

**An exploration of primary teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, retention,
and job satisfaction in Malawi**

Maxwell Peprah Opoku

Special Education Department, United Arab Emirates University,
United Arab Emirates

Alex Nester Jiya

Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences, Pan African University
Cameroon

Rose Cynthia Kanyinji

Pentecostal Life University
Lilongwe-Malawi

William Nketsia

School of Education, University of Western Sydney
Australia

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Abstract

The relevance of education in the effort towards alleviating poverty cannot be overemphasised. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in Africa, with over 80% of the population living in rural areas and reeling under deplorable conditions. With the effort towards practicing inclusive education, there is the need for policymakers to expedite attempts towards providing equitable access to education for children living in rural communities. Teachers are central in the effort towards practicing inclusive education. Thus, the aim of this study was to understand the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education, job satisfaction, as well as their intention to remain in rural schools. A total of 305 primary school teachers were recruited from 44 rural schools in three regions in Malawi to complete three survey scales. The results show small but positive relationship between attitudes, job satisfaction, and teacher retention. Only job satisfaction was a significant predictor of teachers' attitudes. The need for policymakers to provide teachers with supports and improving conditions of service, has been discussed in detail.

Keywords: Inclusive education, teachers, children in rural schools, access to education, quality education.

**An Exploration of primary teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, retention,
and job satisfaction in Malawi**

Inclusive education is an educational policy that demands that all children are provided equitable access to education (Florian, 2008). According to Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011), three interrelated constructs constitute the right to education: access to education, quality education and the right to respect within a given environment. To elaborate, education has been envisaged as fundamental human rights and thus, discussions have centred on ways through which governments would make it accessible to all children (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; McGrath, 2010; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). With respect to rural education, governments have been urged to make education accessible to all children. In particular, teachers are agents of change who could make sure that children in rural schools acquire relevant skills to participate in society (Themane & Thobejane, 2019). However, the intricate relationship between rural community and deprivation cannot be overstated (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Mulkeen, 2005). This means that governments should make a conscious effort to make school facilities available and deploy teachers to rural communities. In Malawi, one such strategy has been giving financial incentives to teachers to remain in rural schools (Mwenda & Mgomezulu, 2018). Teachers who have been trained in urban areas have to forgo some pleasures and access to basic amenities available in urban areas. The additional income is intended to motivate teachers to remain in their post in rural schools.

In this study, inclusive education is broadly defined as making deliberate arrangement in schools to enable all children including those with disabilities, HIV/AIDS, girl-child and orphans to participate at all levels of education (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2017a). Due to discrimination, inequalities and hierarchy in societies, inclusive education has been envisaged as useful policy to bridge the gap in societies (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010; Sharma et al., 2013). However, this can only be achieved in the event where

teachers accept to include all students in their lessons (Sharma et al., 2013). It is believed that teachers ought to embrace, be knowledgeable about diversity, and be aware of appropriate ways to teach all students in classrooms (Carew et al., 2019; De Boer et al., 2011; Vaz et al. 2015). With many countries reforming their education systems for the purpose of practicing inclusive education, universities including those in Malawi, have introduced programmes in inclusive education to prepare teachers to adopt inclusive teaching practices in classrooms. These programmes aim to position teachers to teach all children, including those enrolled in rural schools, in one classroom.

Globally, teacher deployment to rural schools has been a challenge (Blank, 2016; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017b). In Malawi, a rural community is an area with less than 5,000 inhabitants, having limited social services with agriculture being their main source of livelihood. Just like any rural community in sub-Saharan Africa, there are limited jobs, accessible roads, telecommunication and financial services in Malawi (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Blank, 2016; International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2018; Mwenda & Mgomezulu, 2018). The situation in rural areas has made such an environment unattractive to professionals such as teachers (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011). Each year, it is estimated that over 2,000 qualified teachers leave the profession to take non-teacher positions (Blank, 2016). The most affected areas are the rural areas which have become difficult to staff. In rural schools, there is a ratio of 1 teacher to 82 students compared to 1 teacher to 67 students in urban schools (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017b).

While the government has adopted financial incentives to retain teachers in rural areas, schools in rural communities continue to be vacant (Blank, 2016). Many children start school late and drop out of school early without acquiring any meaningful skills. For example, it has been estimated that half of children who enter primary 1 continue on to complete primary school (Blank, 2016). The high rate of children dropping-out of school

coupled with limited access to trained teachers, lend support to a study of teacher retention and job satisfaction in the current era of practicing inclusive education. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, job satisfaction and retention.

