

**THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIES EXECUTED TO ADDRESS UNDERSTAFFING OF
TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUURI DISTRICT:
MERU COUNTY: KENYA.**

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this thesis was to investigate the impact of the strategies used to address the problem of teacher shortage in public secondary schools in Buuri district and to suggest remedial measures to the problem. This district, located in an arid and semi-arid land, has a total of 23 public secondary schools. Formal education is a critical instrument for emancipating the communities living therein. This is nevertheless compromised by the nationwide shortage of teachers in schools. As such several strategies have been applied to address this problem. This research investigated the impact of those strategies in public secondary schools. The study was guided by four objectives and research questions. The literature review covers three broad areas namely the theoretical, empirical reviews and the conceptual framework. The study used the survey research design with a target population of 6437 people, comprising students teachers and chairpersons of the Boards of Governors of the 23 schools. By use of stratified random sampling the study identified a sample size of 410 respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires and an interview schedule and analyzed using descriptive statistics where SPSS program (Integrated Student Version for Windows) was used. Instrument reliability was determined at Cronbach's alpha of 0.83. The study established that the employment of teachers by the schools' Boards Of Governors was the strategy with the most positive impact as it led to lower workloads to the teachers available. The negative impacts of these and other strategies include the non-dependability of BOG teachers, interruption of school time tables by part time teachers, lack of confidence in past students used as teachers, increased costs in the teaching and learning process. The study recommends that the government should integrate its planning process at the Ministry of Education, include Buuri District in the hardship area category, carry out a teachers balancing exercise and employ full time TSC teachers. Finally the study recommends that schools should avoid combining of classes and use of past bright students to teach the current students.

Key Words: Strategies, Teachers Understaffing, Secondary Schools.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter gives the background of the study and states the research problem, research questions objectives of the study as well as the relevance/justification of the study, its scope, limitations and assumptions of the study.

Quality formal education, which among other things depends on the availability of adequate, competent and motivated teachers, is a key instrument in emancipating the society from poverty. It is with the recognition of the role of formal education in individual and national development and the desire to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that the Government of Kenya instituted Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 and Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008 which are seen by many as strategies for alleviating poverty. Apart from increased learners population, the two programs also face acute shortage of teachers, strained school physical facilities such as classrooms, desks and toilets, especially for girls, delays in disbursement of funds, and expanded roles which have taxed teachers (Daily Nation 17th March 2011).

Buuri district is one of the new administrative units in the country. Buuri is on the North Eastern side of Mt. Kenya and covers an approximate area of 22,000 square kilometers . The population of the district is cosmopolitan with the Ameru being the largest community, the other communities include the Agikuyu, Borana and the Somali. Buuri District and basically

depends on agriculture as its main economic activity. However the district is classified largely as an Arid and Semi Arid Land (ASAL). These are climatic regions that receive precipitation below potential evapotranspiration, but not extremely so (Beatrice 1999). This poses a challenge to the agricultural efforts of the inhabitants of the district due to insufficient harvests as well as absolute crop failure and unreliability of cattle keeping thus rendering most house holds economically challenged (Imenti North District Strategic Plan 2007-2011).

Buuri district is not classified by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) as a hardship area unlike the neighboring Laikipia and Isiolo districts. Buuri district has remained unattractive to most teachers (Ministry of Education Strategic Plan 2007-2011). Such a conflict occurred in Marakwet district in November 2009 leading to a disruption of learning in the district (Daily Nation 6 November 2009). Against this background, it is acknowledged that quality secondary education that will support further individual and community development depends on, among other things, the availability of adequate, qualified and motivated teachers. (Onsomu 2006).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Public Secondary Schools in Buuri district have employed various strategies to deal with the problem of understaffing. This research intends to determine the impact that the strategies employed to address the impact that teachers' shortage have on the institutional operations of public secondary schools in Buuri district. Understaffing of teachers has been occasioned by several factors, key among them being the government's freeze on teacher recruitment directly from colleges and universities since 1999 and natural attrition caused by retirement, resignations and death (Ministry of Education Strategic Plan 2007-2011). Currently, it is estimated that the country has a shortage of approximately sixty thousand teachers in both secondary and primary levels (Daily Nation 17th March 2011).

Formal education, which is the focus of this research, is a critical facet of human life. Quality education is a fundamental right of all children regardless of their social, cultural, religious or economic status. Its quality has an immediate impact on individuals and a long-term impact on economic stability and of the society. Such education acts as a springboard for the youth to get a start in productive and satisfactory life so as to make tangible contributions to the country's economic growth and development. Shortage of teachers thus compromises on the fundamental right to quality education for the child since it is bound to have an impact on the quality of the performance of the available teachers. This in turn affects the performance of the child in class (Murigo 2007).

By shedding light on the impact of the strategies employed to address teachers shortage, this study will ultimately be beneficial to the learners as it will form a basis upon which to advise the following secondary beneficiaries of the results of this study, namely it can be useful to: The Teachers Service Commission, staffing officers in the Ministry of Education, District Education Officers, Principals of Schools, sponsors (such as churches) Boards of Governors and Parents Teachers Associations in the country as they chart out the best way forward in ensuring that the rights of the learners as well as their future and that of the country is not compromised by use of inappropriate strategies while at the same time the findings will escalate commitment to the strategies that will be deemed to have a positive and beneficial impact on the performance of both the teachers and the learners.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To establish the current status of teacher shortage in public secondary schools in Buuri district.

- 2) To establish the effectiveness of the strategies used to address understaffing in public secondary schools in the district.
- 3) To find out challenges faced in executing the strategies to address understaffing in the district.

1.4. Scope of the Study

The study focused on establishing the impact of the strategies used to address teachers' shortage in public secondary schools in Buuri District of Meru County. There are 23 public secondary schools in the district out of which 5 are boarding secondary schools, 17 are day secondary schools and 1 is a mixed day and boarding secondary school. The district, with an approximate area of 22,000 square kilometers, has a total of 100 TSC teachers and 23 principals. The study focused on the views of the District Human Resource Officer who represents the Ministry of Education and the TSC on staffing matters at the district level then the Chairpersons, Principals, HODs and students of the nine sampled schools.

