



## **A Study on Policy Related to Teacher Retention in the Rural Primary Schools of Chhukha, Bhutan**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This study was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Authors Tshering and DP, both authors have participated in each stage of the study, design of the study, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results. Both the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Teachers' attrition rate keeps rising every year and has been observed that mostly teachers from rural and remote parts of the country choose to resign voluntarily or go on long term leave. Teacher's attrition rate in 2018 is 4.4% and it has risen up to 5.2% in 2019 which is a serious concern to be looked at. Recruitment and retention of teachers in the remote and rural schools remains a significant challenge in low-income countries, including Bhutan, hampering the educational delivery services to the rural population and slows the progress of achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

For delivering quality educational services to the people and improving their outcomes, motivated teachers must be available at the right time and place. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors affecting teacher retention in the rural areas of Chhukha District based on policy and practice. A total of five domains were assessed regarding financial matters, career matters, personal and family matters, working and living conditions, and policy matters. In the past decade, there have been worrying signs that the intellectual quality of teachers is declining. Teachers who are already in schools and are highly qualified may be able to offset this trend if they are retained.

In order to better understand the key factors influencing rural schools' appeal and retention of teachers, this study was conducted. A satisfaction survey was also conducted to determine if their current place of employment offered them the policies, facilities, services, and support that they were seeking. In order to attract or retain teachers in remote and rural schools, the study findings, recommendations, and appropriate strategies were provided to relevant stakeholders for

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intervention. Therefore, more motivated teachers are available in remote Bhutanese regions. Consequently, teaching services will be of a higher quality. Gross National Happiness can ultimately be achieved by achieving this goal.

*Keywords: Attrition; recruitment; retention; low-income; policies; Gross National Happiness.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The availability of motivated teachers at the right place and at the right time becomes important to deliver quality educational services to the students and improve their outcomes. For example, the quality of education including competency in language of students in the rural parts of Bhutan will depend on access to good educational services that includes highly motivated teachers. However, often the quality of education and services related are not accessible to the students in the rural areas mainly due to non-availability of motivated teachers and resources.

“Rural-specific literature identifies three key challenges related to recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas: (1) lower pay; (2) geographic and social isolation and (3) difficult working conditions, such as having to teach classes in multiple subject areas” [1]. Collectively, these challenges can place rural schools and districts at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining well qualified teachers. Bhutan being a mountainous country with most of the human settlements scattered over the rugged geographical terrain, the rural school service suits the country best and forms the backbone of the national education system. There are 665 schools in Bhutan and out of which 300 (45%) schools were located in rural and remote parts of the country. 202,737 students’ study in these schools and there are 9,125 Teachers spread across the country in these schools.

Chhukha District has 36 numbers of schools catering to the educational needs for 15,475 students. Out of 36 schools under the district, 20 schools fall under remote geographical locations. There are 715 teachers working in Chhukha district out of which 40% of them serve in those 20 schools which falls in remote corners of the district [1]. There are clearly many issues affecting the quality of education received by students in rural and remote communities of Chhukha District, however, this research project must contend that the most significant factor in education quality is the provision of appropriate quality stable staff in the rural areas. This

research intends to explore a range of issues associated with the attraction and retention of teachers to rural and remote schools and aims to suggest appropriate improvements.

There are also similar issues embedded within some of the concerns raised, such as a sense of professional isolation, that need to be explored. An analysis of the rural and remote area staffing policies of the district shall be scrutinized to provide a comprehensive view. It is hoped that such an analysis will provide a bank of ideas to be pursued by the Ministry of Education suggesting approaches that are to be avoided because they have been found to be unsuccessful. To address these issues, the Government has instituted diverse interventions such as payment of difficulty allowance for rural posting and allocation of 5% marks for rural service during selection interview for long-term training program to the civil servants serving in the remote places mainly to attract and retain them in the rural areas [2].

However, despite the incentives, many of the teachers are not willing to work in the rural and remote schools of Bhutan and the reasons are not yet understood properly. Teachers’ attrition rate keeps rising every year and it has been observed that mostly teachers from rural and remote parts of the country choose to resign voluntarily or go on long term leave. Teacher’s attrition rate in 2018 is 4.4% and it has risen up to 5.2% in 2019 which is a serious concern to be looked at [3].