Research context

Malawi is a landlocked Southern Africa country with an estimated population of nearly 18 million (Malawi National Statistical Office, 2019). It is categorised as one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2018, Malawi was among the lowest ranked countries, 171 out of 189 countries, on the human development index (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2018). Specifically, individuals in Malawi have low living standards, knowledge and life-expectancy. Compounding this situation is the fact that 80% of the population live in rural areas where there is limited access to education, healthcare and other necessities (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2017). In order to improve the living conditions of individuals in the country, the government of Malawi has identified education as a useful policy to alleviate poverty in the country (International Monetary Fund, 2017; UNECA, 2017). It is important to state here that there is a three-tier education structure in Malawi: eight years primary education, four years each of secondary and tertiary education (Hummel et al., 2016). Specifically, inclusive education has been promoted as a useful policy to promote the learning of all children in Malawi. This approach means that teachers will be given the requisite training and conducive environment to implement the policy in classrooms.

The Malawian constitution espouses the need for all children to have access to all levels of education. There are various legislations promoting the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi. For example, the country is a signatory and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which is a key milestone in effort

towards practicing inclusive education. This convention seems to inform the development of National Policy on Special Education in 2007 and the Disability Act of 2012 which assert the rights of all children to education in regular classrooms. Additionally, the National Education Sector Plan (2008 – 2017) and Education Sector Implementation Plan (I & II) make provision for the implementation of inclusive education. Undoubtedly, there is solid legal foundation for the implementation of inclusive education for all children in Malawi.

The target of the Malawian government is to reform school systems to enable children, regardless of their needs, to have access to education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017b). To enhance the learning process, there are plans for public education and re-training of teachers to provide meaningful education to all children. Currently, pre-service teachers take some courses in inclusive education to enable them to teach all children in regular classrooms. Most importantly, free universal primary education has been provided to all children in public schools. This suggests that regardless of one's geographical location, children would be able to have access to at least primary education. Unfortunately, the implementation of inclusive education has stalled due to plethora of challenges impacting on successful practices in schools (e.g., Blanks, 2016; Chimwaza, 2015; Chitiyo et al., 2019). For example, teachers are unable to acquire requisite skills needed to teach all students in regular classrooms (Blanks, 2016). Currently, there is a search for best practices to enable all children to benefit from the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi. However, the need for implementation of inclusive education for children in rural communities was not advocated in the National Inclusive Education Policy. With the majority of children with disabilities, HIV, orphans and other vulnerable Malawi children living in rural communities (Hummel et al., 2016), there is the need to study the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education in rural schools.

Attitudes, job satisfaction, and teacher retention

Attitudes of teachers towards practicing inclusive education is one of the most researched areas of inclusive education. In conceptualising the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and theory of reasoned action, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) identified attitude as important to understanding human behaviour. With respect to TPB, Ajzen (1991) argued that beliefs are identified as vital to explaining human behaviour. Generally, three related beliefs (behavioural, normative and control beliefs) have been identified as predicting human intention towards performing or undertaking an action. Behavioural beliefs are identified as a key component which explains whether an individual will be favourable towards performing a given behaviour. Behavioural beliefs accumulate into attitudes towards behaviour. Due to its relevance, efforts are being made to understand human actions towards performing a given action. In this study, attitude refers to the disposition of individuals towards practicing inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011).

It is believed that understanding teachers' attitudes is the first step towards promoting the education of diverse students in regular classrooms (De Boer et al., 2011). The attitudes of teachers could enable teacher educators to understand whether they would be for or against the practice of inclusive education. One major approach to support teachers to develop positive attitudes to teach diverse students in regular classrooms is through either pre or in-service training in inclusive education (Carew et al., 2019; De Boer et al, 2011). Exposing teachers to courses in inclusive education would enable them to understand diversity among students and make efforts to support all students in classrooms. Furthermore, teachers would develop in-depth insight into legal frameworks and policy underpinning the implementation of inclusive education. In the Malawian context, it is unclear as to whether teachers'

knowledge of inclusive education and policies would have any impact on their attitude, satisfaction and retention in rural schools.

While many teachers have received training in inclusive education, there is lack of uniformity with respect to attitudes of teachers on practicing inclusive education. In a global review of mainly Western literature on attitudes towards inclusive education, De Boer et al. (2011) concluded that teachers were neutral with respect to their attitudes towards practicing inclusive education. However, more recent studies have reported complexities with respect to teachers attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities. While many studies have reported that teachers were positive towards practicing inclusive education (Garrad et al., 2019; O'Toole & Burke, 2013; Romero-Contreras et al., 2013), other studies reported they were not (Shah et al., 2016; Wong & Chik, 2015).

In rural communities, despite adversities and limited resources to support learning and teaching activities, teachers seemed positive about teaching all students (Deng, 2008; Kuhl et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2015; Themane & Thobejane, 2019). However, teachers expressed the need for access to learning materials, training and specialised personnel to advance their practices (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). Studies on teachers' attitudes towards working in rural schools have been limited to mainly countries such as Australia where there are systems to support inclusive practices. In countries where there is high rate of poverty and scarcity of amenities in rural communities such as Malawi, it is unclear as to whether teachers would be positive towards teaching children with diversities enrolled in rural schools.