1.5. Methodology

1.5.1 Research Design.

Descriptive survey design was utilized in this study. This type of design gives the researcher the opportunity to study the variables as they are without manipulate the variables. Williamson (2000) argues that this method is appropriate for: situations when understanding of context is important and where experiences of individuals and the context of their actions are critical.

A survey study is concerned about finding out something about the specific phenomenon, in this case teachers' shortage and the impact of the strategies employed to address the shortage.

In this study, the target population is comprised of the District Human Resource Officer at the DEO's office, all teachers, principals and chairpersons of the Boards of Governors and the form three and four students in the twenty three public schools of Buuri District in the Eastern Province. According to the recent record from the District Education Office, 2011, there are 100 T.S.C. employed teachers and 23 principals in the district. Total target population is 6437 people.

1.5.2: Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to pick the Human Resource Officer at the DEO's office in Buuri district. This is because the officer has the data on staffing of all the schools in the district and has authority to comment on the same, being well versed with the staffing situation.

Stratified random sampling also referred to as proportional or quota random sampling is a probabilistic technique that gives each member of the target population a known and equal chance of selection, while stratification increases precision without increasing sample size (Crawford, 1995). The technique involves dividing the population into homogeneous non-overlapping subgroups, that is strata, and then taking a simple random sample at a consistent percentage in each subgroup. In other words, this means to divide the population into $N_1, N_2, N_3, \dots, N_i$, such that $N_1 + N_2 + N_3 \dots + N_i = N$. Then do a simple random sample of $f = n/N$ in each strata.

Stratified random sampling has the following benefits. First, it ensures that a sample represents not only the overall population, but also key subgroups of the population, especially small minority groups. Second, stratified random sampling will generally have more statistical precision than simple random sampling. This is only true if the strata or groups are homogeneous. If they are then the variability within-groups is lower than the Variability for the population as a whole. The researcher stratified the schools into 5 strata based on their categories namely, boys boarding, girls boarding, mixed boarding, mixed day and boarding and mixed day. It is from the target population of 23 schools that the researcher identified: The chairpersons of the respective BOGs, Principals and

Heads of Departments of the sampled schools who formed the sample for those categories. A 10% sample of form three and four students was picked from the various categories of schools initially sampled. The class lists in the school formed the basis of drawing the random samples. (Kothari 2008)

The researcher sampled a high percentage of 40% of the 23 public secondary schools in the district making a sample of 9 schools. It is the Principals and Chairpersons of the BOGs and the 4 Heads of Departments and the DHRO that formed the 60 respondents

For the form three and four students, a sample of 10% of the total 3500 form four and form three students was picked from each school from the various categories of schools initially sampled. This made a sample size of 350 students. Class lists in the school formed the basis of drawing random samples. The total sample size was 410 respondents.

1.6 Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. Most scholars agree that the most suitable research instrument for survey design is a questionnaire. Gay (1981) asserts that a questionnaire has the ability to collect a large amount of information in a reasonably quick space of time.

Questionnaires have a number of advantages. For instance, data can be collected from a large sample and diverse regions and confidentiality is upheld. Using a questionnaire also saves time and, since they are presented in paper format, there is no opportunity for interviewer bias. Interview method was also used in addition to questionnaire method. This is a face to face inquiry where the researcher engages the respondent in a verbal discussion. This method has the advantage of giving the researcher the opportunity to rephrase the questions in case such questions are unclear to the respondent. However, interviews have limitations one of them being that they are time consuming to administer (Mugenda 1999). Thus due to this limitation this research restricted the use of interview schedules to the District Human Resource Officer only.

1.7 Instrument Validity and Reliability

To test the validity and reliability of the instrument, the researcher did a pilot study of on the three Principals, two Chairpersons of BOG's, five HOD's, ten form three and ten form four students not used as respondents to pre-test the questionnaire and the interview guide. The responses elicited were consistent to an acceptable percentage of 83.5

1.8. Findings and Discussions

1.8.1 Shortage of Teachers

The first objective off this study was to determine the current status of teacher staffing in Buuri district. This section highlights the findings of this study on this objective. The DHRO, who is in charge of staffing in the district, conceded to the fact that public secondary schools in Buuri district were experiencing a significant shortage of TSC teachers. The Principals, Chairpersons of BOG's and the HOD's sampled indicated that given the CBE's of the respective schools and the TSC employed teachers available, there was excess workload for those teachers in various departments in the respective schools. All the nine Chairpersons of the respective BOG's and their Principals (100%) stated that they were experiencing a shortage of TSC teachers in their schools. In addition, three hundred and twenty six students (93.14%) affirmed that they had experienced the problem of teachers' shortage in their schools. Table 4.3 summarizes these findings.

Table 1.1: Shortage of teachers

Category	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Administrative personnel	60	100	-	-
Students	326	93.14	24	6.86

N= 410

In table 1.1 all the sixty (100%) of the respondents in administrative positions affirmed that schools in Buuri district are understaffed. Three hundred and twenty six (93.14%) of the students have experienced the problem of teacher shortage in their schools. Thus it is established that by the time of conducting this study the district had a prevalent shortage of TSC teachers in the secondary schools category.

1.8.2 Teaching Load

Table 1.2: Average Teaching Loads at the Department Level

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 20	-	0
20-25	1	2.44
26-30	3	7.32
Above 30	37	90.24

N=41

In table 1.2 the researcher wanted to establish from the HODs the average teaching load of the teachers in their departments in public secondary schools in Buuri district. None of the sampled HODs had average workloads of below 20 lessons in their departments. One (2.44%) HOD said the average teaching load in the department was between 20-25. Three of the HODs (7.32%) said the average teaching load in their schools was between 26 to 30 lessons per week. Thirty seven HODs (90.24%) said the average workload in their departments was above 30 lessons per week. This explicitly shows that the workload in most of the schools is above that recommended for their CBEs. This inadvertently leads to work overload for the teachers.

