

Influence of School Environmental Characteristics on Retention of Secondary School Teachers in Homa Bay County, Kenya

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Abstract

The present study investigated the influence of school environmental characteristics on retention of secondary schoolteachers in Homa Bay County of Kenya. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design. For a population of one thousand eight hundred and one (1801) teachers, according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of specification, three hundred and twenty (320) teachers were recommended to be appropriate and for a population of 295 principals, one hundred and sixty-nine (169) were appropriate. This study used questionnaires as the instrument of data collection. Two sets of questionnaires were used; one for the school principals and another for the teachers. To enhance validity of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted in twenty selected schools in the neighboring Migori County. This involved the ten principals and two teachers from each school. In this study, internal consistency reliability of the instruments was obtained by computing Cronbach's alpha () using SPSS and a Cronbach's Alpha of = .705 was reported. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis. The findings indicated that there was a significant fairly moderate, positive correlation between the two variables [$r = .463, n=422, p<.05$], with high levels of conducive school environment associated with high teacher retention rate. The study recommends that the Teachers Service Commission should develop a strict policy governing teachers transfers that incorporates a term limit of 5-6 years.

Keywords: *school environmental characteristics, retention, secondary school teachers*

1. Introduction

The most asset to a learning institution is its teachers, thus retaining them in their stations is essential for any school. Teaching quality globally is the most important schooling input in determination of student achievement given the central role the teacher plays in the education sector. However, it has been observed that teaching is increasingly becoming a profession with the highest flows in and out of schools. This high rate of teacher transfers impacts negatively on schools' academic achievements because it disrupts the stability and continuity of teaching (Sass, 2006). Consequently, teachers' transfers have emerged as a significant problem affected by school administrator's behavior in most institutions of learning. Schools and staffing survey from the Marvel, Lyter, Petrola, Strizek and Morton (2013) provided sufficient argument indicating that appropriately a third of America's teachers seek transfer from one institution to the other citing lack of promotion by some administrators, poor

incentives, lack of recognition at school level, demoralizing leadership behaviors employed by the institutional administrators among others.

Despite the efforts to put control to teachers' frequent demands for transfers, teachers' mobility is still prevalent in many parts of Kenya. The Kenyan government has however developed a bonding policy which restricts newly recruited teachers from seeking transfer before the end of five years from their first posting schools since 2001 (Republic of Kenya, 2009b). However, many teachers still find their ways out of this restriction and get transfer to their schools of choice. The current research equally notes that number of teachers seeking transfers from a school to another in Homa Bay County has been in the rising trend (Refer to table 1). This has led the education stakeholders in the area to cite several possible factors as responsible for the mass transfer requests by teachers. Among these is the issue of principals' strict leadership behaviors and lack of motivational rewards from many of secondary school heads.

Several queries have been raised around frequent teachers' requests for transfers if related to principals' management behaviors, reward systems at school level or school environmental characteristics. If yes, then what specifically motivates the teachers to seek transfers to other schools and is there a role that motivational rewards by principals play on retention of these teachers? And how can these transfers be contained at school level by the school principals? Determining these questions through research was instrumental in the understanding and solving one of the significant educational challenges facing public secondary schools in Homa Bay County and other areas in the country faced by the same challenges.

As an effort to recruit more trained and qualified teachers into the teaching profession prove to be successful, determining how to keep high-quality teachers in their posted schools to provide meaningful and effective instruction to the learners remains an enigma. Personnel transfer, intra-system transfer and promotion without replacement causes understaffing in an institution (Katam, 2014). Teachers transfer has the potential to impact seriously on school morale and values as students attempt to adjust to new teachers and their possible shifts in focus. Despite these drawbacks it is becoming a common knowledge that teachers seek to transfer from one school to another or from one region to another that is of relative advantage in terms of working conditions. This poses a serious problem faced by many principals that in turn has a strong relationship on the performance of students in academics (Ingersoll, 2010).

The study was guided by Herzberg two factor theory which posits that teachers are motivated by internal values rather than values that are external to the work. That individual's look for the gratification of higher level psychological needs, for example, achievement, recognition, responsibility, relationship at work place, advancement and nature of the work itself. This theory is relevant to this study in that it recognizes that teachers have two categories of needs that operate in them (e.g. intrinsic and extrinsic) and that both should be addressed.

