

WHAT MAKES TEACHERS CONSIDER LEAVING? WORKING CONDITIONS AND TURNOVER INTENTION IN NAIROBI'S PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Hellen Ayayo Odongo¹ & Gladys Kinyanjui, PhD²

¹ Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya

² Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' intention to leave has implications for school staffing and continuity of learning. This study examined the relationship between satisfaction with working conditions and turnover intention among teachers in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. Guided by Herzberg's two-factor theory, the study adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods design. Of 125 questionnaires distributed, 121 were returned by teachers in national, extra-county and county schools; eight principals were interviewed. Teachers assessed class size, learner discipline, communication, water and sanitation, physical facilities, and alignment of teaching subjects with their training. National school respondents generally rated favourable conditions more highly than county school respondents. In the reported simple regression of 120 observations, greater satisfaction with working conditions was associated with lower turnover intention ($b = -1.014$, 95% CI $[-1.100, -0.928]$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .823$). Principals' accounts of large classes, resource shortages, and deteriorating facilities helped explain the quantitative pattern. The findings point to working conditions as an important consideration in teacher retention planning.

Keywords: Working Conditions; Teacher Job Satisfaction; Turnover Intention; Public Secondary Schools; Nairobi County

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' job satisfaction refers to the positive feeling that teachers develop when they evaluate their work experiences and outcomes. A school that provides teachers with appropriate resources and support is better placed to maintain a stable teaching staff and a productive learning environment. When teachers consider leaving, schools face the possibility of interrupted instruction and additional demands on colleagues (Doughty, 2024; Hoque et al., 2023). The distinction between considering departure and actually leaving is important: this article examines the former, which was the outcome measured in the study.

The conditions in which teachers work include class size, teaching materials, facilities, sanitation, learner behaviour and administrative support. These are part of everyday teaching. Large classes can increase preparation and marking demands, while inadequate materials may make it difficult to deliver planned lessons. The ability to discuss difficulties with school leaders and obtain support with learner discipline may also shape how manageable teachers find their work. Conditions of the job are therefore broader than the physical state of a classroom (Collie, 2023; Ssenyonga & Hecker, 2021).

International research shows that the context of teacher retention differs across education systems. In China, Jiang et al. (2023) examined rural teachers through the distinction between hygiene and motivation factors. In Australia, Collie (2023) investigated the relationship of job demands and resources with teacher wellbeing and turnover intentions. These studies draw attention to teachers' daily working environment, although findings from either setting cannot be assumed to describe Nairobi's schools. Doughty (2024) likewise used mixed methods to examine why teachers leave, showing the value of listening to teachers' explanations alongside numerical measures of dissatisfaction.

African studies provide a closer regional perspective. Mpundu et al. (2023) analysed teacher turnover and attrition in South Africa's North-West Province. In Tanzania, Sanga et al. (2024) examined factors influencing turnover in government secondary schools, including the working environment and accommodation. Work in Nigeria has considered the relationship between teacher welfare and job satisfaction (Gbawa & Dimkpa, 2024), while Ssenyonga and Hecker (2021) examined how job perceptions contribute to stress among Ugandan secondary school teachers. Together, these studies suggest that workloads, resources and support warrant attention, while also showing that working conditions operate alongside other personal and institutional considerations.

Within Kenya, Sande (2022) studied job satisfaction among public secondary school teachers in Kilifi County and identified the work environment and teaching facilities as concerns. Muga et al. (2017) examined teachers' job satisfaction across Siaya, Kisumu and Kajiado counties. Such studies establish the relevance of teachers' experiences in Kenya, but Nairobi County has its own mix of national, extra-county and county public secondary schools. The present article examines whether teachers in those three categories report similar conditions and whether satisfaction with those conditions is associated with their intention to leave.

Problem Statement

Although teachers employed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) are expected to serve until the end of their contracts or retirement, some leave the profession early despite accepting the terms set out in the TSC Code of Regulations for Teachers (2015). These departures can create staffing shortages, disrupt curriculum delivery, and place additional pressure on the teachers who remain, potentially affecting the quality of education. The study therefore examines whether satisfaction with working conditions influences teachers' decisions to leave the profession in Nairobi County.

Objective of the Study

To determine the effect of teachers' job satisfaction with working conditions of the job on their turnover.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Working conditions as a source of dissatisfaction

Herzberg's two-factor theory distinguishes between motivators associated with the work itself and hygiene factors associated with the circumstances in which work is performed. Conditions of the job fall within the second group: inadequate conditions can cause dissatisfaction, whereas improving them does not necessarily provide every source of motivation that a teacher needs (Alshmemri et al., 2017). This distinction helps explain why a committed teacher can value teaching yet become discouraged by an unmanageable daily environment. Jiang et al. (2023) used a related distinction when examining the retention of rural teachers in Western China.

