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## Exploring factors influencing teacher retention in private secondary schools of Zambia

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### Abstract

This study explored factors influencing teacher retention in three private secondary schools of different reputation levels in Lusaka, Zambia. A mixed-methods case study approach was used to explore the factors influencing retention of teachers from 2020 to 2024 in the selected private schools. Data was collected through document analysis, questionnaires from current teachers, interviews with former teachers and school administrators, and focus group discussions with current teachers. The three schools were purposively selected to represent high, medium, and low reputation categories based on factors including fee structure, facilities, curriculum offerings, and academic performance records. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA while qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that multiple factors influenced teacher retention, with their relative importance varying by school reputation level. There was a statistically significant difference that existed for most retention factors across the three schools (as indicated by significant F-values and p-values < 0.05) except for colleague relationships. At the high-reputation school, professional development opportunities, work environment, and competitive compensation were primary retention factors. The medium-reputation school's teachers emphasized Christian values alignment, reasonable workload, and job security. At the low-reputation school, basic compensation adequacy, physical working conditions, and resource availability were dominant concerns. The study concluded that there is a need to employ strategies of retaining teachers in private schools. Recommendations include implementing targeted retention strategies for high-demand subjects and establishing sector-wide professional development initiatives to enhance teacher retention and educational quality in private schools.

**Keywords:** Teacher retention, retention strategies, private schools, educational quality

### 1. Introduction

The quality of education delivered in any educational institution is significantly influenced by stability of its teaching workforce (Darling-Hammond, 2017) <sup>[9]</sup>. Teacher retention has emerged as a critical issue in educational management globally, with particular implications for developing nations such as Zambia (Ministry of General Education [MoGE], 2019) <sup>[23]</sup>. The Zambian education system has undergone several reforms since independence, with the most recent being the implementation of the Education and Skills Sector Plan 2017-2021, which emphasizes the importance of quality education delivered by qualified and motivated teachers (Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education [MESVTEE], 2018) <sup>[22]</sup>. Despite these efforts, teacher attrition and mobility remain significant challenges, particularly in private schools where contractual arrangements often differ from government institutions (Banda, 2020) <sup>[1]</sup>. High teacher turnover rates can disrupt educational processes, undermine institutional memory, and potentially impact pupil achievement negatively (Ronfeldt *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[31]</sup>. When experienced teachers leave schools, they take with them valuable expertise, established relationships with pupils, and institutional knowledge that can be difficult to replace immediately (Sinyangwe, 2019) <sup>[33]</sup>.

There are various reasons the teachers leave schools. Private school's diverse characteristics in terms of reputation, resources, and organizational culture. Private schools should come up with measures of retaining these teachers despite their diversity in stated above. This study explores these factors and strategies of how to reduce these attritions.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of teacher retention and continuity, there is limited research exploring factors of teacher retention within the context of private secondary schools in Zambia. The private education sector is characterized by significant disparities in working conditions, remuneration packages, and professional development opportunities across schools of different repute (Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research [ZIPAR], 2022) <sup>[39]</sup>. These disparities potentially influence teacher retention. The problem this study addresses is the lack of comprehensive understanding regarding teacher retention across private secondary schools. Without this understanding, stakeholders lack the evidence base needed to develop targeted strategies for improving teacher retention.

## 3. Research Objective

The objective of this study was to explore retention factors that influence retention of teachers in private secondary schools in Zambia.

## 4. Theoretical Framework and Literature Reviewed

This study is anchored on Human Capital Theory, as articulated by Becker (1993) <sup>[2]</sup>, that posits that education and training are investments that yield returns through increased productivity. In the context of this study, teachers represent human capital for schools, with their knowledge, skills, and experience constituting assets that appreciate over time. When teachers leave an institution, this represents a loss of human capital investment, potentially diminishing the school's instructional capacity and effectiveness. Schools that successfully retain teachers benefit from continuous development of their human capital, while those experiencing high turnover must constantly reinvest in developing new human capital, potentially at the expense of educational quality.

The literature identifies numerous factors influencing teacher retention decisions, with variations across contexts. Podolsky *et al.* (2019) <sup>[28]</sup> synthesised research from 25 countries and categorised retention factors into five domains: compensation and benefits, preparation and support, school leadership, working conditions, and professional prestige.