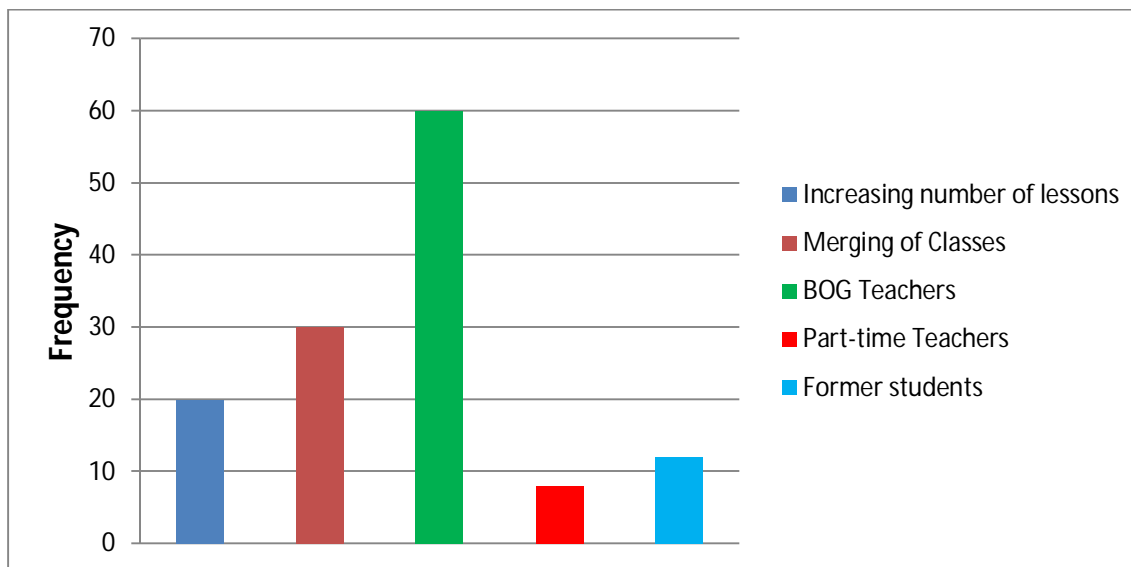


Figure 1.1: Strategies used to address shortage of teachers

In Figure 1.1, the researcher wanted to establish from the teachers and those in administrative positions the prevalent strategies used by schools in the district to deal with the problem of shortage of teachers. Twenty of the respondents (40.67%) identified increasing number of lessons for available teachers, 30 (50%) identified the merging two classes to be taught by one teacher, 60 (100%) of the respondents mentioned employing of BOG teachers and eight (13.33%) mentioned the use of part time teachers from nearby schools while 12 (20%) mentioned the use of former bright students to teach the current students. Some classes within the District were found to have a student population of over 80 students far beyond the recommended number of 45 students per class. Thus, a multiplicity of strategies is in use in the district in an effort to deal with the challenge of teachers' shortage. However the DHRO noted that the Ministry is not directly involved in the recruitment of BOG teachers but rather offers a policy guideline to the effect that the employed teachers should meet the government's minimum criteria for selection, namely that they should at least be trained and qualified teachers registered as such by the TSC.

1.8.3 Impact of the Strategies Used to Address Shortage of Teachers

The third objective of this study was to determine the impact of the strategies used to address the problem of understaffing of TSC teachers in Buuri district. The study thus looked at both the positive and negative impacts of the strategies to the administrators and the students as outlined in this section