In the study reported here, teacher satisfaction was operationalised as a feeling of fulfilment among teachers in line of their duty. The satisfaction encompasses a good condition of service, less stress, having the required teaching materials and feeling respected in their role (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2004; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Nagar, 2012). It is apparent that satisfied teachers are more likely to have a positive attitude to implementing

inclusive practices. Unfortunately, the extent of satisfaction of teachers supporting the implementation of inclusive education has received limited attention in the literature (Katz, 2015; Shaukat et al., 2019; Strydom et al., 2012).

For instance, in a Pakistani study, Shaukat et al. (2019) studied the relationship between satisfaction of special educators and self-efficacy towards practicing inclusive education. While they found no correlation between job satisfaction and self-efficacy, with respect to demographic variables, they reported that female teachers and those with postgraduate qualification were more efficacious and satisfied than male teachers and teachers with undergraduate or certificate qualifications, respectively. Also, young teachers who were less than 30 years of age were less satisfied to teach students with disabilities than teachers who were more than 30 years of age. In the Pakistani study, only special educators were considered for participation. The narrow scope of participants might affect generalisation or application of the findings to other contexts. In regular schools, both special and regular teachers are supporting inclusive practices, thus there is a need to consider attitudes of both in a study.

The continuous availability of teachers in schools may impact their attitudes towards implementing inclusive education. Teacher retention is operationally defined as intention of teachers to stay and work in rural schools. While children living in rural areas struggle to acquire quality education in countries such as Malawi (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2017a), the attitudes of teachers towards remaining and teaching all students in rural schools is unreported. Few studies have studied the attitudes of teachers towards practicing inclusive education in rural schools. For example, in a qualitative study of Australian secondary school teachers' attitudes towards practicing inclusive education, Kuhl et al. (2015) reported that several barriers affected inclusive practice. Although teachers were in support of inclusive practices, teachers reported limited pedagogical training and resources

for inclusive practices. As there was a small sample size recruited for this study, there is a need to expand the study to include additional participants.

Factors such as financial incentives, respect, opportunity for professional development and an accepting community have been found to enhance teacher retention (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Blanks, 2016; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008; Mulkeen, 2005; Mwenda & Mgomzulu, 2018). There is seeming relationship (e.g. education) between factors influencing teacher attitudes towards inclusive education, job satisfaction, and retention in rural schools. Unfortunately, an empirical study has yet to examine the relationship between the three constructs (i.e., attitudes toward inclusive education, teacher retention and job satisfaction). With changing teacher attitudes identified as first step towards practicing inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011), it is unclear as to whether it will be impacted by job satisfaction and retention. In light of this gap in the literature, we addressed the following questions:

1. What is the association between demographic variables and the three variables of attitudes, teacher retention, and job satisfaction among primary school teachers in Malawi?
2. What is the relationship between teacher attitudes towards inclusive education, retention and job satisfaction among primary school teachers in Malawi?
3. How do demographic variables (coursework on IE and awareness of IE policy) moderate the relationship between attitudes and the other two predictors, teacher retention and job satisfaction?
4. How do job satisfaction and retention predict attitudes towards inclusive education in Malawi?

Methods

Participants

Participants for this study were primary school teachers recruited from rural communities in Malawi. The teachers were drawn from 22 communities located in two (north and central regions) out of the three administrative regions of Malawi. The rural communities were selected based on familiarity and close proximity to the researchers. While participants were recruited from 20 schools in the northern region, in the central region participants were drawn from 24 rural communities. The inclusion criteria for this study was qualified teachers who had been posted to public primary schools located in the study communities.

In all, a total of 440 questionnaires were distributed to teachers in the study areas. We were able to recover 305 completed questionnaires, representing a return rate of 69%. Table 1 presents a summary of the data collected from participants. With respect to gender, 58% of the participants were females; 37% were 41 years and above; 70% indicated they had a certificate in teaching; 43% had taught for more than 11 years or more; 74% were married; 56% indicated they had taken courses in inclusive education; 80% said they were aware of inclusive education policies; and 63% of the participants said they were living with their families in the rural communities (see Table for details).

Instrument

The instrument used for data collection consisted of demographic variables and three published surveys adopted for this study. The first section of the instrument was demographic questions developed from the literature and based on the Malawian context: gender, age, education qualification, years of teaching experience, marital status, taken courses in inclusive education, awareness of inclusive policy and living with family in rural communities.