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“Despite widespread agreement that working conditions are a critical factor in retaining teachers [4]; Bennell and Akyeampong [5], Cooper and Alvarado [6] maintain that working conditions are rarely examined systematically and that efforts to improve teaching environments are minimal”. Bennell and Akyeampong [5] stated that, “the key factors are workload (number of pupils and working hours), general classroom conditions, collegial and management support, location, living arrangements and distance to work. Housing and travel are the two critical issues affecting teacher

morale and motivation in rural corners of the country". Cooper and Alvarado [6] affirms that, "although salaries can make a difference in terms of teacher recruitment, teachers generally report the importance of good working conditions in making a decision to stay in teaching".

School culture and other factors play a crucial role in teacher turnover, including inadequate support from school administration, student motivation in learning, disciplinary problems, and limited teacher input against the guiding principles of school policies. These factors also affect the motivation and commitment of those teachers who stay at the school. Therefore, to retain and attract teachers in the remote parts of Bhutan, important factors like living conditions including proper government housing and proper sanitation was found pertinent. Other factors like having conducive classroom environments, adequate support in terms of resources and professional development trainings from Education offices was found essential. It would appear, then, that advisers consider staff development to be a significant feature of their work.

Staff development program is a planned process of development which enhances the quality of pupil learning by identifying, clarifying and meeting the individual needs of the teaching staff within the context of the school as a whole. Its primary aim should be to increase the quality of pupil learning by the development of the staff potential and it should seek to recognize the specialized needs of the individual teachers. Hewton [7] reminds us, however; 'that the effectiveness of organizations depends upon the quality of life provided for those who work within them' (p.37).

Fenstermacher and Berliner [8] maintain that 'staff development has become an activity that encompasses much more than a single teacher acting as individual, it is understood that this person's activities are a part of the larger environment of the school.' Continuous staff professional development program ensures the motivation of staff as well as capacity building of teachers to provide quality education in the rural parts of the country. Joyce [9] suggests that, 'where direct and clear training has been provided, where teachers have had the opportunity to generate their own ways of helping one another, the results have been consistently impressive, whether the focus has been feedback, still and strategy training, curriculum

implementation or staff reorganization. Indeed, "teachers believe they have little lateral mobility and less upward mobility than do people in other careers" [10].

This can lead to dissatisfaction and attrition from the profession. Teachers have been the target of considerable criticism in the popular news media. The social status and respect assigned teachers, in the eyes of some, have diminished. Consequently, some of the non-monetary rewards of teaching have lessened, again contributing to lower levels of satisfaction and, possibly, to career instability. When considering the reasons why people entered teaching, we could conclude that financial considerations and indeed extrinsic reasons generally, do not play an important part. However, this is only half the story. If instead we look at reasons why people did not choose to go into teaching, we see that external considerations play a more important role.

In their interviews of 148 prospective primary teachers, Thornton et al. [11] found that "pay was a factor that could most discourage people from becoming teachers, followed by workload and then the image and status of teaching". Likewise, Carrington and Tomlin [12] found that PGCE students 'perceive the job as involving considerable stress, long hours, excessive paperwork and relatively low remuneration'. Undergraduate students in geography, in the study by Rawlinson et al. [13], identified "pay, student behavior, stress, government attitude, low morale and long hours as deterrents to enter teaching". In the study of mature students entering teaching by Whitehead et al. [14], "heavy workload, classroom management and insecurity due to possible redundancy were highlighted as issues of concern".

The principal reason teachers leave rural areas is isolation-social, cultural, and professional. Rural administrators have difficulty finding qualified teachers who fit in with the school and community and who will stay in the job. The "ideal" rural teacher is certified to teach more than one subject or grade level, can teach students with a wide range of abilities in the same classroom, is prepared to supervise extracurricular activities, and can adjust to the community [15]. "In the British Columbia study, teachers stayed because of their principal, spouse employment in the community, and satisfaction with the rural lifestyle" [16].

## **2.1 Policy on Teacher Retention in Bhutan**

In rural districts, as in districts everywhere, some aspects of teacher recruitment and retention are beyond the immediate influence of education leaders, but other aspects can be affected through policy and practice. Rural school leaders need access to the best available information and data on teacher recruitment and retention, and they need to approach the task in a manner that is strategic, specific, and sustained [17]. In the face of a growing school aged population, schools and districts must struggle to maintain standards for teaching quality while continuously recruiting bright new teachers and seeking to retain their most effective existing teachers.