Compensation remains a significant factor globally, though its relative importance varies. In high-income contexts, research by Hanushek and Rivkin (2018) <sup>[14]</sup> found that salary differentials predicted mobility between schools and districts but were less predictive of decisions to leave the profession entirely. In contrast, studies from lower-income contexts such as Malawi (Steiner-Khamsi & Kunje, 2021) <sup>[36]</sup> and Tanzania (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2019) <sup>[4]</sup> found that compensation was more strongly predictive of both inter-school mobility and profession exit decisions.

Working conditions encompass numerous dimensions influencing retention. Johnson *et al.* (2020) <sup>[18]</sup> identified physical facilities, workload, student behaviour, collegial relationships, and parental engagement as key components of working conditions affecting retention. Their longitudinal study of 250 schools found that improvements in working conditions predicted subsequent improvements in retention rates more strongly than comparable percentage increases in compensation.

School leadership quality has emerged as a particularly important retention factor. Kraft *et al.* (2023) <sup>[20]</sup> examined administrative data from 830 schools over six years and found that changes in principal quality (measured through validated leadership assessments) predicted subsequent changes in teacher retention rates. Specifically, schools experiencing a one standard deviation improvement in principal quality saw a 5.9 percentage point reduction in teacher turnover in the following year.

Professional development opportunities contribute substantially to retention, particularly for early and mid-career teachers. Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2019) <sup>[28]</sup> found that schools implementing comprehensive induction and mentoring programs retained first-year teachers at rates 20-30% higher than schools without such programs. For experienced teachers, opportunities for leadership, specialisation, and advanced certification were associated with extended tenure.

In the African context specifically, additional factors have been identified. Buckler's (2019) <sup>[6]</sup> qualitative research across rural schools in Uganda, Tanzania, and Nigeria highlighted the importance of community integration, housing provision, and safety considerations, particularly for teachers deployed to remote areas. These contextual factors often superseded compensation concerns in retention decisions.

In Zambia, Mwanza (2021) <sup>[26]</sup> identified several context-specific factors influencing private school teacher retention. Her mixed-methods study across 22 private schools found that contractual security, opportunities to teach examination classes (which carry prestige), involvement in decision-making, and institutional reputation significantly influenced retention intentions among qualified teachers.

Recent research has highlighted the role of psychological factors in retention decisions. Collie *et al.* (2022) <sup>[8]</sup> investigated how teacher motivation profiles related to retention intentions across 12 countries. Their person-centred analysis identified distinct motivational patterns, with teachers exhibiting autonomous motivation (driven by interest and value alignment) showing significantly higher retention intentions than those characterized primarily by controlled motivation (driven by external pressure or obligation). This work suggests that fostering intrinsic motivation through meaningful work and autonomy may be as important as addressing extrinsic factors.

The concept of "job crafting" has gained prominence in teacher retention literature. Berg *et al.* (2021) <sup>[5]</sup> examined how teachers' ability to shape aspects of their work influenced retention decisions. Their longitudinal study found that teachers who reported higher levels of job crafting—the ability to adjust task boundaries, relational dynamics, and cognitive framing of their work—demonstrated significantly higher job satisfaction and retention intentions across school contexts. This suggests that flexibility and teacher agency may be important retention factors beyond traditional structural considerations.

The digital transformation of education has introduced new retention considerations. Prestridge and Cox (2021) <sup>[29]</sup> investigated how technological integration influenced teacher retention across six countries. They found that teachers' perceptions of organizational support for technology adoption significantly predicted retention

intentions, particularly among early-career teachers who valued technological innovation. Their work suggests that schools' approaches to educational technology may increasingly influence retention in an increasingly digital educational landscape.

Research specific to private school contexts has examined how market positioning influences retention factors. Diamond and Spillane (2022) [10] found that private schools with distinctive educational philosophies or specialized curricula (such as Montessori, International Baccalaureate, or religious education) often fostered stronger teacher identification with institutional mission, which served as a significant retention factor. This "mission alignment" effect was particularly pronounced when teachers' pedagogical values matched the school's educational approach, suggesting that value congruence may partially offset other retention challenges in specialized educational contexts.

Cross-cultural comparative research has revealed important variations in retention factors across contexts. Woo *et al.* (2022) [38] conducted a comparative analysis of teacher retention factors across schools in Singapore, Finland, and Canada. They found that while core factors like leadership support and working conditions were consistently important, their relative weights varied significantly by cultural context. Notably, collective efficacy-teachers' shared belief in their ability to positively influence student outcomes-emerged as a particularly powerful predictor in collectivist cultural contexts, while autonomy was more salient in individualist settings.