Muhammad, Humaira, Shereen and Anjum (2012) in Pakistan studied factors affecting teacher motivation at secondary school level in Kohat City. The nature of this study was descriptive cum survey type. Based on this analysis, it was concluded that rewards and incentives, self-confidence, economic status of teacher and financial incentive affect the performance of teachers, while socio- status of the teacher, examination stress, environmental influence and teaching as first choice of the teacher affect the retention of teachers. Alhaji and Yusoff (2012) in Mozambique studied how motivational factors influence organizational commitment and effectiveness. The results showed that environment in which employees' work affects both job performance and job satisfaction and impacts immensely on whether one will continue working at the same institution or not. Such workspace decisions aspire to

create an investment in workers' quality of life, the argument being made that measurable productivity increases will result. Guarino, Santibanez and Daley (2006) in Orangi town in Pakistan studied the relationship between teacher-work environment and retention. The results showed that there was a positive relationship between work environment and teacher's retention. The findings further outlined that high rate of teachers transfer in Pakistan high schools is occasioned by unfavorable school environment which impacts negatively on the students' academic performance.

Ariko and Othuon (2012) in Kenya studied factors influencing teacher transfers in Suba Sub-County of Homa Bay County Kenya. The study revealed that teacher transfer requests could be reduced if transport and communication to schools were improved, electricity and houses made available to teachers among other factors. Yuniyah, Walter, and Duke (2015) in Kenya investigated the determinants of teacher's motivation in public secondary schools in Masaba South Sub County, Kenya. The study established that development factors had a significant effect on teacher motivation and retention where 64.2% change in teacher motivation and commitment was because of the developmental factors. Mutune and Orodho (2014) studied the explanatory variables in public urban secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya. The main reasons for the high teachers' turn over were: job dissatisfaction among teachers as results of poor motivation and poor working conditions in their schools, limited avenues for promotions and professional growth due to unsupportive school and government policies.

Bosom and Frase (2010) in Canada explored the teacher flow experiences under influence of optimal work environment. The research noted that schools with less safety concerns in relation to student's strikes and hostility are more able to provide favorable work environment for teacher's hence encouraging teacher's retention. On the other hand, the schools that struggle more to maintain a safe environment for teachers and students, the study concludes, have usually difficulty in retaining teachers. Oyagi and Kembu (2014) in Tanzania. Findings of the study revealed that there was a strong positive relationship between safety work environment

and retention of academic staff. Ariko and Enose (2011) in Kenya reported that socioeconomic and environmental factors linked to teacher transfer requests included accessibility, location of schools, availability of opportunities for further studies, electricity, security as well as housing. Manduku, Kibet and Birir (2015) in Kenya revealed that majority of the non-teaching staff members (70.2%) believed safety and security at work place had enhanced efficiency among non-teaching staff at their work.

Therefore, the problem most principals face is not the number of teachers posted to their schools; it is the number of teachers constantly seeking transfers to other schools. The consequence of these transfers has been an inequitable teacher distribution in schools and regions particularly in Homa Bay County leading to low performance in the National examinations. Accordingly, teachers' transfer and deployments are caused by various reasons with some being valid while others are not (Katam, 2014). The present study investigated the influence of school environmental characteristics on retention of secondary school teachers in Homa Bay County.

2. Research Methodology

The study adopted an ex-post facto research design. Best and Kahn (2006) has defined ex post facto research more formally as that in which the independent variable or variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable or variables. For a population of one thousand eight hundred and one (1801) teachers, according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, three hundred and twenty (320) teachers were recommended to be appropriate and for a population of 295 principals, one hundred and sixty-nine (169) were appropriate. This study used questionnaires as the instrument of data collection. Two sets of

questionnaires were used; one for the school principals and another for the teachers. To enhance validity of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted in twenty selected schools in the neighboring Migori County. This involved the ten principals and two teachers from each school. In this study, internal consistency reliability of the instruments was obtained by computing Cronbach's alpha () using SPSS and a Cronbach's Alpha of = .705 was reported. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis.

3. Findings and Discussions

The study explored the school characteristics that enhance teachers' retention at different secondary schools in Homa Bay County.