The first survey was Attitude towards Inclusion Scale developed by Sharma and Jacobs (2016). This scale measures attitude of teachers towards practicing inclusive education. While this instrument was developed to measure attitude towards teaching students with disabilities, we adapted it slightly to reflect teaching diverse students in rural schools. The scale is made up of 10 items, two items addressing both beliefs and feelings about inclusion and anchored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). A mean score above 4.5 was interpreted as a positive attitude towards inclusive education. Some of the items on the scale were: 'I believe that all students regardless of their ability should be taught in regular classrooms', 'I believe that inclusion is beneficial to all students socially', 'I believe that inclusion benefits all students academically',

The second survey was a job satisfaction survey. We adopted Yale University's (1974) Job Satisfaction section of the Job Diagnostic Survey which is made up of several sub-scales. However, for this study, the unidimensional job satisfaction scale was adapted to collect data from participants. The scale is made up of 14 items and anchored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from extremely dissatisfied (1) to extremely satisfied (5). A mean score of 3 or above was interpreted as satisfaction among teachers. Some of the items on the scale are: 'I am satisfied with the amount of job security I have', 'I am satisfied with the amount of pay and fringe benefits I receive' and 'I am satisfied with the people I talk to and work with on my job.'

The third survey was the Teacher Retention Scale (TRS) developed by Opoku et al. (2020) to assess teacher retention in rural schools. The scale is comprised of 12 items, two sub-scales (social and structural capitals) and measured on a five-point scale which ranges from very low (1) to very high (5). A mean score of 3 or above was interpreted as teacher retention in Malawi. Some of the items on the scale are: 'I remained in rural area because I

have been promoted and recognised’, ‘I remained in rural area because my salary was increased’ and ‘I remained in rural area because the community accept me’.

The scale was piloted among 21 teachers recruited from two rural areas at a district in the Southern region (Mwanza). The pilot study yielded appropriate Cronbach alpha values (attitudes = .72; job satisfaction= .74 and teacher retention = .70) and feedback from participants were incorporated in the final instrument used for data collection.

Procedure

The study and its protocols were approved by University X. Subsequently, approval was sought from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, asking permission to conduct the study. The Education directorates were contacted to support the data collection process. The education officers gave the list of primary schools within the catchment area to the research team. The researchers randomly selected 50 primary schools from a list obtained at the Ministry of Education. However, six headteachers either were unavailable or did not grant permission, leaving 44 schools available to participate in the study. The data were collected by the second and third author. The authors contacted the headteachers, gave them the study and its protocols, explained the purpose of the study and targeted participants. During break time, the headteachers assembled all the teachers and asked the authors to explain the study to them. Teachers were not paid to participate in this study. Those who wished to take part in the study were given a printed copy of the questionnaire and informed to complete it at their convenience within the next two weeks. The authors went back to the schools to pick up the surveys. The data were collected between January and April, 2019.

Data Analysis

During the collection of questionnaires from participants, the authors checked to make sure that all the sections had been completed. In the event where there were uncompleted

sections, participants were asked to complete those sections. Afterwards, the second author entered all the data from the completed questionnaires in IBM SPSS Statistics version 24. For each of the scales, we checked their reliability by computing the Cronbach alphas. The scores on the three continuous variables yielded appropriate values (attitudes = .80; job satisfaction = .90; teacher retention = .87). Based on Field's (2013) assumption that studies with large sample are by default normally distributed, we proceeded with the analysis.

We first calculated the means and standard deviation of teachers on attitudes, teacher retention, and job satisfaction. We then proceeded to answer the research questions. To answer research question 1, we computed t-test and analysis of variance to assess the association between demographic characteristics and teacher related variables. While the t-test was computed for demographic variables with two levels (e.g., gender, education qualification), ANOVA was computed for demographic variables with three levels (e.g., age and teaching experience). We assessed homogeneity of variance for each of the scores generated in order to make sure that it was not violated.

To answer research question 2, we calculated the Pearson's Product-Moment correlation coefficient to ascertain the relationship between the continuous variables (attitudes, job satisfaction, and teacher retention). To answer research question 3, a Two-way factorial ANOVA was computed to examine whether the two demographics of interests (taken courses in inclusive education and awareness of inclusive policy) will moderate the relationship between other demographics and continuous variables. To answer research question 4, a hierarchical regression was computed to assess the predictors of attitudes towards inclusive education. We checked to make sure that assumptions such as linearity and multicollinearity were not violated. While the demographic variables and the predictors were entered in step 1, only teacher retention and job satisfaction were entered in step 2.

Results

The mean score for the dependent variables were as follows: Teacher retention ($M=2.30$; $SD = .85$), job satisfaction ($M = 3.02$; $SD = .83$) and attitudes towards inclusive education ($M = 4.37$; $SD = 1.26$). While teachers were low on retention, they were ambivalent on attitudes towards inclusive education. However, teachers indicated that they were satisfied when it comes to teaching in rural schools.