The dual goals of recruiting and retaining effective teachers are often difficult to realize because of insufficient and sometimes dwindling resources. Guarino et al. [18] stated that, to develop our understanding of the context in which policies affecting the supply of teachers are formed, these questions should be taken into consideration:

1. What are the characteristics of individuals who enter the teaching profession?
2. What are the characteristics of individuals who remain in teaching?
3. What are the characteristics of schools and districts that successfully recruit and retain teachers?
4. What types of policies show evidence of efficacy in recruiting and retaining teachers?

Guarino et al. [18] further argued that, “the basic principle driving the supply of teachers is the following: Individuals will become or remain teachers if teaching represents the most attractive activity to pursue among all activities available to them. By attractive, we mean desirable in terms of ease of entry and overall compensation (salary, benefits, working conditions, and personal satisfaction). These elements of attractiveness are the policy levers that can be manipulated at the school, district, or state levels to bring supply in line with demand. The demand for teachers is driven by student enrollments, class-size targets, teaching-load norms, and budgetary constraints”.

The extent to which the demand for teachers is either unmet or exceeded will generally determine the motivation for changes in policy. In constructing policies that promote recruitment,

the goal of policymakers would be to increase the rewards of teaching relative to those of the competing occupations available to the types of people they wish to attract. Because ease of entry, monetary compensation, working conditions, and personal satisfaction are elements of the attractiveness of teaching that can be affected by policy levers, studies that focus on recruitment might examine, for example, changes in policies related to credentialing and alternative certification requirements, early recruitment strategies, and entry-level teacher compensation.

Policies that improve working conditions, raise salaries to reflect a value placed on experience, alter tenure or retirement rules, or promote personal satisfaction through campaigns to augment the prestige of the teaching profession or programs that foster mentoring, professional development, and career advancement opportunities combines together to retain teachers in the rural parts of the country. Because policies that promote recruitment and those that promote retention both focus on mechanisms to adjust the attractiveness of teaching relative to other occupations and that is, mechanisms to create rewards that outweigh the opportunity costs of becoming or remaining a teacher.

Ingersoll [19], [20] noted that “the number of teachers retiring from the profession steadily increased across the 1990s, he found that the number of retirees in any given year was smaller than the number of teachers leaving the profession for other reasons. This finding has important policy implications because it does not highlight the graying and retirement of the teacher work force as the central problem related to teacher shortages, which was a prominent theme in earlier research. Instead, Ingersoll’s work suggests that the larger problem is related to non-retirement turnover and that policy efforts may be productively directed toward retaining the substantial number of teachers who are leaving the profession for other reasons”.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Method**

A mixed method was used to conduct the study to determine the factors influencing attraction or retention of the teachers in the remote and rural schools of Bhutan. Rigorous qualitative and quantitative research study has been carried out

to ensure the data accuracy for proper decision making. In rural schools, questionnaires were distributed by the school leaders, and teachers completed the surveys under their supervision. The accuracy of data was verified by contacting some participants in person. Furthermore, researchers have conducted questions and answers with district education officers to update the respondents' responses.

### 3.2 Sampling and Research Sample Size

The population for the study was the teachers working in remote schools of Chhukha district and District Education Officers. The list (sampling frame) along with their current place of posting was obtained from the district education office and district education officers (DEO) for the collection of data. Purposive research was conducted with district education officers to validate and re-visit whether the strategies and guidelines to attract teachers in remote parts of the district has any impacts.

There are a total of 8,644 teachers in the country. Out of which 60% of total composition serves in rural corners of Bhutan. Since the number is too large, research study has been conducted in one district. One hundred teachers from rural primary schools under Chhukha district of Bhutan were included in the sample to determine factors influencing the attraction or retention of teachers in the rural parts of the country. In order to derive accurate research result, sample was taken from the schools having same class range and similar geographical locations and equal sex ratio.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The discrete and continuous data were described descriptively using percentages, frequencies, mean or median as appropriate. A study on policy and factors related to teacher retention in the rural areas of Chhukha District were tested by analysis arraying the outcome by each factor (e.g., Family, finances, working environment, career and policy). Conducted the chi-square test or independent unpaired t-test as appropriate for

the type of data (i.e., Are there differences between males and females?).