Views of the Respondents on School Characteristics and its Influence of Teacher Retention

Both the views of the principals and their teachers on this variable were established through the use Likert scaled questionnaires administered to both. The views of the respondents were computed into percentage frequencies and were summarized in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Principals' Views on School Environmental Characteristics on Teacher Retention

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teachers work longer in schools where there is trust between teachers and the school leadership	113(72.0%)	41 (26.1%)	2 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1(0.6)	4.69	0.56
Teachers like working in schools where the principal share freely with them on their career and personal challenges	99 (63.1%)	57 (36.3%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0)	4.62	0.50
Good leadership style of the principal provides job satisfaction to teachers in secondary schools	89 (56.7%)	60 (38.2%)	7 (4.5%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0)	4.51	0.61
Good relationship between the teachers and the school principal helps retain teachers in those schools	84 (53.5%)	62 (39.5%)	7 (4.5%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6)	4.46	0.67
Students discipline forms the basis of teachers' decision to work in a school or seek for transfer to other schools	39 (24.8%)	56 (35.7%)	22 (14.0)	36 (22.9)	4 (2.5)	3.57	1.16
Many teachers do not like to transfer from schools with manageable teaching work load	52 (33.1%)	72 (45.9%)	17 (10.8)	10(6.4 %)	6 (3.8)	3.98	1.02

Good security and safety measures taken by the principal makes many teachers not asking for transfer to other schools	82 (52.2%)	53 (33.8%)	12 (7.6%)	8 (5.1%)	2 (1.3)	4.31	0.91
Teachers like working in schools where the principals give them protection of whichever kind	67 (42.7%)	60 (38.2%)	18 (11.5)	9 (5.7%)	3 (1.9)	4.14	0.96
Manageable class size motivates teachers to commit themselves to work longer in such schools	58 (36.9%)	55 (35.0%)	22 (14.0)	17 (10.8)	5 (3.2)	3.92	1.11
Teachers decision to work in a specific school is influenced by the presence of teaching learning resources in that school	47 (29.9%)	57 (36.3%)	24 (15.3)	23 (14.6)	6 (3.8)	3.74	1.15
Teachers will ask for transfers from one school to another because they lack housing within the school	32 (20.4%)	43 (27.4%)	29 (18.5)	38 (24.2)	15 (9.6)	3.25	1.29
The teacher student ratio in most schools compromise the teachers' quality teaching and commitment	68 (43.3%)	67 (42.7%)	14 (8.9%)	5 (3.2%)	3 (1.9)	4.22	0.88

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, U-Undecided, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree and Std. Dev. – Standard deviation.
 Source: Survey data (2016)

The findings of the study outlined that school environment characteristics have substantial influence on teacher retention. For examples, the analysis of principals' views that an overwhelming majority 146 (93.0%) of them consented that a good relationship between the teachers and the school principal motivate teachers to remain in a school. This construct had a mean responses of 4.51 (SD=.61), which was relatively high. This agrees with Atambo (2012) in Kenya who found in their studies that environments in which people work affects both job performance and satisfaction which impacts immensely on whether one will continue working at the same institution or transfer to another institution to provide the same services. A school where the principal has bad relationship with the teachers forms unfavorable environment for work. In fact, nearly all 156 (99.4%) of the principals who took part in the study agreed that teachers like working in schools where the principal share freely with them on their career and personal challenges.

It was also established from the findings of study that apart from the principals related issues in schools, issues to do with work itself has a bearing on teacher attrition due to transfer. For instance, a significant majority of 135 (86.0%) of the principals who took part in the survey agreed that the teacher student ratio in most schools compromise the teachers' quality teaching and commitment, as reflected by comparatively high mean of 4.22 and Standard deviation=.88. This confirms the findings of Kituyi, Musau and Thinguri (2014) which noted that increasing workload, class of large sizes, other topics and programs and changing curricula are major demotivating factors in many institutions of learning. That the size of classes and heavy load make teachers to become resistant to continue teaching in such schools hence they may seek transfers to other schools with manageable workload. In addition, it was confirmed by the findings of the study that manageable class size motivates teachers to commit themselves to work longer in such schools. This point of view was held by 113 (71.9%) of the principals who participated in the study. Likewise, nearly four out of every five, 124 (89.0%), of the principals who took part in the study confirmed

that many teachers do not like to transfer from schools with manageable teaching work load.

True to the generally held opinion that several factors can make teachers seek transfer to other schools including teachers' workload, the findings of the study discovered that teachers can be motivated to seek for transfer from some schools given the students behavior. For instance, about three out of every five 95 (60.5%) of the principals who took part in the study translating to the mean of 3.54 and Standard deviation of .67, asserted that students discipline forms the basis of teachers' decision to work in a school or seek for transfer to other schools. This was in line with Duran and Duran (2015) who found out those schools with less safety concerns in regards to students strike and hostility are more able to provide a good working environment for teacher's hence encouraging retention of teachers in such schools. Teachers would wish to leave schools where student discipline is a concern.