Relationship between Dependent Variables

The relationship between the dependent variables were examined using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was small to medium correlation between the three variables. For example, there was medium correlation between job satisfaction and teacher retention ($r = .37$, $n = 305$, $p = .001$) and job satisfaction and attitudes towards inclusive education ($r = .34$, $n = 305$, $p = .001$). Also, there was a small correlation between teacher retention and attitudes towards inclusive education ($r = .19$, $n = 305$, $p = .001$).

Association between Demographics and Dependent Variables

Table 1 presents a summary of an independent sample t-test which was computed to compare the dependent variable (attitude, teacher retention and job satisfaction) scores for two-level demographic variables (Gender, education qualification, marital status, taken course in inclusive education, and teachers' awareness of inclusive policy). There was significant difference between participants based on marital status and awareness of inclusive policy on the Teacher Retention Scale only. With respect to marital status, married teachers were higher on teacher retention than unmarried teachers. Also, teachers who were unaware of inclusive policies were higher on retention than their peers who indicated that they were aware of such policy documents.

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of age and teaching experience on the three independent variables. There was significant difference between participants on teaching experience and the Teacher Retention Scale only. Participants with certificate qualifications were higher on retention than their counterparts with bachelor-level qualifications (see Table 1 for details).

Table 1.

Association between Demographics, Attitudes, Retention and Job Satisfaction

| Demographics | Categories | Sample (N=305) | Attitudes | Retention | Job satisfaction |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------|------------|------------|---------------------|
| Gender | Male | 127 (42%) | 4.43(1.28) | 2.29 (.88) | 3.11 (.88) |
| | Female | 178 (58%) | 4.33(1.25) | 2.30 (.83) | 2.97 (.78) |
| | <i>t</i> | | .67 | -.14 | 1.48 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .001 | .001 | .007 |
| Age | 21-30 years | 103 (34%) | 4.47(1.25) | 2.23 (.76) | 2.94 (.80) |
| | 31-40 years | 88 (29%) | 4.31(1.24) | 2.37 (.90) | 3.02 (.91) |
| | 41 years and above | 114 (37%) | 4.37(1.26) | 2.30 (.89) | 3.05 (.78) |
| | <i>F</i> | | .46 | .65 | .83 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .003 | .004 | .005 |
| Education qualification | Certificate | 214 (70%) | 4.40(1.30) | 2.38 (.82) | 3.05 (.79) |
| | Bachelor or above | 91 (30%) | 4.31(1.16) | 2.09 (.87) | 2.97 (.92) |
| | <i>t</i> | | .58 | 2.73** | .82 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .001 | .02 | .002 |
| Teaching experience | Less than 5 years | 90 ((30%) | 2.75(.92) | 2.30 (.77) | 3.02 (.89) |
| | 6-10 years | 81 (27%) | 2.57(1.01) | 2.14 (.85) | 3.06 (.81) |
| | 11 years or more | 134 (43%) | 2.86(1.07) | 2.39 (.89) | 3.01 (.80) |
| | <i>F</i> | | 1.47 | 2.16 | .10 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .01 | .01 | .001 |
| Marital status | Single | 78 (26%) | 4.45(1.07) | 2.13 (.78) | 2.99 (.92) |
| | Married | 227 (74%) | 4.35(1.32) | 2.35 (.87) | 3.04 (.79) |
| | <i>t</i> | | .63 | -1.94* | -.37 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .001 | .01 | .001 |
| Taken courses in inclusive education | Yes | 133 (44%) | 4.38(1.25) | 2.22(.81) | 2.95 (.83) |
| | No | 172 (56%) | 4.37(1.28) | 2.35(.88) | 3.08(.82) |
| | <i>t</i> | | .06 | -1.39 | -1.34 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .001 | .006 | .006 |

| | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Living with family in rural community | Yes | 192 (63%) | 4.38(1.22) | 2.32(.87) | 3.00(.82) |
| | No | 113 (37%) | 4.37(1.33) | 2.25(.80) | 3.07(.83) |
| | <i>t</i> | | .06 | .75 | -.74 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .001 | .002 | .002 |
| Awareness of inclusive policy | Yes | 245 (80%) | 4.38(1.02) | 2.24(.85) | 3.03(.84) |
| | No | 60 (20%) | 4.35(1.08) | 2.50(.82) | 3.00(.78) |
| | <i>t</i> | | .16 | -2.10* | .24 |
| | <i>Partial eta squared</i> | | .001 | .01 | .001 |

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

Moderation Effect of Inclusive Training

Table 2 presents a summary of two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to assess the impact of training in inclusive education and demographic variables on the three independent variables, attitude, retention and job satisfaction. There was interaction effect between training in inclusive education, marital status ($F(1, 305) = 2.95, p = .02$) and living with family ($F(1, 305) = 2.83, p = .05$) on job satisfaction and attitude, respectively. To expand, teachers who were married were more positive on job satisfaction than teachers who were single. Also, teachers who indicated they were living with their family in rural communities were more positive than teachers who indicated otherwise. However, the magnitude of difference was small: marital status (*partial eta squared* = .013) and living with family in rural community (*partial eta squared* = .001).

