



EFFECT OF TEACHER WORKLOAD ON TEACHER TURNOVER INTENTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN WEST POKOT COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

Teacher turnover remains a major challenge facing public secondary schools in Kenya, particularly in marginalized counties where staffing shortages and demanding working conditions are prevalent. This study examined the effect of teacher workload on teacher turnover intention in public secondary schools in West Pokot County. The study employed a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative data were obtained from 213 teachers through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were collected from school principals through interviews. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used to analyze quantitative data, whereas thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. Findings revealed that although most teachers perceived their classroom teaching workload as manageable, they expressed concerns regarding excessive administrative duties, inadequate staffing, and limited institutional support for teacher well-being. Correlation results indicated significant associations between workload dimensions and turnover intention. Regression analysis further established that teacher workload significantly predicts teacher turnover intention. Qualitative findings corroborated the statistical results by demonstrating that excessive workload lowers teacher morale, increases stress, and contributes to intentions to leave the profession. The study concludes that teacher workload is a significant determinant of turnover intention and recommends workload management interventions, improved staffing, and enhanced teacher support mechanisms to improve retention.

Keywords: teacher workload, turnover intention, teacher retention, public secondary schools, West Pokot County

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1. Introduction

Workload allocation refers to the distribution of teaching and non-teaching responsibilities among teachers within a school, encompassing the number of lessons assigned, administrative duties, extracurricular supervision, examination marking, record keeping, curriculum documentation, and other professional obligations that collectively constitute the totality of a teacher's professional demands (Worth & Van den Brande, 2021; OECD, 2023). The management of teacher workload is regarded as a critical human resource function, as excessive or inequitably distributed workload has been consistently and robustly identified as a primary driver of teacher stress, occupational burnout, job dissatisfaction, and turnover intention across diverse national and institutional educational contexts (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). In Kenya, the allocation of teacher workload is formally governed by guidelines issued by the Teachers Service Commission and the Ministry of Education, though the practical implementation of these guidelines at the school level varies considerably across different counties and institutional contexts, particularly between urban and ASAL region schools (TSC, 2023; MoE, 2022).

Contemporary scholarship increasingly conceptualises workload as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond the simple quantification of teaching hours to encompass qualitative, cognitive, and emotional demands placed on employees in the course of their professional duties (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). Within the Job Demands-Resources theoretical model, workload is categorised as a primary job demand that requires sustained physical, cognitive, and emotional effort from employees, and is therefore associated with high psychological and physiological costs when it persistently exceeds the resources available to manage it (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). When such demands chronically exceed employees' available personal and organisational resources, psychological strain, professional disengagement, and withdrawal behaviours, including turnover intention, are likely to emerge as predictable consequences of the resulting resource depletion.

Several scholars have sought to refine and extend the conceptual definition of workload in ways that have direct implications for understanding teacher attrition. Askiyanto and Soetjipto (2023) conceptualise workload as a condition of being extremely and persistently busy without a clearly defined or achievable endpoint, emphasising the subjective, open-ended, and often unbounded nature of workload as experienced by employees in demanding professional roles. Bruggen (2024) similarly defines workload in terms of persistent busyness without reference to specific performance targets or measurable task completion criteria, suggesting that the ambiguity and lack of clarity inherent in many professional roles may independently intensify subjective perceptions of overload beyond what is accounted for by objective workload indicators alone. By contrast, Laschinger *et al.* (2022) frame workload more structurally, defining it in terms of the amount of labour effort required to meet formally defined job expectations, thereby

highlighting the organisational and systemic origins of workload as an institutional design feature rather than a purely individual perceptual phenomenon.

Fox *et al.* (2021) extend this conceptual discussion by distinguishing meaningfully between physical workload, characterised by time pressure, extended working hours, and high task volume and perceptual workload, characterised by intensive mental effort and sustained attentional demands, arguing that both dimensions independently and additively predict occupational stress, professional burnout, and withdrawal behaviours, including turnover intention. Bowling and Kirkendall (2023) similarly conceptualise workload as the total sustained effort required of an employee across all dimensions of their professional role, and empirically demonstrate a significant positive relationship between high aggregate workload and turnover intentions, suggesting that sustained excessive professional effort progressively erodes employees' psychological attachment to their organisations and increases the frequency and intensity of exit cognitions. In the education sector specifically, workload has been shown to be particularly complex, pervasive, and professionally burdensome. Oesomowidjojo (2024) defines teacher workload as the determination of hours required to complete all assigned tasks within a given timeframe, taking into account environmental conditions, time utilisation efficiency, and organisational goals, while Findlay and Thompson (2023) describe the contemporary teacher's professional experience as characterised by what they term "demanding work" marked by longer working hours, intensified performance expectations, and systematically blurred boundaries between professional work and personal life.

