kevin, teacher Rulindo High School)*

Kevin indicated that teachers link the school and the parents and school authorities looked for teachers who knew families and who could teach the curriculum in a way that got otherwise disengaged students to fit in the school system. These teachers achieved results.

Proficiency in Local Language

Rural parents and students expected teachers to communicate in both English and the dominant local language because most parents were reported to have less exposure to English. For example, Gabriel, PTA Chairperson Rulindo High School said, "*On average, the highest level of education for most parents, is primary seven. Education is a problem. Most parents do not read and write. So, some of these teachers act as interpreters of school circulars*." As a result, teachers who shared language spoken by the wider community were able to fit in. Gideon said, "*Being a Muntu and the Bakiga are also Bantu, it was not difficult for me to understand the language. My language is Lugwere. Within like two months, I had known most of the things.*" Gideon's Bantu ethnicity enabled him to integrate easily and interact within the community.

English, the official medium of instruction for teaching in all secondary schools, was not widely spoken among rural students who mostly communicated using the shared local language. As a result, teachers typically used a bilingual mixture of local language and English. This teacher who was not bilingual illustrates the issue:

> *It was really challenging (at the start). I could not teach Senior one (S1) students because S1 students needed to interpret everything I teach, and I did not know the language. I could not say the words in Rufumbira (local language). They did not understand what I was saying (in*

English). When I asked, they said everyone had to explain (in Rufumbira). (Deborah, teacher Gakenke High School)

The rural school context requirement for teachers to communicate the curriculum in the local language highlighted the gap between national language policy and the local expectations of parents and the students.

Involvement in Community Events and Activities

Teachers actively sought out and participated in community activities and groups that used their skills or drew on their interests in community. For example, Lewis reported:

> *When I came, the community had to make use of me. In the Bataka group, I work as an auditor. Then I joined Traders' Association, they also elected me as auditor. Then there is Bikoguze Association, I work as Vice Chairperson. There is another group called 'Abungura group', which is for my clan, I work as a Treasurer. They make use of me because they hope I am able to help them, and I am working and enjoying all those responsibilities. (Lewis, teacher Kirehe High School).*

Lewis joined groups that fit both his interests and ties with the community, namely, place of residence, culture, and financial groups. The community utilised Lewis in leadership roles similar to Elvis who reported: "*I am the PTA Chairperson of a certain primary school, I am the old students' representative to School Management Committee of my former primary school … (and) I am the Vice Chairperson of the church.*" Community involvement provided a social outlet for these teachers to contribute and enhanced teacher's local social status.

Work-family Balance

Teachers typically preferred schools close to the place of domicile for family reasons. Lewis provided a good example:

> *In 2012 when I was at Ngoma High School, the school was so far from my home and yet I had an old mother whom I was supposed to look after. At home, I work as a family Chairperson. I developed an interest to apply to this school because it is near my home of residence ... I do the teaching at the same time looking after my old mother. So alongside that of course I have a family that I look after in collaboration with my spouse. I give maximum attention to the students and my home affairs and really, I enjoy my work. Me, I am very comfortable. (Lewis, teacher Kirehe High School.*

Lewis' sentiment was similar to most teachers' desire to work close to their place of domicile or in places that afforded them easy mobility between workplace and place of domicile. Working close to place of domicile also enabled teachers to monitor and manage their property. Xenon reported:

> *I had to come and serve my place. At the same time (as I work), I look after my property rather than employing somebody. That is why I have liked this school. (Xenon, teacher Burera High School)*

Moreover, Deborah said:

> *One of the main reasons why I left Kampala to come this side is my father's property. Some people were trying to steal the gardens. After my parents' death, the responsibility fell in my hands. I have my uncle here. He was not happy and at times did not want me to be there (in Kampala). So, he wanted me to come (Deborah, teacher Gakenke High School).*

Other teachers stayed because of marriage to members of the local community., Brenda said, "*I transferred to this school from an urban school in Rukungiri four years ago. I came here because my*

husband who works here had got in an accident and therefore could not continue commuting." Brenda's situation was an example of dual career families who found jobs in the same community.

Discussion

Kilpatrick et al. (2011) noted that, "*It is important to recruit the 'right' people with the 'right' attributes to rural positions, to ensure a good match. Essential attributes include a rural affinity, commitment to the community, flexibility, adaptability, persistence and willingness to risk take*" (p. 189). But this sense of 'rightness' is unlikely to be generic across different national rural and cultural contexts. We wondered, what individual and social factors promote teacher retention and professional longevity in the context of schools and communities rural Uganda. In this research setting, most teachers found employment in a rural school close to their place of domicile. Culturally-similar teachers who moved for other reasons (e.g. government job or spousal employment) viewed the community as their place of residence and we found that they were less inclined to stay than homegrown teachers. Some culturally-similar teachers were likely to return to their place of domicile after meeting their expectations such as finding a government job. For newcomers, who had little or no cultural similarity, the community did not have the same strong pull, nor were these teachers appreciated in the same way.