In the Nairobi study, conditions of the job were defined as the environment, facilities, resources and administrative support that allow teachers to carry out assigned responsibilities. This definition links the theory to observable aspects of school life: classrooms, water, sanitation, supplies, learner discipline and communication. It also prevents the discussion from treating dissatisfaction with pay or career advancement as though it were evidence about working conditions. The analysis reported here is confined to the latter.

Resources, class size and school facilities

An adequately resourced classroom allows teachers to prepare lessons, engage learners and assess progress with fewer practical obstacles. Conversely, shortages of instructional materials may shift costs and additional work onto teachers. Large classes increase the number of learners who require attention, and crowded or poorly ventilated rooms may make teaching more difficult. Water and sanitation are similarly part of the working environment, particularly when teachers spend most of the day at school. Admiraal (2023) examined work conditions and job satisfaction in primary and secondary education, while Sande (2022) described the importance of classrooms and instructional facilities in Kenyan public secondary schools.

The meaning of a favourable working environment varies across school categories and locations. Sanga et al. (2024) reported challenges related to the work environment and accommodation among government secondary school teachers in Tanzania. Mpundu et al. (2023) analysed attrition in a South African provincial setting. Those studies point to material and logistical demands, but the Nairobi investigation measured particular conditions within local schools rather than applying a single measure of working conditions from another country.

Learner discipline and administrative support

Working conditions also reflect how a school manages people and problems. When teachers have clear channels for communicating with administrators, they can raise concerns about resources, workloads or learner behaviour before those concerns become more difficult to manage. Effective responses to indiscipline can protect teaching time. The absence of such support may leave individual teachers to address recurring problems without sufficient help. Collie (2023) considered both job demands, including disruptive behaviour and time pressure, and resources such as supportive relationships when examining wellbeing and turnover intention.

The study in Nairobi included items on discipline measures and communication between teachers and the administration. These items allow a wider understanding of conditions of the job than a facilities-only measure would provide. Interviews with principals can add context to questionnaire scores by showing the pressures under which schools operate, although principals cannot speak for every teacher. Stress research among Ugandan secondary teachers also supports taking perceptions of the school environment seriously (Ssenyonga & Hecker, 2021).

Working conditions and turnover intention

Turnover intention describes a teacher's reported likelihood of leaving, rather than a documented resignation, retirement or transfer. It can alert schools to potential retention difficulties, but intention is not an exact count

of future departures. The relationship may also run in more than one direction: dissatisfied teachers may consider leaving, and teachers already seeking other work may evaluate current conditions more negatively. Cross-sectional questionnaires cannot determine the sequence of these experiences. This distinction is particularly relevant when interpreting a strong association between two self-reported measures.

Prior studies do not suggest that working conditions are the only consideration in teacher retention. Sande (2022) examined job satisfaction in Kilifi and found that favourable views of the work environment did not necessarily resolve decisions about staying. In the regional literature, workloads, facilities and support appear alongside other concerns, including career opportunities and personal circumstances (Mpundu et al., 2023; Sanga et al., 2024). The value of the current study lies in isolating working conditions as one aspect of satisfaction and examining how strongly they were associated with intention to leave in this particular sample.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a convergent parallel mixed methods design. Teacher questionnaires and interviews with principals were used to examine the same issue from different perspectives. The proposal identified 85 public secondary schools and 4,278 teachers in Nairobi County as the target population. Schools were selected by national, extra-county, and county categories; the planned sample comprised 17 schools, 120 teachers, and 13 principals. The results chapter reports 125 questionnaires issued to teachers, of which 121 were returned (96.8%), and interviews with eight principals.

Teachers rated statements on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The job-conditions items included class size, learner discipline, communication with school management, water and sanitation, clean and ventilated facilities, and whether teachers were assigned subjects outside their training. The study described an aggregate satisfaction score as the predictor and reported teachers' likelihood of leaving as the outcome.

Descriptive scores compared the three school categories. A simple linear regression assessed the association between the satisfaction score and turnover intention, and principals' interview accounts were used to help interpret the pattern. This analysis did not track actual departures or statistically adjust for other possible influences. Expert judgement was used to assess content validity, and Cronbach's alpha was used for reliability. Permissions were sought before data collection, and respondent confidentiality was protected.