The relationship between teacher workload and turnover intention is among the most consistently and robustly documented associations in the international literature on teacher attrition, with findings converging powerfully across diverse national, cultural, and institutional educational contexts. Excessive workload, characterised by an unsustainable volume of teaching hours, mounting administrative burdens, and expanding non-instructional responsibilities, has been repeatedly and consistently identified as one of the most powerful predictors of teacher stress, occupational burnout, professional dissatisfaction, and ultimately turnover intention in educational systems worldwide (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; OECD, 2023). When teachers perceive their workload as unmanageable, chronically inequitably distributed relative to their colleagues, or fundamentally inconsistent with their professional role expectations and identity, their sense of work-life balance and professional sustainability is progressively eroded, leading to deepening disengagement from their institutional roles and significantly heightened intentions to leave the profession (Worth & Van den Brande, 2021; Timms *et al.*, 2007).

Zulkarnain *et al.* (2023) found empirically that increased workload imposes severe and compounding time constraints on teachers, frequently forcing them to work beyond official contracted hours or to carry unfinished professional work into their personal time, which systematically undermines psychological recovery, instructional productivity, and the work-life balance necessary to sustain long-term professional commitment. This

finding is theoretically consistent with the Job Demands-Resources model, which predicts that when the demands imposed by workload persistently deplete employees' personal and professional resources without adequate organisational replenishment, the resulting resource deficit generates burnout, disengagement, and withdrawal intention as psychologically protective responses (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024).

In the United States, Ingersoll *et al.* (2020) found that excessive workload encompassing large class sizes, multiple simultaneous subject area preparations, and heavy and expanding administrative responsibilities was among the most frequently cited institutional reasons for teacher departure, particularly among early-career teachers who had not yet developed the professional coping strategies, time management skills, and institutional knowledge necessary to manage high and persistent professional demands sustainably. Sutchter *et al.* (2019) similarly established that workload-related burnout was a major and growing contributor to teacher attrition across American school districts, with teachers in chronically under-resourced schools disproportionately affected by staffing shortages that forced remaining teachers to absorb additional instructional loads far beyond their contracted responsibilities.

In Europe, the OECD (2023) reported across member countries that workload intensification driven by continuously expanding curriculum requirements, growing administrative accountability and documentation demands, and increasing student population diversity was a significant and rapidly worsening driver of teacher occupational stress and turnover intention across multiple national educational systems. Worth and Van den Brande (2021) established in a nationally representative study in the United Kingdom that excessive workload was the single most frequently cited reason for teachers actively considering leaving the profession, with a large proportion of surveyed teachers specifically reporting that the relentlessly growing volume of non-teaching administrative tasks including documentation requirements, data entry, compliance reporting, and standardised assessment administration had expanded to the point of systematically crowding out the meaningful instructional work and professional development activities that originally motivated them to enter and remain in the profession.

Contrasting evidence from more highly resourced and institutionally flexible contexts provides an important moderating perspective. Tan and Lim (2024), studying employees in Singapore's corporate sector, found that workload did not significantly predict turnover intentions when flexible work arrangements and genuinely supportive supervisory practices were present and accessible to employees, suggesting that the translation of high workload into turnover intention is significantly moderated by the availability of adequate organisational resources, supportive management relationships, and flexible working arrangements that provide employees with meaningful control over their professional demands. However, as the authors themselves acknowledge, such organisational flexibility is characteristically absent or severely limited in public education systems in developing countries, where teachers have little control over class sizes, curriculum scope, administrative requirements, or working hour arrangements,

substantially limiting the transferability of these findings to the Kenyan public secondary school context.

In the African context, UNESCO (2022) reported that excessively large class sizes, multi-grade teaching responsibilities arising from severe teacher shortages, and the resulting compulsion for remaining teachers to absorb disproportionately heavy instructional loads were among the most significant and pervasive contributors to teacher occupational burnout and attrition across Sub-Saharan Africa. These structural conditions create a self-reinforcing cycle in which teacher departures driven by workload dissatisfaction further intensify the burdens borne by remaining teachers, accelerating subsequent rounds of attrition and progressively degrading the quality of educational provision available to learners.