## 4. RESULTS

Out of targeted respondents, the rural Primary School teachers took part in providing data for the study conducted. There were 50 males and 50 females who took part in the research study. 5 teachers from each school took part in this research study providing valid responses to the entire questionnaire.

Out of 100 primary school teachers listed as participants of the study, 100 returned the completed questionnaire making a response rate of 100%. Of the 100 respondents, 50% were male and 50% were female. Most of the respondents were married (90%). About 30% of the respondents had at least two children, 40% had one child and 30% did not have a child. Only 30% of the respondent was younger than 25 years of age, 60% between 25 to 45 years and 10% was above 45 years of age

### 4.1 Results of Responses from Criterion Variable

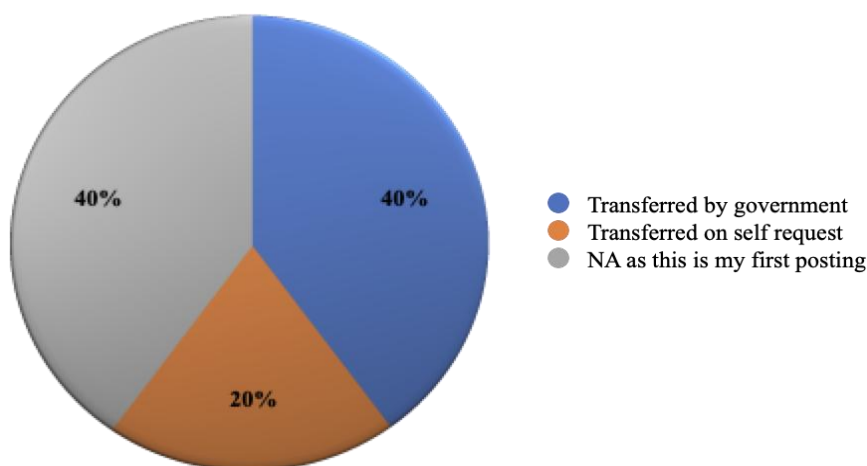
#### 4.1.1 Current place of posting

Analysis of the data was conducted to determine if the perceptions of the teachers differed based on their demographic information. For example, means and standard deviations were calculated for participants working in remote areas against the eight constructs of the theoretical framework. Fig. 1 summarizes how teachers were placed in the remote schools of Chhukha District.

The study revealed that the placement of teachers was as a result of the transfer policy of Ministry of Education, Bhutan. Transfer to the remote schools in Bhutan never happened as per the demand of individual employees except in few cases. Above figure indicates that 80% of placement of teachers in remote schools of Chhukha District happened either by Government's placement or as the mandatory appointment as per the education policy.

**Table 1. Gender of respondent**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
<b>Valid</b>	Male	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Female	50	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	



**Fig. 1. Placement status of teachers in the remote schools**

#### 4.1.2 Choice of place of transfer

To conduct statistical analysis for this criterion variable, data was rearranged according to participant's choice to either go on transfer to a rural or an urban health facility. The responses from the participants revealed that the most suitable place of posting would be semi-urban. 80% indicated that the most comfortable place of posting would be in semi-urban and 20% choose to be in urban areas. None of the participant opted for rural or remote places.

Participants willing to go on a transfer to rural schools appear to be of the notion that the four importance factors are important. However, their satisfaction level appears to be less compared to participants opting for transfer to urban health facilities except for career related factors, mean for Urban and for semi-urban. All the difference in importance and satisfaction level was found to be statistically significant.

Data suggests that irrespective of gender, participants accord the most importance to the status of their and family member's health and quality of education for their children in school. Also, that both male and female participant expresses lower levels of satisfaction with the quality of education in schools. This may be detrimental in their decisions about continuing work in remote and rural areas.

In the working environment and living condition construct, cooperation among staff members, support from District Education Officer, and adequate facilities were rated the most important among other items, by both genders. However, provision of residential quarters was rated least

satisfactory. For career related factors, supportive supervision by their immediate supervisor and by District education officer appears to be accorded higher importance along with opportunities to upgrade qualification and opportunities to attend trainings and meetings. However, participants were less satisfied with the opportunity to upgrade qualification and with the 5% bonus mark for rural postings policy.