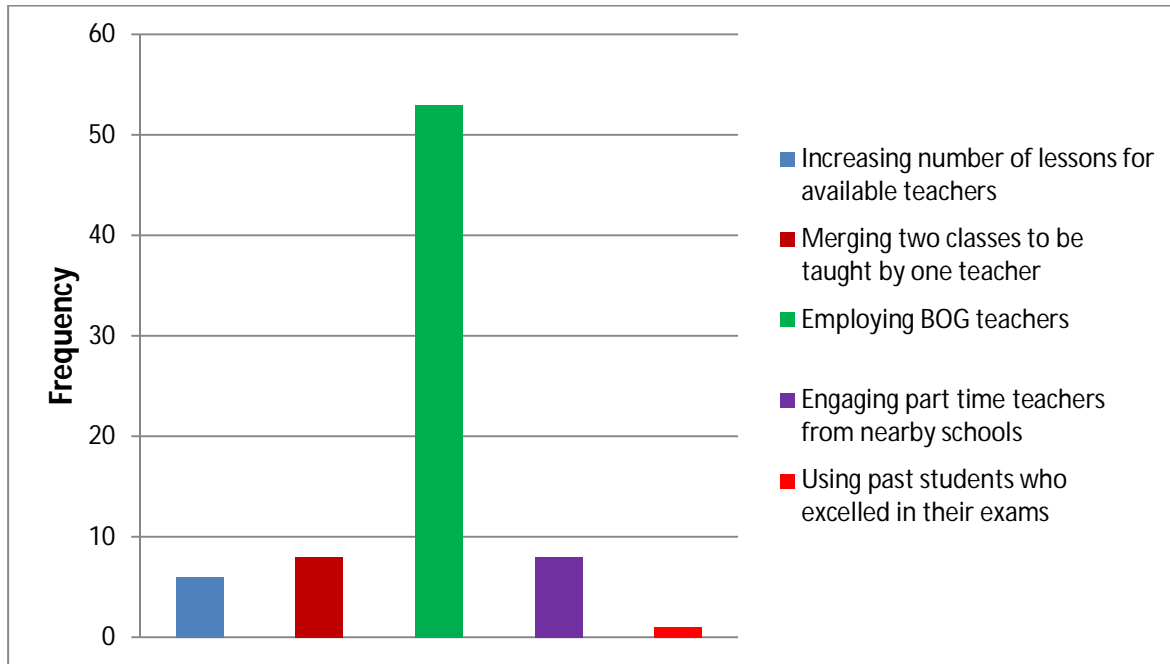


Figure 1.2: Strategies with positive impact to administrators

1.8.3.1: Strategies with positive impact to administrator

In figure 1.2 the researcher wanted to establish the strategies perceived to be most effective by the respondents in administrative positions. Increasing number of lessons for available teachers was identified by 6 (10%) of the respondents, merging two classes to be taught by one teacher was favored by 8 (13.33%) of the respondents. Employing BOG teachers was identified by 53 (88.33%) of the respondents. Engaging part time teachers from nearby schools was stated by 8 (13.33%) while the use of former students who excelled in their exams was identified as being effective by one (1.67%) respondent. The employment of BOG teachers is thus the most effective strategy to the administrators in addressing teachers' shortage in Buuri district as opposed to the other strategies considered.

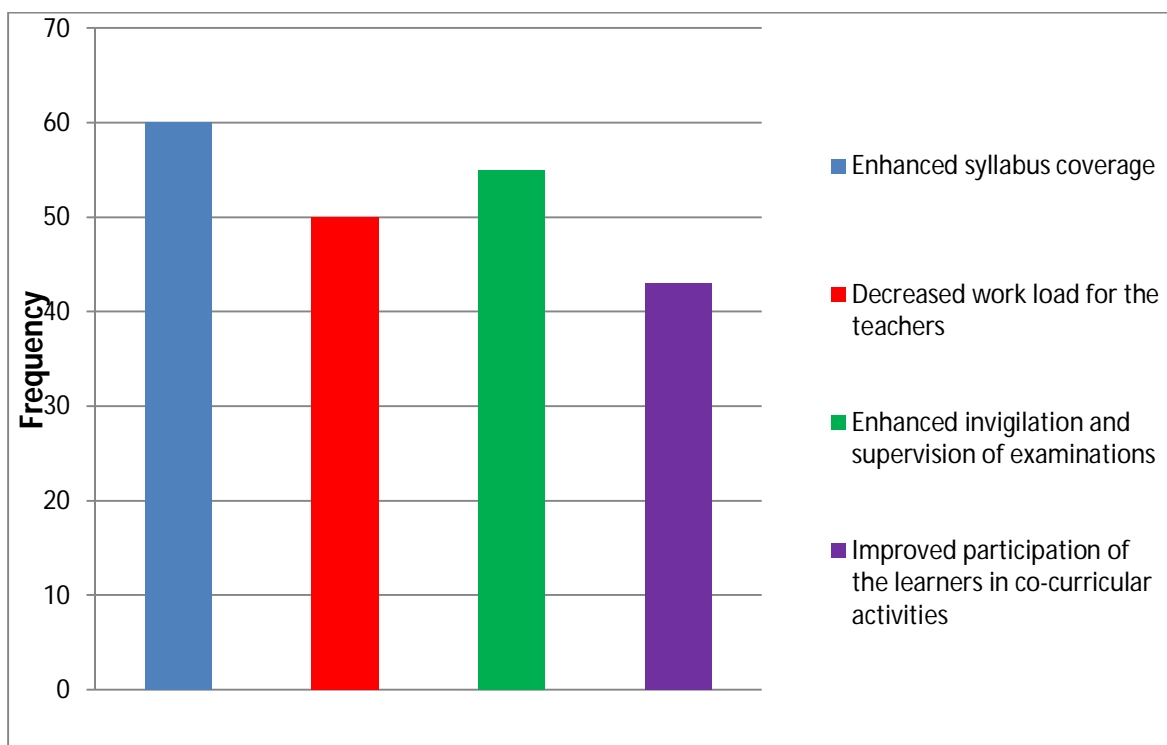


Figure 1.3: Why the strategies have positive impact to administrators

In figure 1.3 the researcher wanted to establish why the strategies identified have a positive impact in the view of the respondents in the administrative positions. All the 60 (100%) respondents in this category who had identified the employment of BOG teachers as the most effective said that such teachers enhance the timely coverage of the syllabuses. Fifty (83.33%) of the respondents said the strategy helps in effectively decreasing the work load for the permanently employed teachers in the schools, 55 (91.67%) said the strategy enhances the supervision and invigilation of examinations in the school while 43 (71.67%) noted that the strategy enhances participation of both learners and teachers in co-curricular activities.

Table 1.4: Strategies with positive impact to students

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Increasing number of lessons for available teachers	178	50.86
Employing BOG teachers	276	78.86

N=350

In table 4.5, the researcher embarked on establishing the strategies perceived to be most effective by the students. Increasing number of lessons for available teachers was favoured by 178 (50.86%) of the respondents. Employing BOG teachers was identified by 276 (78.86%) of the respondents. The employment of BOG teachers and the increasing of the number of lessons per teacher were thus identified by most of the students as the most effective strategies in addressing teachers' shortage in Buuri district as opposed to the other strategies considered.