RESULTS

Participant response and ratings of working conditions

A total of 121 teachers returned questionnaires: eight from national schools, 28 from extra-county schools and 85 from county schools. The respondents comprised 63 women (52.1%) and 58 men (47.9%). Table 1 reproduces the mean scores reported for the working-conditions items by school category.

Table 1. Reported mean item scores for conditions of the job by school category

Working condition item	National	Extra-county	County
Class size of 25-50 learners	4	3	2
Learner behaviour and discipline measures	4	3	2
Clear communication channels	4	3	3
Clean water and sanitation	4	3	3
Clean, adequately ventilated facilities	4	3	2
Teaching subjects outside one's training	2	2	3

Note. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Results in Table 1 show that national school respondents consistently reported scores of 4, indicating agreement with favourable statements about their conditions. Extra-county respondents reported neutral average scores of 3. County school respondents scored class size, learner discipline, and physical facilities at

2, while communication and water and sanitation each scored 3. The pattern points to differences in specific conditions, especially classroom demands and facilities, rather than a single uniform experience shared by all teachers in a school category.

Association with Turnover Intention

The reported regression used 120 teacher observations. Satisfaction with conditions of the job was negatively associated with intention to leave ($b = -1.014$, $SE = 0.043$, 95% CI $[-1.100, -0.928]$, $p < .001$). The model R^2 was .823. Within the scale used in the study, a one-point higher satisfaction score corresponded to approximately a one-point lower predicted intention score.

Table 2. Reported Simple Regression of Turnover Intention on Working-Conditions Satisfaction

Statistic	Reported value
Observations	120
Satisfaction coefficient (b)	-1.014
Standard error	0.043
95% confidence interval	-1.100 to -0.928
p value	3.48×10^{-46}
R^2	.823
Adjusted R^2	.821

The interview accounts provide context for this association. Principals described high workloads and inadequate teaching and learning resources in some county and extra-county schools. One principal explained: “We struggle with basic resources - sometimes teachers buy chalk using their own money. Classes have 70-80 students. Some toilets are in a state of disrepair.” This account connects the measured concerns about class size, materials, and facilities to teachers’ daily experience.

DISCUSSION

Differences in the daily conditions of teaching

The results show that satisfaction with working conditions was uneven across the three categories of public secondary schools. National school respondents generally agreed that the conditions listed in the questionnaire were favourable, whereas county school respondents reported less favourable class sizes, discipline measures and facilities. The gap is relevant because teachers must deliver the curriculum within the conditions available at their particular school. A teacher facing a crowded room and insufficient resources may experience the same formal job very differently from a teacher in a better-equipped setting. The principals’ account of classes of 70-80 learners and teachers purchasing chalk gives a concrete example of the pressure that resource shortages can create.

These findings are broadly consistent with the literature linking work demands and resources to teacher wellbeing and turnover intentions (Collie, 2023). Studies in Tanzania and South Africa have also identified aspects of the working environment as concerns in teacher retention (Sanga et al., 2024; Mpundu et al., 2023). The Nairobi results add a within-county comparison: the same national employment system includes schools in which participating teachers rated classroom conditions quite differently.

Conditions of the job and intention to leave

The negative regression coefficient indicates that teachers reporting greater satisfaction with working conditions also tended to report less intention to leave. This aligns with Herzberg’s view that inadequate hygiene factors can contribute to dissatisfaction (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Its practical meaning is that retention discussions should include class size, resources, facilities, learner discipline, and communication, alongside other employment concerns. The strong R^2 describes fit within this sample and for the particular measures used; it does not mean that working conditions explain 82% of actual teacher departures or that other influences are unimportant.

Comparison with the Kilifi study needs care. Sande (2022) reported that satisfaction with the work environment did not necessarily translate into a decision to remain. The Nairobi association does not contradict that observation: teachers can express a lower intention to leave while still moving later for personal, financial or career reasons. Likewise, the principals' reports of teachers seeking early retirement provide context but do not establish how many teachers actually left because of their conditions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers who reported greater satisfaction with working conditions also reported lower intention to leave. Ratings of class size, learner discipline and physical facilities were less favourable among county school respondents than among national school respondents. Principals' accounts highlighted the practical pressures behind some of these ratings. The findings support improving teaching resources and facilities, keeping workloads manageable and strengthening school-level support. The Ministry of Education and TSC should improve the working conditions of the teachers by ensuring that their workloads are manageable, providing adequate and necessary teaching resources, and increasing administrative support for teachers. This will not only ensure that teachers effectively execute their assigned tasks and responsibilities, but it will also result in increased TJS and reduced turnover intention.

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