The intersection of retention factors with career stage has received increased attention. Glazer (2020) [11] developed a career-stage framework for understanding retention factors, arguing that early-career teachers prioritize mentorship and growth opportunities, mid-career teachers emphasize work-life balance and meaningful influence, while late-career teachers value recognition and legacy-building opportunities. This developmental perspective suggests that retention strategies should be differentiated based on teachers' career stages rather than applied uniformly.

In the specific context of high-pressure, exam-oriented educational systems common in many African countries, Osei-Owusu and Sam (2021) [27] found that assessment-related stress significantly predicted turnover intentions. Their study across private schools in Ghana identified assessment-related workload, pressure to produce high examination results, and parental expectations as critical stress factors influencing retention. This work highlights how cultural and systemic educational priorities create distinctive retention challenges in achievement-focused contexts.

Literature on improving teacher retention highlights multiple strategic approaches with varying effectiveness across contexts. Comprehensive approaches targeting multiple retention factors simultaneously have shown the greatest impact on retention outcomes.

Financial strategies remain common, though with mixed evidence of effectiveness in isolation. Springer *et al.* (2019) [35] analysed the impact of performance-based financial incentives across six randomised controlled trials and found modest positive effects on retention (average of 4-6 percentage points improvement), with stronger effects when incentives were substantial (exceeding 10% of base salary) and clearly communicated. Complementary research by

Glazerman and Seifullah (2021) [12] found that retention bonuses were most effective when structured as multi-year commitments rather than single-year payments.

Professional development strategies have demonstrated consistently positive impacts on retention. Ingersoll *et al.* (2022) [16] conducted a meta-analysis of induction program effects and found that comprehensive induction programs incorporating mentoring, collaborative planning time, reduced workloads, and structured feedback improved three-year retention rates by an average of 15 percentage points compared to minimal induction approaches. The effects were particularly pronounced for teachers in challenging school environments.

Leadership development approaches focus on enhancing principals' capacity to create retention-supportive environments. Grissom and Bartanen (2023) [13] evaluated a leadership intervention specifically targeting principals' teacher development and support capabilities. Schools with principals receiving the intervention showed a 7.8 percentage point improvement in teacher retention compared to control schools over a three-year period.

Working condition improvements encompass various strategies. Simon and Johnson (2019) [32] documented successful approaches including collaborative scheduling, physical facility enhancements, student behaviour management systems, and parent engagement initiatives. Their case studies of high-retention schools in challenging environments highlighted the importance of teacher voice in identifying and prioritising working condition improvements.

In African contexts, several distinctive strategies have shown promise. Mulkeen and Chen (2020) [25] evaluated housing provision programs for teachers in rural Malawi and found that quality housing provision improved three-year retention rates by 23 percentage points. Similarly, Bennell (2018) [3] found that professional community building through teacher networks significantly improved retention in isolated schools across Tanzania, Uganda, and Ghana.

In the Zambian private school context specifically, limited research has evaluated retention improvement strategies. The Private Schools Association of Zambia (2021) [26] documented emerging practices including career ladders, performance-based contracts with retention incentives, and professional development partnerships with universities. However, rigorous evaluation of these approaches remains limited, particularly regarding differential effectiveness across school reputation categories.

Recent research has highlighted the potential of organizational identity development as a retention strategy. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) [40] examined how cultivating "communities of practice" influenced teacher retention across diverse school contexts. Their findings suggest that schools fostering strong professional communities with shared repertoires, joint enterprises, and mutual engagement demonstrated significantly higher retention rates. These communities provided both practical support and psychological belonging that enhanced commitment, particularly in challenging or resource-constrained environments.

Career pathway innovations have shown promise in addressing advancement-related turnover. York-Barr and Duke (2021) [41] evaluated hybrid teacher leadership roles that allow accomplished teachers to maintain classroom

responsibilities while taking on leadership functions. Their three-year evaluation found that schools implementing these hybrid roles retained experienced teachers at rates 12-18 percentage points higher than comparison schools. This approach addresses the common retention challenge where talented teachers must leave classroom teaching entirely to advance professionally.

## 5. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods study design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The quantitative component analysed numerical data on teacher retention rates while the qualitative component explored perceptions, experiences, and contextual factors through interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. This integration of methods enabled triangulation of findings and provided a more understanding.

### 5.1 Research Site

The research was conducted in three private secondary schools in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia. Lusaka was selected due to its high concentration of private secondary schools with varying reputation levels. The three schools were selected using the following criteria to ensure they represented distinct reputation categories:

**1. High Reputation School (HRS):** Characterized by

premium fee structure (above K35,000 annually), established reputation (operating for 15+ years), dual curriculum offerings (Cambridge and Zambian), extensive facilities including well-equipped laboratories and library, and consistently high academic performance records (95%+ pass rates).