It emerged from the findings of the study that teachers' decision to work in a specific school is influenced by the presence of teaching learning resources in that school, a fact pointed out by 106 (66.2%) of the principals who took part in the study. A school with adequate teaching and learning resources is likely to retain the teachers than a school without adequate resources. This resonates with Lumuli (2009) who noted in his studies that physical materials in terms of adequacy and quality have great impact on teacher motivation and retention to schools. Principals should work harder to make available learning and teaching materials to teachers and enhancement of good performance motivates teachers to work longer in such schools.

Table 2. Teachers' View on School Environmental Characteristics on Teacher Retention

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teachers work longer in schools where there is trust between teachers and the school leadership	216 (81.5%)	46(17.4%)	2(0.8%)	0(0.0%)	1(0.4%)	4.81	0.41
Teachers like working in schools where the principal share freely with them on their career and personal challenges	210(79.2%)	54(20.4%)	1(0.4%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	4.79	0.42
Good leadership style of the principal provides job satisfaction to teachers in secondary schools	166(62.6%)	91(34.3%)	1(0.4%)	5(1.9%)	2(0.8%)	4.58	0.64
Good relationship between the teachers and the school principal helps retain teachers in those schools	169(63.8%)	73(27.5%)	12(4.5%)	9(3.4%)	2(0.8%)	4.52	0.74
Students discipline is always a motivating factor to many teachers in their work stations	174(65.7%)	70(26.4%)	12(4.5%)	9(3.4%)	0(0.0%)	4.54	0.74
Many teachers do not like to transfer from schools with manageable teaching work load	98(37.0%)	102(38.5%)	27(10.2%)	29(10.9%)	9(3.4%)	3.99	1.05

The good security and safety measures taken by the principal makes many teachers to stay longer in particular secondary schools	109(41.1%)	110(41.5%)	24(9.1%)	19(7.2%)	3(1.1%)	4.16	0.91
Teachers like working in schools where the principals give them protection of whichever kind	92(34.7%)	102(38.5%)	36(13.6%)	19(7.2%)	16(6.0%)	3.94	1.08
Manageable class size motivates teachers to commit themselves to work	120(45.3%)	108(40.8%)	16(6.0%)	16(6.0%)	5(1.9%)	4.23	0.92
Teachers decision to work in a specific school is influenced by the presence of teaching learning resources in that school	66(24.9%)	107(40.4%)	37(14.0%)	42(15.8%)	13(4.9%)	3.67	1.14
Teachers will ask for transfers from one school to another because they lack housing within the school	33(12.5%)	62(23.4%)	44(16.6%)	84(31.7%)	42(15.8%)	2.86	1.28
The teacher student ratio in most schools compromise the teachers' quality teaching and commitment	128(48.3%)	86(32.5%)	17(6.4%)	16(6.0%)	18(6.8%)	4.14	1.12

Key: SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, U-Undecided, Disagree and Strongly Disagree
 Source: Survey data (2016)

On the contrary, the findings of the study established that lack or presence of teachers' houses, though important school factor that influence teacher's decision to seek or not to seek transfers, is not key in decision making. This fact was confirmed by the response of the principals. For example, whereas only 32 (20.4%) of the principals strongly held a point of view that teachers will ask for transfers from one school to another because they lack housing within the school, 53 (33.8%) of the principals negated the claim, as another 26 (18.5%) of the principals expressed uncertainty on the matter. This fact was further confirmed with a low mean of 3.25 and standard deviation of 1.29. This was not in agreement with Oyagi and Kembu (2014) in Tanzania whose study postulates that several teachers' especially female teachers asking for transfers from rural to urban schools were on the rise. Those teachers considered provision of housing to be a key factor in most secondary schools in the region.

The findings of the study show that the teachers were generally in agreement with their principals on school factors that influence teacher transfer. For example, almost all 262 (98.9%) of the teachers who took part in the survey, like their principals, agree that teachers work longer in schools where there is trust between teachers and the school leadership. This fact was further reflected by the highest mean of 4.81 (SD=.41). About four out of every five, 264 (79.6%), of the teachers who were surveyed held a general feeling that teachers like working in schools where the principal share freely with them on their career and personal challenges. A fact that resonates the findings of Oyaro (2014) that teachers requests for transfers due to family ties, conflicts between the teaching staff and the leadership, mistrust between the teachers and the principal, among other reasons. In fact, a majority of the 169 (63.8%) of the teachers agreed that good relationship between the teachers and the school principal is an important factor in making decision on transfer by the teachers from those schools.