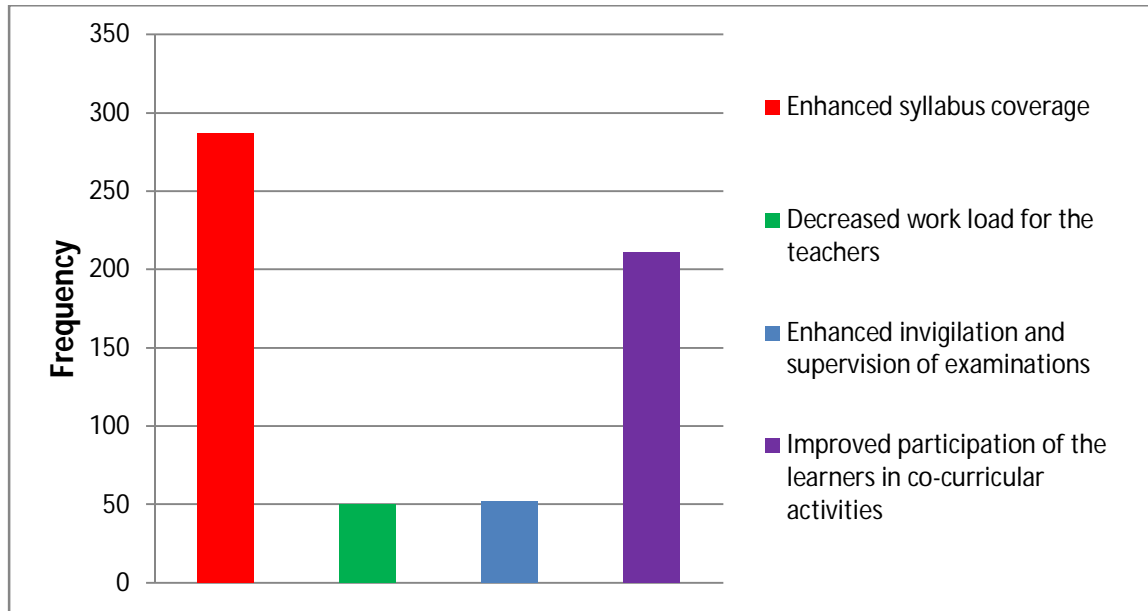


Figure 1.4: Why the strategies have positive impact to students

In figure 1.4, the researcher sought to determine the reasons behind the students' view that the strategies they had identified were having a positive impact on them. 287 (82.0%) said the strategies enhanced syllabus coverage, 50 (14.28%) said the strategies helped in reducing work load for the available teachers, 52 (14.89%) of the respondents said the strategies enhanced the administration of examinations in the schools while 211 (60.29%) of the respondents said the strategies allow for more participation in co-curricular activities.

1.8.3.2 Strategies Having Negative Impacts

Among the strategies identified as being in use in public secondary schools in Buuri district, some were identified as having undesirable and negative impact on the overall mission of the schools. The DHRO critically observed that the practice of schools employing their own teachers has opened room for schools to employ none professionals to teach in the subjects of need. The 9 principals (100%) and chairpersons of the respective boards observed that financing for the services of the teachers has posed a big challenge to the schools. The strategies with significantly negative impact are identified and then their impacts summarized in the section below;

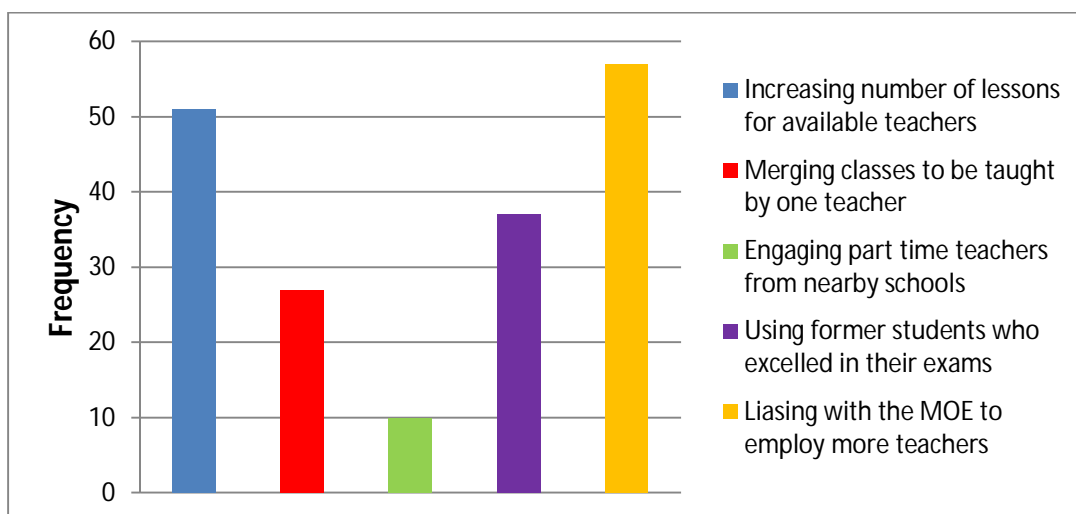


Figure 1.5: Administrators views on strategies with negative impact

In figure 1.5 the researcher wanted to determine which strategies have had a negative impact to the schools from the point of view of the administrators sampled. 51 (85%) said increasing the number of lessons taught per teacher in the affected subjects was having a negative impact in the schools, 27 (45%) stated that merging classes to be taught by one teacher (for schools having more than one stream) had negative impact in the school. Ten (16.67) of the respondents said that engaging part time teachers from nearby schools had the outcome of having negative impact in the institutions, 37 (61.67%) said the use of bright former students had negative impact in the schools while 57 (95.0%) said depending on the Ministry of Education to post teachers to their schools had negatively impacted on their schools. It is clear that there are strategies that have been having negative implications to the schools. Dependency on the Ministry of Education to post teachers to the schools has had negative impact on a significant number of schools.