**2. Medium Reputation School (MRS):** Characterized by moderate fee structure (K15,000-20,000 annually), established reputation (operating for 5-15 years), primarily Zambian curriculum with some integration of American materials, adequate facilities including functional laboratories and computer lab, and moderate to good academic performance records (65-75% pass rates).

**3. Low Reputation School (LRS):** Characterized by lower fee structure (K3,000-4,500 annually), relatively longer establishment (operating since 2004) but limited development, exclusively Zambian curriculum, basic facilities with resource constraints, and variable academic performance records (45-55% pass rates).

The target population for this study included current teachers, former teachers, administrators, those educational management bodies and the District Education Board Secretary's office.

The study involved the following sample sizes across the three schools:

**Table 1:** Sample sizes across all Schools

Participant Category	High Reputation School	Medium Reputation School	Low Reputation School	Key Informants	Total
School Administrators	4	4	4	-	12
Current Teachers	12	12	12	-	36
Former Teachers	6	6	6	-	18
Key Informants	-	-	-	5	5
Total	22	22	22	5	71

Source: Field data, 2025

The study employed multiple sampling techniques to select appropriate participants which included stratified random sampling to select current teachers within each school, snow sampling identify and recruit former teachers who had left the selected schools during the study period (2020-2024) and expert sampling to select key informants from educational management bodies based on their roles and experience with private education in Zambia.

The study employed multiple research instruments to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. These included document analysis protocol which was used to gather historical data on teacher retention patterns and pupil achievement from school records. Other instruments were semi - structured interview guide to collect data from the administrators and key informants, focus group discussion guide to collect data from current teachers and the questionnaire from current teachers.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, with integration at multiple stages to address the research objective comprehensively.

Quantitative data from document analysis and questionnaires were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 26. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis. This study adhered to strict ethical standards throughout all phases of research.

## 6. Presentation of Findings

The findings are organized according to the research objectives and themes that emerged. This section presents findings on the primary factors affecting retention decisions and how these factors vary across school reputation categories.

### A. Primary Retention Factors

Analysis of questionnaire responses, interviews, and focus group discussions identified several key factors influencing teacher retention decisions. Table 2 presents the top five factors mentioned by current and former teachers at each school.

**Table 2:** Key Factors Influencing Teacher Retention Decisions by School Type

Rank	High Reputation School (HRS)	Medium Reputation School (MRS)	Low Reputation School (LRS)
1	Professional development opportunities	Christian values and environment	Compensation adequacy
2	School reputation and prestige	Reasonable teaching load	Physical working conditions
3	Competitive compensation	Job security	Teaching resources availability
4	Quality of working environment	Compensation package	Administrative support
5	Administrative support and leadership	School leadership	Job security

Source: Field data, 2025

The data reveals both similarities and differences in retention factors across the three schools:

1. Compensation appeared as a significant factor across all three schools but varied in priority. It ranked third at the HRS, fourth at the MRS, and first at the LRS, suggesting that as basic compensation adequacy decreases, its relative importance as a retention factor increases.
2. School-specific values emerged distinctively at different schools. Professional development and reputation were particularly important at the HRS, while Christian values and environment were

highlighted at the MRS. At the LRS, basic working conditions and resource availability were paramount.

3. Administrative factors appeared across all three schools but with different emphasis. At the HRS, administrative support was valued as part of a quality working environment. At the MRS, school leadership was identified specifically, while at the LRS, administrative support was noted as a separate factor.

The questionnaire included Likert-scale ratings of various retention factors. Table 3 presents the mean scores for selected factors across the three schools.