While this is a localized and culturally specific case study, previous research in the US (Boyd et al., 2005; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Reininger, 2012) and Canada (Gereluk et al., 2020) found that many rurally-raised teachers preferred to teach close to where they grew up and in areas with similar characteristics to their hometown. Likewise, in Australia, Mayer et al., (2017) reported that teachers, "*taught in schools in areas where they lived prior to entering the university program … (or schools located) in areas with similar socioeconomic profile as that in which they lived prior to their teacher preparation*" (p. 107). Kilpatrick and Abbott-Chapman (2002) also found that rural youth in Tasmania prefer to find jobs near to home due to family and school/community social ties. In the United States, Hardré (2009) argued that "*more home-grown teachers fit with their own similar rural cultures, know how to survive and are familiar with the place*" (p. 4). Consistent with literature from Sweden (Cvetkovic, 2009), China (Wang & Chen, 2020) and Australia (Kilpatrick et al., 2011), affinity to rural life was reported to attract and retain teachers interviewed in this study.

For the teachers themselves, living together with both nuclear and extended family enhanced the likelihood of staying on in a position and this persistence in turn supported the consolidation of family resources. Both school authorities and teachers reported social and economic advantages for teachers living within extended family, community and cultural configurations. The desire for work-family balance we found in this study is consistent with the literature on teacher retention (Day & Gu, 2010; Halford, 2020; Liao, 2019) and work-life balance generally (Connidis & McMullin, 2002).

Our findings indicate that rural school authorities preferred teachers proficient in the local language and cultural knowledge (Marichal, 2021). Homegrown teachers who participated in this study reported communicating easily with parents and students in both the local language and medium of instruction (Tembe, 2006). Many rural students and parents effectively required bilingual instruction and teachers fluent in *Runyakitara* (Bernsten, 1998; Namugenyi, 2018), the first language for rural communities in this study. These teachers operated as linguistic brokers within the high stakes formal credentialling system of the Ugandan school system.

In this study, Ugandan rural teachers' roles also extended beyond school to the wider community. These roles include: (a) homegrown teachers acted as 'boundary crossers' who supported culturally-similar teachers and culturally non-similar teachers to integrate in community, (b) they served as a cultural, social, economic and linguistic brokers between the

parents and the school, and (c) they were seen as role models for students due to shared kinship in the community. The induction and integration of culturally-similar teachers and culturally non-similar teachers into the wider rural community was possible because homegrown teachers were already familiar with both the rural community and the school culture.

Consistent with Australian (Reed, 2009) and Canadian research (Danyluk et al., 2020; Gereluk et al., 2020), homegrown teachers in this study play a variety of non-professional and para-professional roles, mediating between parents and school authorities to convey and negotiate the interests of both parties. For example, teachers would become sureties for school fees that helped avert student exclusion from school for failure to pay. Moreover, homegrown teachers provided linguistically and culturally sensitive feedback to parents about their children's progress at school and negotiated with the parents to provide special care for their children (Bauch, 2001). We also found that homegrown teachers provided altruistic support for students as a way of giving back to their home communities, again confirming international literature (Friedman, 2016). Homegrown teachers were also often involved in community leadership roles in groups and associations. In reciprocity for employing their own members, the community and parents contributed to school funding needs.

Conclusion

In addition to providing educational services and state mandated curriculum and pedagogy, it is our conclusion that home-grown and culturally-similar teachers provide critical ancillary support to rural schools. Our study has demonstrated that Ugandan rural communities recognise and value homegrown teachers as a resource for addressing teacher shortage and teacher retention; and for attracting and integrating newcomer teachers in the local community.

Our analysis illustrates how familiarity with languages and sociocultural practices in the communities allowed homegrown and culturally similar teachers to deliver curriculum in place-sensitive ways that engaged both students and parents in the educational process. This situation was beneficial to the teachers themselves, enhancing their professional and social status, but also to parents who required and valued what might be called brokering and translation co-curricular work of teachers who possessed local knowledge.

While a case study does not support generalisations for all rural communities, we suggest that teacher education programs, education providers and policy actors might cooperate to facilitate forms of teacher education as well as attraction and retention mechanisms to allow home-grown and culturally-similar teachers to find positions in rural schools. This case study illustrates the specificity of successful, community supported teaching, and the importance of qualitative research into questions concerning teacher shortages and what might be done about them. Our analysis also raises questions about the complexity of professional work and life in different rural contexts, which, if studied in particular situations through qualitative research, could inform relevant and place-sensitive teacher education and effective and appropriate incentivisation for finding teachers who are more likely to remain in hard to staff schools.

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