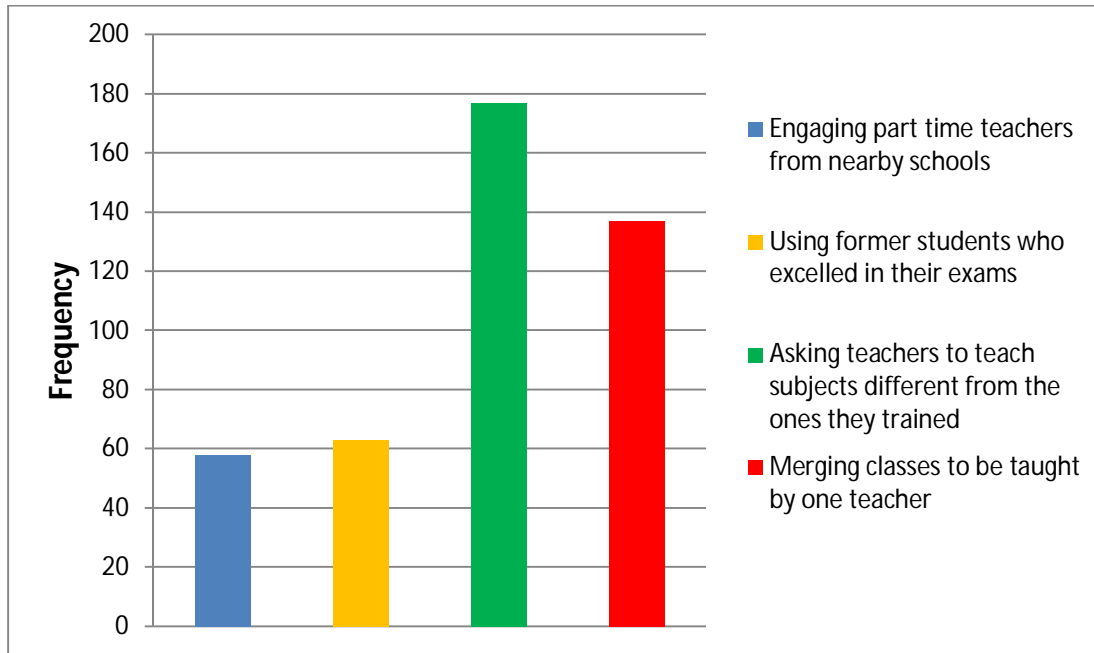


Figure 1.6: Strategies with negative impact on students

In figure 1.6 the researcher wanted to determine which three strategies have had a negative impact to the students. 58 (16.57%) of the respondents said that engaging part time teachers from nearby schools had negative impact on them as students, 63 (18%) observed that using former students to respond to the teacher shortage impacted negatively on them, 177 (50.57%) said that having teachers teaching subjects different from the ones they were trained to teach has a negative impact on the students. 137 (39.14%) stated that merging classes to be taught by one teacher (for schools having more than one stream) had negative impact to them.

Plate 1 show students crowded in a classroom where two classes had been combined. The students cannot access the teacher's personal attention as he goes around the class in an attempt to assist them.

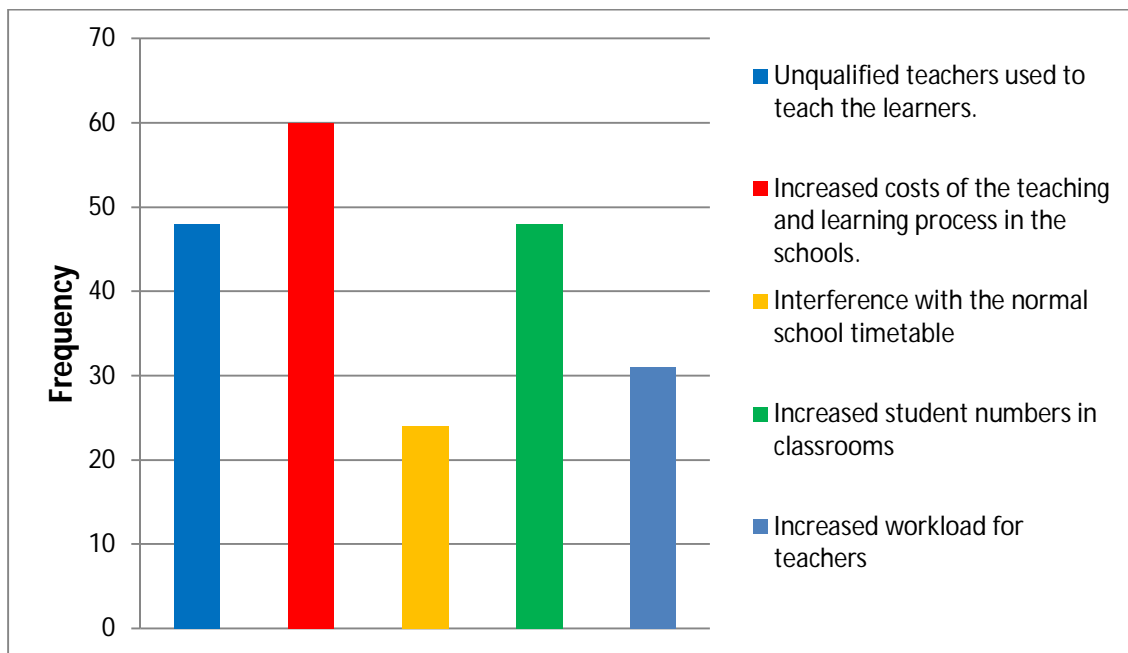


Figure 1.7: Administrators views on critical negative impacts

Figure 1.7 summarizes the responses given by the managers and administrators on the most critical negative impacts. 48 (80%) said schools have had to contend with employing unqualified teachers mostly due to the insufficiency of qualified unemployed teachers in their neighborhoods. Increased cost of the teaching and learning process was quoted by all the 60 (100%) respondents. Interference with the main time table was identified as a negative impact by 24 (76.67%). Increased student numbers in classroom was mentioned by 48 (81.67%) of the respondents. Increased workload for the teachers was noted by 31 (51.67%) of the respondents, apparently in reference to the schools where classes are combined to be taught by one teacher.

Plate 2 captures a teacher from one of the sampled schools marking books from a combined form three class.