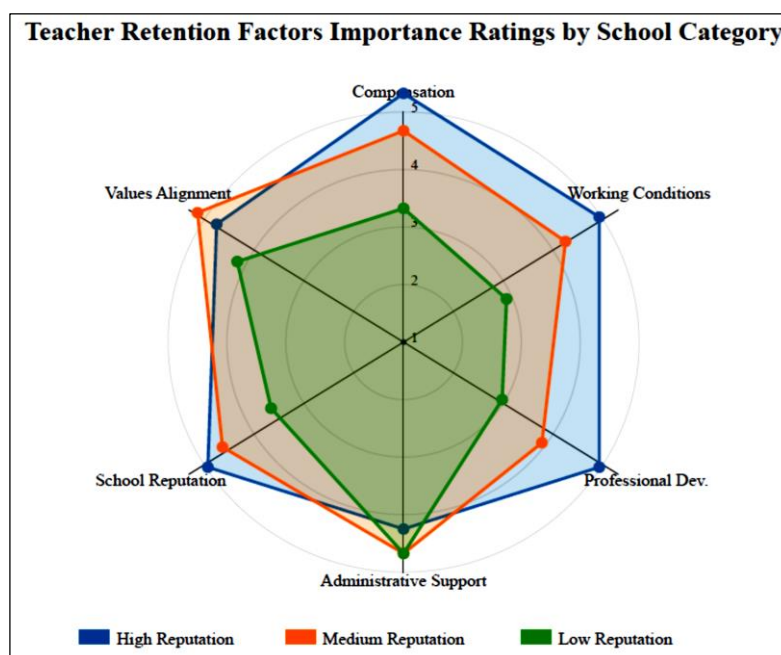
**Table 3:** Mean Scores of Retention Factors Across School Categories

Retention Factor	High Reputation School (HRS)	Medium Reputation School (MRS)	Low Reputation School (LRS)	F-value	p-value
Compensation and benefits	4.33	3.67	2.33	28.49	<0.001*
Working conditions	4.58	3.75	2.25	35.72	<0.001*
Professional development	4.42	3.08	2.17	42.95	<0.001*
Administrative support	4.25	3.83	3.08	15.63	<0.001*
School reputation	4.75	3.92	2.75	30.18	<0.001*
Retention Factor	High Reputation School (HRS)	Medium Reputation School (MRS)	Low Reputation School (LRS)	F-value	p-value
Career advancement	4.17	3.00	2.08	39.71	<0.001*
Colleague relationships	4.08	4.00	3.92	0.87	0.428
Values alignment	3.92	4.50	3.58	11.93	<0.001*
Job security	4.33	3.42	2.25	31.84	<0.001*
Work-life balance	3.83	3.58	2.83	12.41	<0.001*

\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$

Note: Mean scores on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Not Important and 5 = Very Important

Source: Field data, 2025



Source: Field data, 2025

**Fig 1:** Graphical ratings

The quantitative ratings reveal several important patterns:

1. Statistically significant differences existed for most retention factors across the three schools (as indicated by significant F-values and p-values < 0.05). The only factor showing no significant difference was "Colleague relationships," which was rated relatively highly across all three schools.
2. Consistent stratification was evident for most factors, with the HRS generally showing the highest ratings, followed by the MRS, and then the LRS. The notable exception was "Values alignment," which was rated highest at the MRS, reflecting the school's explicit Christian orientation.
3. Magnitude of differences varied across factors. The largest differences between the HRS and LRS were

observed for "Professional development" (difference of 2.25 points), "Working conditions" (difference of 2.33 points), and "Career advancement" (difference of 2.09 points).

Beyond these general patterns, the data reveals important nuances in how retention factors operate across different school contexts.

**B. Compensation and Benefits**

Compensation emerged as a significant factor across all three schools, though with varying importance and distinct mechanisms. Table 4 presents the salary ranges across the three schools by qualification level.

**Table 4:** Salary Ranges Across the Three Schools by Qualification Level (2024)

Qualification Level	High Reputation School (HRS)	Medium Reputation School (MRS)	Low Reputation School (LRS)
Certificate	-	-	K3,500-3,800
Diploma	K9,000-12,000	K7,500-9,500	K3,700-4,300
Bachelor's Degree	K11,000-15,000	K8,000-10,500	K4,000-4,500
Master's Degree	K13,500-18,000	K9,500-12,000	-

Source: Field data, 2025

The salary data reveals substantial disparities across the three schools:

1. **Absolute differences:** The HRS offered salaries approximately 40-50% higher than the MRS and 150-200% higher than the LRS for comparable qualifications.
2. **Qualification differentiation:** The HRS and MRS showed greater salary differentiation based on qualifications compared to the LRS, where the range was more compressed.
3. **Ceiling differences:** The maximum salary at the HRS (K18,000) was 50% higher than at the MRS (K12,000) and 300% higher than at the LRS (K4,500).

In interviews and focus groups, teachers elaborated on compensation considerations:

"Despite the heavy workload, including extracurricular activities, exam preparation, and extended hours, remuneration often does not reflect the effort. Our salaries should be increased, and our salary scales should be commensurate with our qualifications" (HRS Current Teacher).

