

## EDUCATION

# Learning faces crisis as retiring teachers

Old guard may not easily cope with new subjects, including computers, and sport

By SAMUEL SIRINGI

**S**ome 32,264 teachers nearing retirement will report to schools country-wide today with the news that they now have up to 10 more years in service, the *Nation* has learnt.

Some of them, who were about to turn 55 years, were not expecting to return to classrooms this term, but will now work for another five years, thanks to last month's government move to increase the retirement age from 55 to 60 years.

The new rule, which came into effect on April 1, has been opposed by some MPs and students.

The 32,264 teachers are aged between 50 and 55 years, the group that was headed to the exit door if the government retained the earlier retirement age. There are 1,087 more others aged between 55 and 60 years.

## Computers

The increase in the retirement age means the teachers will have between five and 10 years on the job, unless they decided to exit through early retirement, which comes at 50 years.

In total, there are 234,526 teachers in the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) employ.

But an analysis of the statistics shows that the new rule could increasingly put the school system in an ageing crisis as the teaching force will comprise a huge chunk of older teachers.

Such teachers are likely to find it difficult to embrace new subjects such as computers and HIV and Aids.

There is also likely to be a lack of personnel to take children through physical education lessons or sports activities.

According to the statistics, 180,074 teachers are aged 35 years and above. Of these, the age group with the highest number of teachers is that of between 40 and 44 years, which has 55,201. It is followed by the group of those aged between 35 and 39 years, which has 46,898 teachers.

In the group of those between 50 and 54 years, the teachers who would have retired within the next five years, there are 32,264. These are the teachers who will help the government save Sh15 billion over the next five years by remaining in service instead of exiting to go home with their pension. This means it will save Sh3 billion annually.

During a conference for secondary school student leaders last month, partici-

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Age at which civil servants and tutors will now retire

pants argued against having many older teachers in schools.

Students proposed that more younger teachers be posted to schools as they were more suitable to handle maturity problems that affect youngsters.

Public Service Commission permanent secretary Titus Ndambuki said recently that the move was a wise idea as it would ease government expenditure on pension payouts, which were expected to hit the Sh100 million mark by 2030.

In the current financial year that ends in June, the state had earmarked Sh26 billion for the payouts, which were expected to increase to Sh30 billion in the next financial year.

But now, the additional Sh3 billion will not be allocated under the programme



"because there are no new retirees", Mr Ndambuki said.

But keeping the teachers in schools may not necessarily be a good idea since the profession is not just a "sitting-in-the-office" job.

Many teachers have to be energetic to walk about classrooms as they teach and be ready to attend to co-curricula activities that are essential for the teachers.

It is estimated that about 7,000 teachers have been leaving the service, many of them through retirements. Others leave through resignations, deaths and sacking.

## Filling the posts

Due to the departures, the TSC has been filling the posts that fall vacant each year, at an average of 8,000 in primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

But this figure is likely to be trimmed after TSC boss Gabriel Lengoboni hinted recently that he was conducting an audit to

**Parents queue outside a bank in Nakuru to withdraw money for fees as schools prepare to reopen today for the second term.**

Photo/JOSEPH KIHARI

establish the number of those retiring.

"We expect to replace teachers as we have done annually only that the figures might be less than in previous years," he said.

Failure to recruit more teachers in the lower age groups is likely to perpetuate the ageing crisis, with less than 1,000 teachers below 25 years.

There are only 539 teachers aged between 20 and 24 years. A larger number, 13,828, are aged between 25 and 29 years.

With the numbers heavily skewed towards the older age groups, the message is clear that a lot is needed to address the ageing crisis.

Mr Ndambuki allayed the fears, saying the ageing crisis was being addressed through sustained recruitment of new public servants and others from the pri-

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# 'Kick the greying lot out of class and

By BARNABAS BII and GEORGE MUNENE

Some educationists, union officials and parents are opposed to the move to increase the retirement age of teachers, interviews by the *Nation* have revealed.

In the North Rift, statistics by the Ministry of Education indicate that 275 primary and secondary school teachers in the newly created Eldoret West District were expected to go home after attaining retirement age.

Eldoret East district education officer Genny Jama revealed that 40 out of the 1,700 teachers in the area have had their contracts extended even after attaining retirement age.

However, educationists, trade unionists and parents believe the wide age gap between pupils and their teachers will cause disharmony in the teaching of lessons that involve physical, social and technological abilities.

"Some children are uncomfortable when being taught by teachers who are almost their

grandparents. They instead prefer to be taught by younger teachers, whom they consider to be flexible in their thinking," says Mr Sammy Bor, Rift Valley's Kenya National Union of Teachers (Knut) secretary.

## Commitment

However, other stakeholders have supported the extension of the age limit, arguing that interest and commitment is the guiding principle in any profession.

"It all depends on the interest, commitment and exposure of any teacher," argues Ms Dorothy Otieno, the Wareng district education officer.

She says some of the teachers who have attained retirement age are flexible enough to teach subjects like Physical Education, HIV and Aids and

**'Most of these old teachers want to pursue other social and economic ventures'**

computers, unlike some of their 'dot com' colleagues.

"Most of these young teachers are not strict and principled enough to impart a reading culture to children," adds Ms Otieno.

However, unionists and parents argue the extension of the retirement age will derail the learning process.

"Most of these teachers are unwilling to go back to class. They want to pursue other social and economic ventures," says Boniface Tenai, the Nandi East Knut executive secretary.

He adds that teachers above 50 years are not flexible enough to handle some of the newly introduced subjects, and that they should be allowed to retire.

"Extending service for teachers who have attained retirement age will impact negatively on their teaching abilities. Most of them are psychologically prepared to engage in other issues in life," Mr Tenai argues.

He says that out of the 1,200 teachers in the district, 50 of them have attained retirement age and are ready to quit the

profession. "The Government should recruit young teachers who are ready to freely interact with pupils and students."

"They are in a better position to discuss with them subjects like HIV and Aids, which the older generation finds difficult to handle," Mr Tenai says.

His sentiments are supported by parents opposed to the extension of the retirement age.

"Youthful teachers should be given a chance to explore their skills. Most of them are well-versed in the new curriculum," says Mathew Koech, a parent from Chepkumia, Nandi South District.

## Elderly ones

He appeals to the Government to recruit young, flexible teachers and allow those who have attained retirement age to leave the profession and venture into other activities.

In the Eastern region, parents are hoping that the Government will keep hiring more teachers in spite of retaining the elderly ones.

They say the quality of learn-

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