Table 2.

Interaction Effect of Training on Variables

| | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Partial eta squared</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 17.11 | .11 | .74 | .001 |
| Retention | 1 | 65.86 | .64 | .43 | .008 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 157.45 | 1.19 | .28 | .004 |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 2 | 123.62 | .77 | .46 | .001 |
| Retention | 2 | 206.18 | 2.01 | .14 | .008 |
| Job satisfaction | 2 | 151.14 | .11 | .89 | .006 |
| <i>Education qualification</i> | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------|------|------|------|
| Attitude | 1 | 62.22 | .39 | .53 | .001 |
| Retention | 1 | 19.08 | .19 | .67 | .003 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 223.53 | 1.68 | .20 | .001 |
| <i>Teaching experience</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 2 | 91.21 | .57 | .57 | .001 |
| Retention | 2 | 168.35 | 1.65 | .19 | .002 |
| Job satisfaction | 2 | 71.65 | .53 | .59 | .007 |
| <i>Marital status</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 263.87 | 1.65 | .20 | .002 |
| Retention | 1 | 4.91 | .05 | .83 | .004 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 392.27 | 2.95 | .02* | .013 |
| <i>Awareness of inclusive policy</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 4.65 | .03 | .87 | .001 |
| Retention | 1 | 46.73 | .46 | .50 | .001 |
| Job satisfaction | | | | | |
| <i>Living with family</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 159.38 | 2.83 | .05* | .001 |
| Retention | 1 | 112.33 | 1.09 | .30 | .009 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 245.76 | 1.85 | .18 | .003 |

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

Moderation Effect of Awareness of Inclusive Policy

The interaction effect of knowledge on inclusive education policy and demographic variables on the outcome variables were assessed (see Table 3 for details). Knowledge of inclusive education policy moderated the relationship between gender ($F(1, 305) = 3.35, p = .053$, partial eta squared = .02), teaching experience ($F(2, 305) = 2.35, p = .04$, partial eta squared = .01) and marital status ($F(1, 305) = 3.53, p = .051$, partial eta squared = .006) on retention and job satisfaction, respectively. To expand, female teachers were more positive on retention than male teachers. In addition, teachers with more years of teaching experience were more likely to remain in rural schools than teachers at initial stages of teaching. Moreover, teachers who were married indicated that they were more remain in rural schools than teachers who were single ($F(1, 305) = -1.94, p = .05$, partial eta squared = .01). However, the magnitude of difference on the interaction effect was very small.

Table 3.

Interaction Effect of Inclusive Education Policy on Variables

| | <i>df</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | Partial eta squared |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 9.41 | .06 | .81 | .001 |
| Retention | 1 | 341.32 | 3.35 | .053* | .02 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 3.46 | .03 | .87 | .001 |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 2 | 184.65 | 1.15 | .32 | .001 |
| Retention | 2 | 179.71 | 1.76 | .17 | .02 |
| Job satisfaction | 2 | 165.12 | 1.23 | .29 | .001 |
| <i>Education qualification</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 205.57 | 1.29 | .26 | .002 |
| Retention | 1 | 45.53 | .45 | .50 | .02 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 4.01 | .03 | .86 | .001 |
| <i>Teaching experience</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 2 | 375.30 | 2.38 | .10 | .001 |
| Retention | 2 | 236.70 | 2.35 | .04* | .01 |
| Job satisfaction | 2 | 132.69 | .98 | .38 | .001 |
| <i>Marital status</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 370.48 | 2.32 | .13 | .003 |
| Retention | 1 | 72.47 | .71 | .40 | .006 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 471.21 | 3.53 | .051* | .004 |
| <i>Living with family</i> | | | | | |
| Attitude | 1 | 38.03 | .24 | .63 | .001 |
| Retention | 1 | 41.10 | .40 | .53 | .02 |
| Job satisfaction | 1 | 4.98 | .04 | .85 | .001 |

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$

Predictors of Attitudes

A hierarchical regression was used to assess the predictors of attitudes, after controlling for the influence of demographic variables (see Table 4 for details). Retention and Job Satisfaction were entered in step 1 which explained 12% of the variance in attitudes, $F(2, 302) = 20.94$, $p = .001$. In the first model, only job satisfaction made significant and large contribution in the variance in attitudes, ($\beta = .31$, $p = .001$). After entry of demographic variables in the model, the total variance in attitude was 13%, $F(8, 294) = 4.50$, $p = .89$. The demographic variables contributed only 1% of the variance in attitudes. In the second model,

only job satisfaction made a significant, as well as the largest, contribution to the variance in attitudes (beta = .31, $p = .001$).