Data revealed that participants perceived provision of road facility, adequate salary, travel budget, and attractive difficulty allowance as important. Similarly, participants expressed lower levels of satisfaction that the provision of the education policy on transfer and appointment put in place.

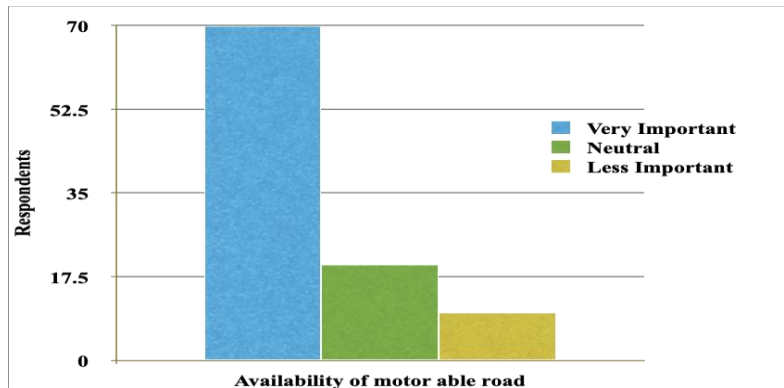
#### 4.2 Discussion

This study sought to determine the primary school teachers' perceptions of the importance and satisfaction levels on four constructs: personal and family factors, working environment and living conditions, career related factors and education policy on transfer. The primary research questions driving this study were: Does policies play vital role in attraction and retention of teachers in the rural parts of Chhukha District and what are the important factors influencing attraction or retention of teachers in the remote and rural parts of Chhukha District of Bhutan?

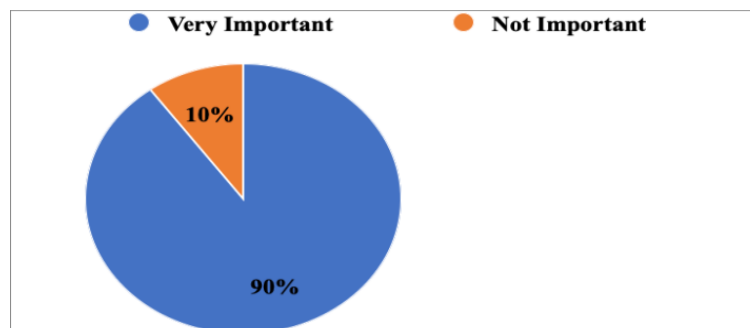
In this section, the findings of the study in relation to the research questions were discussed and the different conception of the factors that are believed to be influential in determining primary school teacher's attraction and retention in rural schools were summarized.

**Table 2. Options of place of transfer**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Valid	Urban area	20	20.0	20.0
	Semi-urban area	80	80.0	80.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0



**Fig. 2. Importance of road facility in remote places**



**Fig. 3. Importance of living with spouse in the same place of work**

**Table 3. Importance of education for children in remote places**

Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid Very important	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

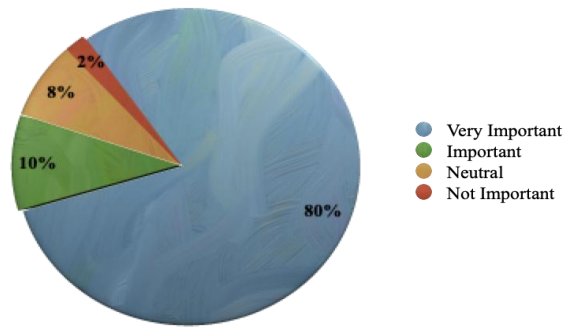
**4.2.1 Personal and family factors**

Remote Primary School teachers perceived personal and family factors as being important in their decisions regarding their choice of remaining at the place of postings. Besides living with spouse and having an opportunity for the spouse to work at the same place, family members’ health condition and access to school and quality education for their children were considered important factors.