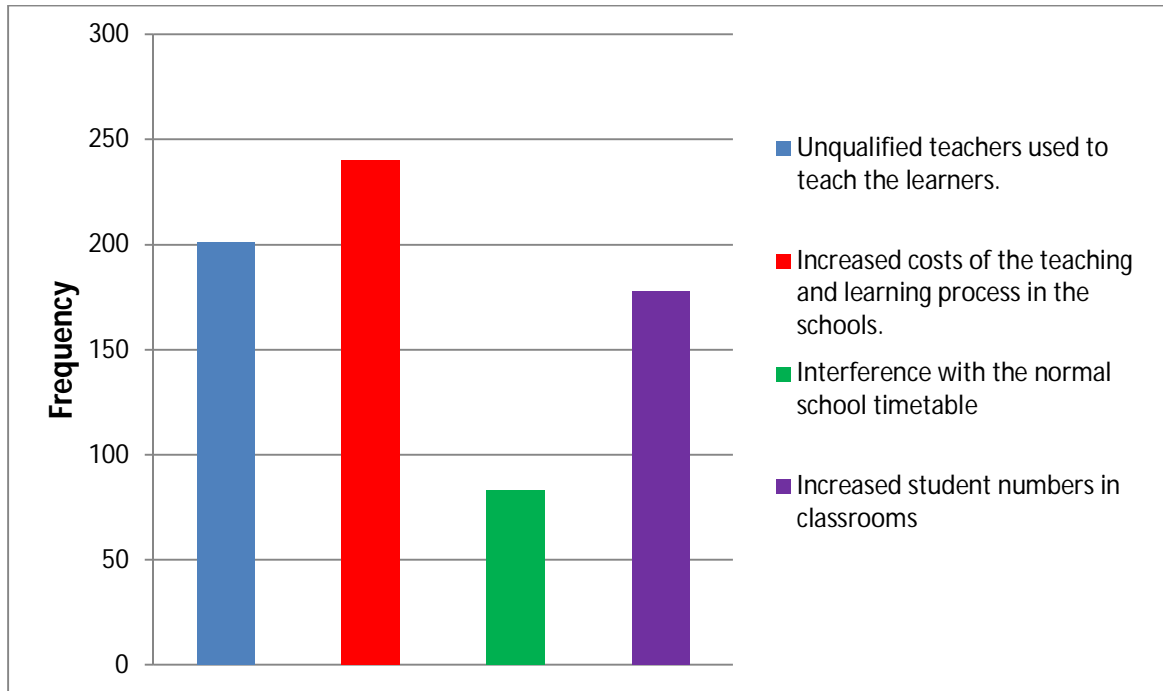


Figure 1.8: Student's views on critical negative impacts

In figure 1.8, the researcher sought to establish the views of the students on the negative impact that the strategies had on them. 201 (57.43%) mentioned the use of unqualified teachers used to teach the learners, 240 (68.57%) stated that increased costs of the teaching and learning process in the schools is pushed to their caregivers at home, 83 (23.71%) said some of the strategies interfered with the normal school timetable while 178 (50.86%) said they experienced increased student numbers in classrooms.

1.8.4 Challenges Faced in Executing Strategies to Address Shortage of Teachers

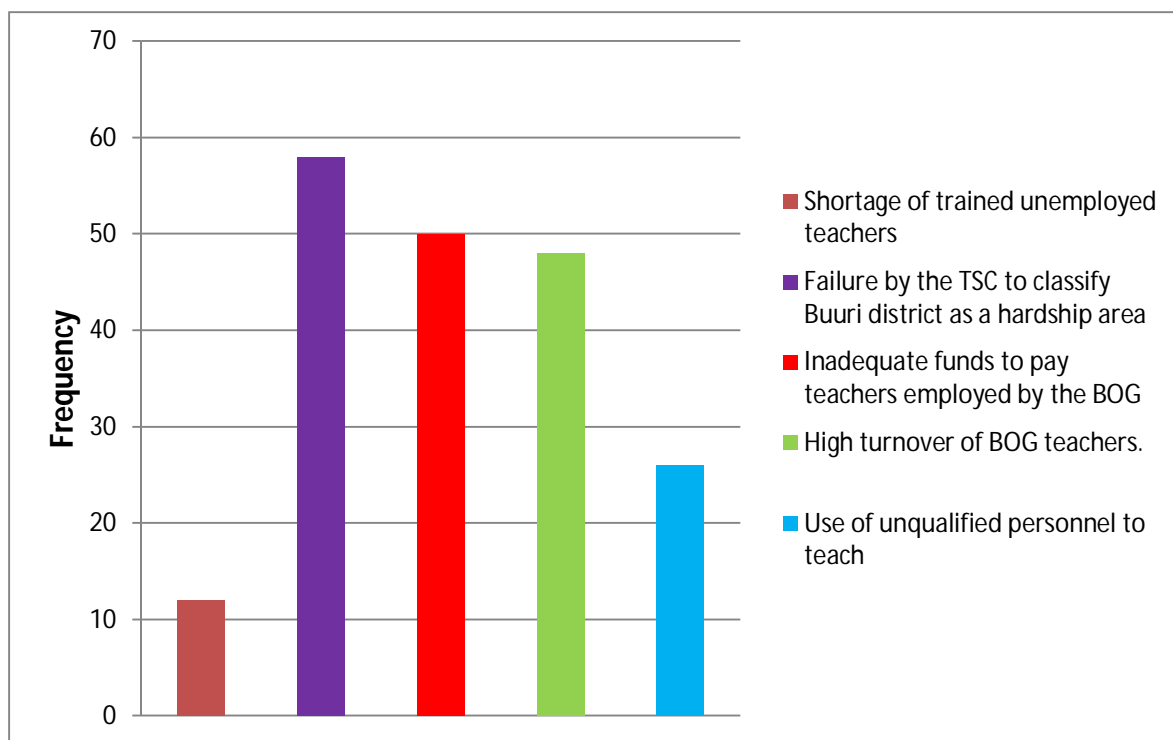


Figure 1.8 Challenges faced in executing the strategies

In figure 1.9, the researcher sought to determine the challenges faced in executing the strategies for addressing the teachers' shortage in Buuri district. Shortage of trained unemployed teachers was mentioned by 12 (20%) of the working respondents. Failure by the TSC to classify Buuri district as a hardship area was mentioned by 58 (96.67%) of the respondents while inadequate funds to pay teachers employed by the BOG was identified by 50 (83.33%) of the respondents. High turnover of BOG teachers was identified by 48 (80%) of the respondents and the use of unqualified personnel to teach was mentioned by 26 (43.33% of the respondents. Thus the fact that Buuri is not classified as a hardship area is noted as the biggest challenge followed by inadequate funds to employ BOG teachers.