It was also discovered that a significant majority of 219 (82.6%) of the teachers who were sampled for the study alluded that a good security and safety measures taken by the principal can make many teachers to stay longer in particular secondary schools. The findings that concur with Bosom and Frase (2010) in Canada who eluded those

schools with less safety concerns in relation to student’s strikes and hostility are more able to provide favorable work environment for teachers hence encouraging teacher’s retention. This point of view was held by another 194 (73.2%) of teachers who supported the assertion that teachers like working in schools where the principals give them protection of whichever kind.

The findings of the study show that 214 (80.8%) of the teachers who were involved in the study believe that the teacher student ratio in most schools compromise the teacher’s quality teaching and commitment, a fact that resonated with the views of 228 (86.1%) of the teacher

respondents who held a general opinion that manageable class size motivate teachers to commit themselves to work, as reflected by a high of response rate (mean=4.14, SD=1.12). About three quarters 200 (75.5%) of the teachers believed that many teachers do not like to get transfer from schools with manageable teaching work load. It also emerged from the findings of the study that students discipline is always a motivating factor to many teachers in their work stations. This school of thought was supported by an overwhelming majority 244 (92.1%) of the teachers who took part in the study.

Another results of the study indicate that although majority 144 (65.3%) of the teachers held a belief that teachers decision to work in a specific school may be influenced by the presence of teaching and learning resources in that school, a significant proportion 55 (20.7%) of the teacher respondents believed that presence of teaching and learning resources has no bearing on teacher transfer, as a further 37(14.0%) of them were uncertain on the influence of the teaching and learning resources. This was in contrast of the findings by Erling, Boe and Robert (2009) who stated that retention of teachers is unlikely to increase in schools without dramatic improvements in the organization, management and funding of teaching or learning resources.

On the contrary, teachers were sharply divided on the influence of teachers housing on teacher transfer. It emerged that whereas 95 (35.9%) of the teacher respondents agree that teachers will ask for transfers from one school to another because they lack housing within the school, 126 (47.5%) others rejected the claim that lack of housing within the school can make teachers seek for transfer from a school. The findings that contradicts the notion of Chiboiwa, Samwel and Chipunza (2010) in Kenya who postulates that housing, career growth and training helps to increase employee retention and decrease turnover and serves as a tool to enhance the employees commitment and institutional attachment.

To find out whether there was any statistical influence of school characteristics on teacher retention, an inferential statistics was used to test the null hypothesis that “there is no statistically significant influence of school environment on teacher retention”. The relationship between perceived school characteristics and perceived teacher retention was investigated using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. After preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity, correlation results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between School Characteristics and Teacher Retention

	Teacher Retention	
School Environment	Pearson Correlation	.463**
Characteristics	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 summarizes the results of Pearson Moment Correlation test on the views of respondents on the influence of school characteristics on teacher retention in secondary schools in Homa Bay County. The results indicate that there was a significant fairly moderate, positive correlation between the two variables [$r = .463$, $n=422$, $p<.05$], with high levels of conducive school environment associated with high teacher retention rate. Given that a significant relationship was established (sig. level $<.05$), the hypothesis that there is no significant influence of school characteristics on teacher retention in secondary schools in Homa Bay County was therefore rejected. The implication of these findings is that characteristics of the school environment influences teacher retention in secondary schools; the more conducive the school environment characteristics are the high level of teacher retention in secondary schools.

4. Conclusion

The study established the school environmental characteristics that enhance retention of secondary school teachers in Homa Bay County. The study established that environmental characteristics have a plausible influence on teacher retention. The study revealed that environment in which teachers work affects both performance and satisfaction which dictates immensely whether a teacher will continue working at the same institution or seek transfer to another school. Both the principals and the teachers attested to the fact that good relationship between the teachers and the school administration motivate teachers to work in particular schools. On the issue of teachers-student ratio, the study noted that the student-teacher ratio in most schools compromise the teacher's quality teaching and commitment. On the other hand, the findings however noted that teacher recognition had a part correlation coefficient of .360, that when squared gave accounting for 13.0 (1 dp) per cent of the variance in Teacher retention. The study recommends that the Teachers Service Commission should develop a strict policy governing teachers transfers that incorporates a term limit of 5-6 years.

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