"I do not receive medical aid, pension, or housing allowance, which are typically available in government schools. There is also no job security as contracts are often short-term or renewable annually without assurance of long-term employment" (HRS Current Teacher)

"While our salaries are competitive within the private education sector, they're still below what international schools or the corporate sector might offer. What makes the difference is the total package - professional development, working conditions, and career opportunities." (HRS Current Teacher)

"Our salaries are reasonable but not exceptional. For many of us, the Christian environment and reasonable workload compensate for potentially higher salaries elsewhere. However, economic pressures sometimes force difficult decisions, especially for teachers with growing families." (MRS Current Teacher)

**Former teachers provided additional insights on how compensation influenced their departure decisions**

"I left for an international school position that increased my salary by about 65%. While I valued many aspects of my previous position, the financial difference was simply too significant to ignore, especially with increasing family responsibilities." (HRS Former Teacher)

"I taught at one of the private secondary schools in Lusaka and sadly, I earned below the cost of living. This created financial strain, making it hard for me to support my family *let alone* my extended family or to afford basic needs". As inflation arose, salaries remained stagnant and that led to dissatisfaction, prompting me to seek better-paying opportunities in government schools". (HRS Former Teacher)

"I got a job at a private school that did not offer salary progression, bonuses, or performance-based rewards. Without a clear path for financial advancement, I felt professionally and economically stuck, increasing my likelihood of leaving and I left". (HRS Former Teacher)

"The private company offered me nearly double my teaching salary. While I enjoyed teaching, the financial reality made the decision inevitable. Teaching salary simply couldn't compete with corporate opportunities for someone with my qualifications." (MRS Former Teacher)

**School administrators acknowledged compensation challenges**

"We've developed a comprehensive compensation strategy that balances competitiveness with financial sustainability. We can't always match international schools or corporate salaries, but we ensure our total package remains attractive." (HRS Head Teacher)

"Our fee structure limits what we can offer in direct compensation, so we try to create other advantages - reasonable teaching loads, supportive community, and values alignment. We know we'll lose some teachers to financial considerations despite these efforts." (MRS Principal)

These insights suggest that compensation operates differently across school contexts -- as one factor among many at the HRS, as a consideration balanced against values and working conditions at the MRS, and as a fundamental constraint at the LRS.

### **C. Professional Development and Career Advancement**

Professional development opportunities and career advancement pathways showed some of the largest disparities across the three schools and emerged as significant retention factors, particularly at the HRS. Document analysis revealed structured professional development programs at the HRS, limited opportunities at the MRS, and virtually no formal development at the LRS.

In questionnaires, current teachers rated professional development opportunities as follows:

- **"I have access to relevant professional development":** HRS (4.42), MRS (3.08), LRS (2.17)
- **"The school supports my growth as a teacher":** HRS (4.33), MRS (3.25), LRS (2.25)
- **"There are clear pathways for career advancement":** HRS (4.17), MRS (3.00), LRS (1.92)

### **Interviews provided deeper insights into these disparities**

"The professional development program here is exceptional by Zambian standards. Annual allowances for Cambridge certification, structured mentorship, conference attendance opportunities, and clear advancement pathways make a tremendous difference. You feel like you're growing professionally even while remaining at the same institution." (HRS Current Teacher)

"There's essentially no professional development here. We receive no training, no support for further education, and no advancement opportunities. This creates a sense of professional stagnation that eventually drives teachers to seek opportunities elsewhere." (LRS Current Teacher)

### **Former teachers described how professional development considerations influenced their departure decisions**

"I left primarily to pursue further studies, though with the intention of returning afterward. The school was supportive of my educational goals but couldn't accommodate a part-time arrangement during my studies." (HRS Former Teacher)

"The limited professional growth opportunities definitely influenced my decision. I felt I was stagnating professionally and needed new challenges. The lack of clear advancement pathways within the school meant I had to look elsewhere for growth." (MRS Former Teacher)

### **School administrators discussed professional development approaches**

"We view professional development as a strategic investment rather than an expense. Our annual budget allocates K15,000 per teacher for development activities, and we've created structured pathways for advancement within the institution. These investments enhance both teacher quality and retention." (HRS Head Teacher)

"Our financial reality makes structured professional development nearly impossible. We encourage teachers to pursue development independently and try to accommodate

schedule adjustments when possible, but we cannot provide financial support." (LRS Director)

These findings suggest that professional development operates as both a direct retention factor and an indicator of institutional investment in teachers' growth and advancement.