Table 4.

Summary of the Predictors of Attitudes

| Variable | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---------------------------|-------|------|---------|-------|--------|
| Step 1 | | | | | |
| Retention | .11 | .08 | .09 | 1.46 | .15 |
| Job satisfaction | .34 | .07 | .31 | 5.17 | .001** |
| Gender | -.73 | 1.52 | -.03 | -.48 | .63 |
| Age | .26 | 1.24 | .02 | .21 | .83 |
| Education | -.13 | 1.69 | -.01 | -.07 | .94 |
| qualification | -1.44 | 1.23 | -.10 | -1.17 | .24 |
| Teaching experience | -.90 | 1.69 | -.03 | -.53 | .59 |
| Marital status | -.55 | 1.44 | -.02 | -.38 | .70 |
| Taken course in IE | -.40 | 1.46 | -.02 | -.28 | .78 |
| Living with family | -.44 | 1.79 | -.01 | -.25 | .81 |
| Awareness of IE policy | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | | |
| Retention | .09 | .07 | .08 | 1.30 | .20 |
| Job satisfaction | .34 | .06 | .31 | 5.41 | .001** |

** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$; IE = Inclusive education

Discussion

With poverty prevalent among Malawians in rural communities (IMF, 2017; UNECA, 2017), there is an urgency to promote equitable access to education. In this way, the children living in rural communities who are at risk of not accessing education would be supported to develop skillsets for sustainable development. It is light of this reality that we assessed the relationship between teacher attitudes, retention and job satisfaction among teachers working in rural areas. The most important finding of this study was the small but significant association between the three continuous variables (attitudes, retention and job satisfaction). The findings show that teachers who are positive and satisfied with their work and rate highly on retention would be interested to promote the learning of all children in rural schools. The

reverse is also true; teachers who are negative towards inclusive education, unsatisfied in their jobs and rate low on retention would not be interested in the educational needs of children in those communities.

This finding lends some support with respect to developing positive attitudes among teachers, enhancing their satisfaction and retention in order to facilitate acceptance and effective implementation of inclusive education. While training in inclusive education would improve understanding and positivity among teachers towards inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011), improvement in working environment (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Mwenda & Mgomezulu, 2018) and conditions of service would enhance teacher retention in rural schools (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011) providing trained teachers and continuity for students. Therefore, it is exigent for policymakers to prioritise the professional development in inclusive education in rural schools, improving the condition of service and making available teacher and learning resources to rural schools.

Research results show that job satisfaction was a major contributor in the variance in attitudes towards practicing inclusive education in rural schools. It is important to reiterate here that rural schools are at a disadvantage compared to urban schools when it comes to teaching and learning materials, qualified teachers, and basic amenities that would promote learning (Blanks, 2016). It appears that providing schools with resources, equipping teachers with pedagogical skills to address the learning needs of children, and overseeing the welfare of teachers would go a long way to improving the attitude of teachers towards teaching diverse children in the same classrooms as their typical peers in rural schools.

Perhaps, in the provision of resources to rural schools, consideration can be given to the diverse needs of children such as those with disabilities who are enrolled in these rural schools. There is also the possibility that the training needs of teachers with respect to improved conditions of service, inclusive of the acquisition of pedagogical skills and

knowledge, would also be considered and provided. This finding provides baseline information for policymakers to ensure that teachers in rural schools are satisfied and hopefully results in a rippling effect on developing and sustaining positive attitudes towards practicing inclusive education.

Retention of teachers in rural schools did not predict attitude towards practicing inclusive education. The deplorable living conditions of rural schools cannot be overstated (Moreno et al., 2015). This situation has made it difficult for teacher deployment and retention in rural schools (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011). With all children in rural schools having a right to education, it is important for such schools to have qualified teachers who provide appropriate teaching services to all. In this study, teacher retention not being a predictor of attitudes towards practicing inclusive education should be a matter of concern in Malawi. There is the possibility that teachers who participated in this study are reluctant to stay in rural schools to support the learning of all children. Probably, they are considering leaving rural communities to take up positions in urban schools or applying for non-teaching roles. The probability of teachers leaving rural schools could have an adverse impact on effort towards providing all students the opportunity to participate in quality education. In as much as Malawi is promoting the practice of inclusive education, the retention of teachers in rural schools could be considered by policymakers. In particular, there is the need for exploration of factors that would enhance retention of qualified teachers in rural schools so as to enable all children have access to appropriate learning services.