**4.2.2 Working environment and living conditions**

Connectivity, in-terms of road, electricity and phone network are perceived to be an important

factor in teachers’ decisions regarding their choice of placement and they appear to be satisfied. This may be explained by a relentless construction of farm road, 100% electricity connectivity pledges made by Bhutan Power Cooperation, and the reach of mobile phone network across the country. Facilities that are available such as computer and internet, staff housing, adequate furniture and fencing were perceived to be important and may be influential in their decision to continue to work in their same place of posting. However, participants expressed low levels of satisfaction on these factors. Adequate staffing of health facilities was perceived to be important. However, teachers appear to not to be satisfied with the levels and



**Fig. 4. Importance of availability of electricity supply in remote places**

degree of deployment. Statistics indicate that an adequate number of primary teachers are already in service across the country. Therefore, deployment appears to be a problem. Safety in the workplace is an important factor. However, most of the participants appears not to be satisfied.

#### 4.2.3 Career related factors

All career related factors appear to be perceived as being important in teachers' decisions. Irrespective of their places of posting, participants expressed low levels of satisfaction with opportunities to attend trainings/meetings and upgrade their qualifications. Similarly, they appear to be less satisfied with mandatory rural service and 5% bonus mark policy for rural placement.

##### 4.2.3.1 Education recruitment and transfer policy

Though Ministry of Education, Bhutan has strong transfer and recruitment policy of teachers, the study revealed that there are some differences in implementing it. The policy states that, any teacher who is placed in remote schools should serve for at least three years but the research study indicated that some teachers move out of the remote places before completing the term. This shows some disparity in the implementation of the policy. Transfer policy also states that, preferences for trainings and out country courses shall be given to the teachers serving in remote schools but the study shows that rare opportunities were given and many such opportunities were provided to the nearby schools of the Capital city considering the proximity of closeness and travel cost.

##### 4.2.3.2 District Education officers' view on transfer policy and recruitment process

The study concludes that the transfer policy as mechanisms for appointing teachers and

recruiting the competent teachers in rural areas seemed challenging. The education officers shared their views on recruitment of new teachers in the remote and rural areas in the initial placement. As per the policy, any new appointees should be serving remote areas for at least three years despite of any sort of issues, but in reality, there is a problem recruiting new appointees to be sent to remote paces and had to negotiate while unavoidable circumstances arise like health issues, marital cases and other reasons.

The studies revealed that the only steps towards encouraging teachers to be transferred to rural areas and remain there for few years would be providing better financial incentives, providing opportunities for professional progression, award with extrinsic motivation and sign an undertaking with teachers stating that after three years in remote places, better places of services shall be given.

This study also indicated that the transfer and recruitment policies of Ministry of Education plays pivotal roles in the process of recruitment and without which it will become most difficult task to send teachers in the remote schools even in the initial stage. It has become much easier for the Education officers to state the policy on transfer and recruitment while deploying teachers in the remote school. Teachers were convinced and were willing to go to the remote places while explaining the policies but the study also revealed that keeping the mandates of the policy has become the greatest challenge which ultimately takes away the faith and trust of the teachers serving in the remote areas. Research study also showed that keeping the transfer policy rigid and firm across the country is a question. Uniformity in implementing the transfer and recruitment policy is always viewed as a challenge.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The availability of motivated teachers at the right place and right time is important for delivering quality educational services to the people and improving their outcomes. As a consequence, recruiting and retaining teachers in remote and rural schools has become increasingly difficult, especially in low-income countries where teacher quality is in short supply and rural places lack desired facilities and resources. Accordingly, this study evaluated the teachers' perceptions of importance and satisfaction levels with the facilities, services and support factors in order to understand their attraction and retention in the remote and rural schools in Bhutan. Results revealed that all factors were perceived to be important for their attraction and retention in the rural schools. However, participants were less satisfied with the financial factors; opportunity to attend training, opportunity to upgrade qualification, mandatory rural service policy, 5% competitive marks slated for rural service under the career factors; and internet facility, computer facility, staff quarter facility, adequate number of staff, adequate furniture in the workplace, community support, safety in workplace and the health facility under the working environment and living condition factors in their current place of postings.

Based on the study findings, a list of recommendations like improving working and living conditions; providing financial incentives; appropriate professional development programs; etc. were proposed for taking effective policy interventions to address the problem. The implementation of the recommendations would not only increase the availability of motivated teachers in the remote and rural schools in Bhutan and improve the quality of educational services.

## CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

Both the authors declare that 'written informed consent was obtained from the Ministry of Education, TPSD (full form) and subsequently from Dzongkhag Education Office, Principals from participating Schools and concern participants under Chukha District for publication of this article.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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