### **D. School Leadership and Administrative Support**

School leadership and administrative support emerged as important retention factors across all three schools, though with varying emphases. Questionnaire ratings for administrative support elements included:

- "School leadership is supportive and approachable": HRS (4.25), MRS (3.83), LRS (3.08)
- "Administrative decisions are fair and transparent": HRS (4.33), MRS (3.58), LRS (2.75)
- "Teachers are involved in meaningful decision-making": HRS (4.17), MRS (3.33), LRS (2.42)

### **Focus group discussions elaborated on leadership influences**

"The administration here creates conditions where teachers can focus on teaching rather than managing problems. Discipline issues are handled effectively, materials are procured efficiently, and communication is clear. This administrative effectiveness is a significant retention factor even if we don't always explicitly recognize it." (HRS Focus Group)

"Administrative support is uneven. Intentions are good, but implementation is often constrained by resources. When teachers' basic needs aren't addressed -- from classroom supplies to timely salary payment -- administrative relationships become strained regardless of personal goodwill." (LRS Focus Group)

### **Interviews with former teachers highlighted how leadership influenced departure decisions**

"Leadership wasn't a significant factor in my departure. The administration was generally effective and supportive. Any frustrations were relatively minor compared to the professional opportunities drawing me elsewhere." (HRS Former Teacher)

"Leadership changes during my tenure created some uncertainty. The new approach was more top-down with less teacher input than previously. This wasn't my primary reason for leaving, but it reduced my hesitation about accepting another opportunity." (MRS Former Teacher)

### **School administrators reflected on leadership approaches**

"We've developed a leadership model that balances clear expectations with teacher autonomy and voice. Regular consultation mechanisms ensure teachers participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their work. This reciprocal respect underlies our retention success." (HRS Head Teacher)

"Leadership in resource-constrained environments involves difficult trade-offs and transparent communication about limitations. We try to be responsive to teacher concerns while being honest about what's feasible within our constraints." (LRS Director)

These findings suggest that leadership and administrative support influence retention both directly through

relationship quality and indirectly through the enabling conditions they create for effective teaching.

## 7. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings presented interpreting them in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework. It has been split into different categories.

### A. Compensation and Benefits

The study found that compensation was a significant retention factor across all three schools but varied in relative importance by school category. It ranked third at the HRS, fourth at the MRS, and first at the LRS, suggesting that as basic compensation adequacy decreases, its relative importance as a retention factor increases. The substantial salary disparities across schools (150-200% difference between HRS and LRS for comparable qualifications) appeared to create fundamentally different retention dynamics.

These findings partially align with Ingersoll and Smith's (2019) <sup>[16]</sup> research suggesting that while important, monetary factors are often secondary to workplace environment factors in retention decisions. However, the current study suggests that this hierarchy may be context-dependent, with compensation taking precedence when it falls below certain adequacy thresholds. This nuanced understanding supports Podolsky *et al.*'s (2019) <sup>[28]</sup> framework categorizing retention factors into five domains, with compensation potentially serving as a prerequisite for other factors to become operant.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through Meyer and Allen's (1997) <sup>[21]</sup> three-component model of organizational commitment. The dominance of compensation concerns at the LRS suggests predominance of continuance commitment (awareness of costs associated with leaving) rather than affective commitment (emotional attachment) or normative commitment (feeling of obligation). This aligns with Mowday *et al.*'s (2020) <sup>[24]</sup> finding that schools fostering stronger affective commitment typically achieved higher retention rates than those relying primarily on continuance commitment through financial incentives.

The qualitative insights into compensation dynamics across the three schools highlight the interaction between compensation and other retention factors. At the HRS, compensation operated as part of a comprehensive package including professional development and working conditions. At the MRS, values alignment partially offset compensation limitations. At the LRS, compensation inadequacy appeared to overshadow other potential retention factors, creating what administrators described as a "stepping stone" dynamic where teachers gain experience before moving to better-paying positions.

### B. Professional Development and Career Advancement

Professional development opportunities and career advancement pathways showed some of the largest disparities across the three schools and emerged as significant retention factors, particularly at the HRS. The contrast between structured professional development programs at the HRS, limited opportunities at the MRS, and virtually no formal development at the LRS represents one of the starkest differentials observed in the study.

These findings align with Darling-Hammond *et al.*'s (2019) <sup>[28]</sup> and Kajala and Daka (2023) <sup>[19]</sup> research highlighting the importance of professional development opportunities for teacher retention, particularly for early and mid-career teachers. The current study extends their work by documenting how professional development disparities manifest across different school reputation categories in the Zambian private education context.