1.8.5 Recommendations to Effectively Address Shortage of Teachers

The study generated several recommendations from the respondents as highlighted in this section.

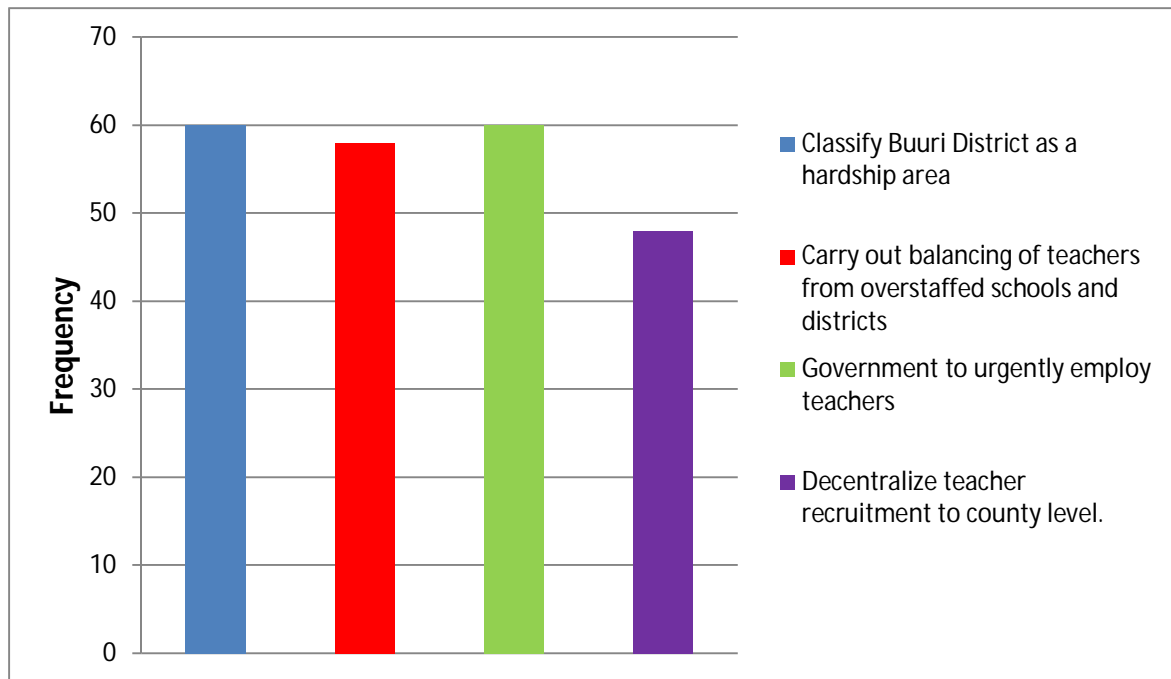


Figure 1.10: Recommendations to effectively address teachers' shortage

In figure 1.10, the researcher sought to determine the recommendations for enhancing staffing level in Buuri district. 60 (100%) of the working respondents said that Buuri district should be considered as a hardship area. 58 (96.67%) of the respondents recommended that the government should carry out a comprehensive staff balancing exercise. 60 (100%) recommended that the government should urgently recruit enough teachers to fill the gap while 48 (80%) of the respondents recommended that the government should decentralize the recruitment of teachers to the county level.

1.11 Conclusions

Strategies employed in Buuri District have varied impacts on the teachers, students and the schools. Some of the strategies have positive impacts critical among them being that employment of teachers by the BOG leads to reduced workload to the TSC teachers available in the schools. This translates to more efficiency in the use of available human resource.

However the strategies have some negative impacts critical among them being the use of unqualified teachers through the BOGs to fill the staffing gaps. The Ministry of Education is not actively involved at the school level during the recruitment of teachers by the BOG. This exercise is left on the hands of the respective boards whose competence in such human resource undertakings has not been established.

Teachers employed by the BOG, as it was noted, have a propensity to leave for greener pastures which makes them unreliable investment to the schools and at the same time it complicates the continuity in curriculum implementation which they were supposed to solve in the first place. This strategy, moreover, increases operational costs of the schools which in turn are offloaded to the parents and care givers of the learners.

The merging of classes leads to over stretched student numbers in classes that have been combined. This strategy in addition leads to an increased work load for teachers of such classes. Use of part

time teachers from nearby schools disrupts the normal school time table of the host school since that school has to frequently modify its timetable to accommodate the time when such teachers are available. In addition, some schools are in solitary locations without another school in the immediate neighborhood with which to share teachers.

Efforts to address the shortage of teachers in the district face several challenges. Attempts to have teachers transferred to the district are frustrated by the resistance of such teachers to report to Buuri since they perceive the district to be a hardship area yet the government has not classified it as such. The use of former students to teach current students is not well accepted as such former students are not qualified teachers but are rather used as a desperate measure by the schools. Moreover, the former students do not command the respect of their former school mates.

1.12. Suggestions for Further Research

This study exclusively dealt with teacher shortage in public secondary schools in Buuri District. However there are further areas that research can be done on the teachers' shortage issue in Buuri. Such include:

1. Research should be done on the viability of decentralization of teacher management to the county level in addressing teachers' shortage.
2. Research should be carried out to determine how the terms and conditions of service of the teachers compare to those of other employees in other sectors in the district.
3. Further research should be carried out to determine the effectiveness of the Boards of Governors in independently recruiting teachers on temporary terms

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