One interesting finding noted in this study was the moderating effect of training and awareness of inclusive policy on marital status and job satisfaction. Specifically, teachers who were married and given training and made aware of inclusive policies indicated that they were more satisfied than their counterparts who were unmarried. Similarly, there was interaction effect of training on living with family in rural communities and attitudes towards

inclusive education. In African countries such as Malawi, much emphasis is placed on marital and family relationships (Kayange, 2018). Individuals have responsibilities to both nuclear and members of the extended families (Mfutso-Bengo & Masiye, 2011). For example, when an individual is married, they still have commitment to members of the extended families. This makes them more responsible, empathetic and sensitive to the plight of the vulnerable members of the family. In particular, when a family member is in need or sick, one is expected to pay a visit or contribute money to their well-being (Kayange, 2018). This could be the situation in this study where teachers who participated in this study and lived in rural communities or were married and aware of inclusive policies, were satisfied and rated highly on attitudes towards practicing inclusive education. This could be a powerful tool for policymakers as they may consider introducing policies around family ties. For instance, they could consider giving allowances to teachers who relocate to rural communities with their spouses or accept a posting to areas they have family ties with. Plausibly, they would demonstrate greater commitment and contribute positively towards teaching children in rural schools.

There was also an interaction effect of awareness of inclusive policy on teaching experience and teacher retention. To elaborate, teachers who had more years of teaching experience and were aware of inclusive policy were more likely to remain in rural schools than teachers in their early years of teaching. It is possible that experienced teachers may have become familiar with the teaching and learning processes; bonded with members of the community, thus interested to stay and support the children in such communities. It is likely that they have understood the needs of children in rural communities and decided to stay to promote their learning. Policymakers could capitalise on this finding and involve experienced teachers in efforts towards staffing rural schools in Malawi. They could be used as resource persons who would visit colleges of education to encourage pre-service teachers to accept a

posting to rural schools. More so, they could be asked to mentor novice teachers who commence teaching in rural schools. In this way, the children in rural communities would be assured of the services of a qualified teacher who would be more likely to remain at post to provide them with the needed skills for their own and the national development.

Study Limitations

The results of this study should be interpreted with caution because of a number of limitations. Teachers were recruited from public primary schools only which make it impossible to generalise this finding to all teachers working in rural communities. It is possible that teachers working in secondary and private schools might have differing experiences than those reported in this study. While primary education is free in Malawi, secondary education is not free. With poverty high in Malawi, this lack of fiscal support might present a challenge to providing inclusive education in rural secondary schools. Future studies might explore the relationship between attitudes, job satisfaction and teacher retention in rural secondary schools. Secondly, the voices of parents and children in rural communities were not considered for this study. Perhaps, they could provide additional insight which could be beneficial to policymakers and the implementation of inclusive practices in rural communities.

It is recommended that future studies examine the perspectives of parents and children in rural communities regarding the practice of inclusive education. Thirdly, we cannot substantiate the claims made by teachers who participated in this study. We gathered perceived views of teachers about attitudes, job satisfaction and retention in rural schools. It is important to mention that participants were educated about the objectives of the study and its relevance for policymaking. Notwithstanding, future studies could adopt qualitative method such as interviews, longitudinal and observational studies to get deeper insight into implementation of inclusive education in rural schools.

Conclusion

This study was situated in a human rights approach towards education of all children in Malawi. There is high rate of poverty among Malawians. Malawians living in rural communities are more likely to be poor. In this study, we focused on qualified teachers at post in primary schools in rural communities in Malawi. We were interested in their attitudes, job satisfaction and retention in rural schools. While there was a small but significant correlation between the continuous variables, only job satisfaction predicted attitudes towards practicing inclusive education in rural schools. More so, there was an interaction effect between training and awareness of inclusive policy on marital status, job satisfaction and teaching experience. This finding seems to suggest that married teachers who took part in this study; living with family in rural communities; and having more years of teaching experience are more inclined to contribute towards the teaching of all children in inclusive rural schools.

These findings provide useful information to the Malawian government who has been implementing the National Strategy on Inclusive Education. Potentially, some steps could be taken to promote the learning of children living in rural communities in Malawi. For example, policymakers could consider providing teachers with the supports necessary to fulfil their needs in order to enhance their satisfaction and retention. This support could be in the form of condition of service, teaching and learning materials and social amenities in rural schools and communities. In this way, they would be able to work towards developing the skills of all Malawian children living in rural schools.

Secondly, policymakers could focus retention strategies and changing attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in rural schools around family ties and experienced teachers. For example, allowances and other incentives could be given to teachers who relocate with their family to teach in rural schools. Experienced teachers who have taught for many years in rural schools could be used as ambassadors for inclusive education in rural

areas to encourage teachers participating in pre-service and/or in-service to accept training in inclusive practices to accept and remain employed in rural schools. Such veteran teachers/ambassadors in rural schools could be given training and supported in organizing workshops; sharing their experiences and making teachers aware of their contribution towards developing the skillset of children living in rural schools.

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