The prioritization of professional development as the top retention factor at the HRS aligns with Glazer's (2020) <sup>[11]</sup> career-stage framework, which suggests that early-career teachers prioritize mentorship and growth opportunities, mid-career teachers emphasize work-life balance and meaningful influence, while late-career teachers value recognition and legacy-building opportunities. Chizyuka and Daka (2021) <sup>[7]</sup> findings were also pointing to the same. The demographic profile of the HRS, with a higher proportion of early and mid-career professionals, may partially explain this prioritization pattern.

From a theoretical perspective, these professional development disparities can be understood through both Human Capital framework. In Human Capital terms, professional development represents investment in expanding teacher capabilities and productivity.

The qualitative insights into how professional development influenced retention decisions highlight its multifaceted impact. Beyond the immediate benefits for classroom practice, teachers valued professional development as evidence of institutional investment in their growth, as a pathway for career advancement, and as a means of remaining competitive in the broader educational marketplace. These multiple dimensions help explain professional development's prominence as a retention factor, particularly at the HRS where other basic needs were already met.

### C. School Leadership and Administrative Support

School leadership and administrative support emerged as important retention factors across all three schools, with leadership effectiveness ratings ranging from 4.25 (HRS) to 3.08 (LRS) and decision transparency from 4.33 (HRS) to 2.75 (LRS). While not showing the largest disparities across schools, these factors appeared to influence retention through both direct and indirect pathways.

These findings align with Kraft *et al.*'s (2023) <sup>[20]</sup> research documenting how changes in principal quality predicted subsequent changes in teacher retention rates. The current study extends their work by examining how leadership influences retention across different school reputation categories with varying resource constraints and operational challenges.

The finding that administrative support ratings showed smaller differences across school categories than factors like resources or professional development suggests that effective leadership may be somewhat less dependent on institutional resources than other retention factors. This aligns with Musonda and Sikwibele's (2021) <sup>[26]</sup> research on leadership styles and teacher retention in Zambian private schools, which found that transformational leadership practices were associated with higher teacher satisfaction and retention rates across all school types, though the specific leadership behaviours most valued varied by context.

From a theoretical perspective, leadership's influence on retention can be understood through the concept of "professional capital" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2018) [15]. Effective leaders facilitate the development of human capital (through support and development), social capital (through collaborative structures), and decisional capital (through autonomy and voice). The variations in leadership ratings across schools may reflect differences in leaders' capacity to build this professional capital despite resource constraints.

The qualitative insights into leadership influences highlight how administrative effectiveness operates both directly through relationship quality and indirectly through enabling conditions for effective teaching. Leaders at all three schools acknowledged similar retention challenges but demonstrated different levels of efficacy in addressing them within their resource constraints. This supports Kraft *et al.*'s (2023) [20] finding that leadership quality has independent effects on retention beyond other institutional factors.

## 8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section presents the conclusions drawn from the study findings and discussions, followed by recommendations for various stakeholders in the private education sector.

Retention factors operate in a somewhat hierarchical fashion across school reputation categories. At low-reputation schools, basic needs dominate retention considerations - compensation adequacy and fundamental working conditions. At medium-reputation schools, beyond basic adequacy, values alignment and community factors gain prominence. At high-reputation schools, with basic needs largely satisfied, higher-order factors like professional development, career advancement, and institutional prestige emerge as primary retention drivers.

While compensation is significant across all schools, its relative importance varies inversely with adequacy - ranking first at low-reputation schools, fourth at medium-reputation schools, and third at high-reputation schools. This suggests that compensation functions as a prerequisite for other retention factors to become operant, with substantial threshold effects in its retention influence.

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed for various stakeholders in the private education sector:

- 1. Focus on Working Condition Fundamentals:** While high-reputation schools can emphasize advanced retention factors, schools across all reputation levels should prioritize fundamental working condition improvements within their resource constraints. Even modest enhancements to class sizes, teaching materials, facility functionality, and administrative support can significantly impact teacher satisfaction and retention, particularly at lower-reputation schools.
- 2. Create Continuing Education Partnerships:** Teacher training institutions should develop structured continuing education partnerships with private schools, offering modular professional development, certification programs, and advanced qualifications that teachers can pursue while maintaining their teaching positions.
- 3. Advocate for Supportive Policies:** Private school associations should engage in coordinated advocacy for policies that support teacher quality and retention across

the private education sector, including tax incentives for professional development, recognition of private teaching experience, and appropriate regulatory frameworks that ensure minimum standards while allowing institutional flexibility.

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