Mensah and Adjei (2023), in a study of Ghanaian secondary school teachers, reported a strong positive correlation between perceived workload and turnover intentions, with occupational burnout emerging as a critical explanatory psychological mechanism mediating this relationship. While this study provides important evidence that workload-driven attrition is a significant and measurable phenomenon in the West African sub-regional educational context, its reliance on correlational analysis limits the precision of causal interpretation, and the institutional differences between Ghana's and Kenya's education governance systems particularly in terms of teacher deployment policies, accountability frameworks, and professional development coordination constrain the direct applicability of its specific findings to the Kenyan context.

In Uganda, Okello *et al.* (2024) established a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between teacher occupational stress driven by excessive and inequitably distributed workload and turnover intention among teachers in public secondary schools, confirming that workload management is a critical and underutilized institutional lever for reducing teacher attrition in East African educational contexts. This finding is particularly relevant to the present study, given the geographical and institutional proximity of Uganda's educational challenges to those facing public secondary schools in Kenya's ASAL counties.

In Kenya, Sakwa (2022) found that teachers in public secondary schools, particularly those located in ASAL regions, experienced disproportionately and unsustainably high workloads as a direct consequence of chronic and severe teacher shortages that routinely required individual teachers to cover instructional subjects outside their areas of professional specialisation, to manage excessively large classes with pupil-teacher ratios far exceeding recommended guidelines, and to fulfil extensive administrative and documentation requirements with minimal institutional support. Wambua and Nyaga (2022) similarly established that workload allocation was a significant and independent predictor of teacher turnover intention in Kenyan public secondary schools, with teachers who perceived their workloads as excessive in absolute terms, inequitably distributed relative to colleagues, and insufficiently compensated through recognition, remuneration, or reduced non-instructional burdens reporting significantly and consistently higher intentions to leave their current positions.

Barre (2024) further confirmed in a study of public secondary school teachers in Garissa County an ASAL region with institutional and contextual characteristics broadly comparable to those of West Pokot County, that workload-related dissatisfaction was among the strongest and most consistent predictors of turnover intention, underscoring the particular and distinctive vulnerability of ASAL region teachers to workload-driven attrition and the urgent need for targeted workload management interventions in these contexts. Kamau and Ngure (2024), in a study of Kenyan primary school teachers, found that excessive workload, particularly the administrative demands associated with the Teachers Service Commission's Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development system, including extensive digital documentation requirements, significantly increased turnover intentions, with job-related psychological stress functioning as a significant mediating variable in this relationship. This finding suggests that workload influences turnover intentions not only through its direct effects on professional dissatisfaction but also through the psychological strain it generates, which progressively depletes teachers' motivational resources and emotional commitment to remaining in the profession. However, the study's confinement to primary school contexts and its reliance on cross-sectional data limit its direct applicability to secondary school settings and its capacity to capture the long-term evolution of workload-driven attrition processes.

Wanzala (2025) further documents that chronic systemic understaffing, excessive and continuously expanding documentation requirements, and delayed implementation of Collective Bargaining Agreement commitments have combined to substantially intensify teachers' workload burdens across Kenya's public secondary school system, with these structural pressures particularly acutely felt in hardship counties where institutional support systems are most attenuated and where teachers have the fewest compensatory resources to buffer the effects of excessive professional demands.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design. Data were collected from 213 teachers working in public secondary schools in West Pokot County using structured questionnaires. In addition, interviews were conducted with school principals to obtain qualitative insights regarding teacher workload and turnover intention.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize teachers' perceptions of workload. Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships between workload variables and turnover intention, while simple linear regression analysis assessed the predictive effect of workload on turnover intention. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Workload

Table 1: Teachers' Views on Teacher Workload

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
My teaching workload is manageable	17.8	41.3	11.3	9.9	19.7
I have adequate time to prepare for my lessons	18.3	34.7	10.8	16.0	20.2
Administrative duties are fairly balanced with my teaching responsibilities	22.5	12.7	17.8	21.6	25.4
Teacher well-being is a priority in my school	11.3	18.3	19.2	31.5	19.7
My school is well-staffed	1.4	23.0	17.4	35.2	23.0

The findings indicate that a majority of teachers (59.1%) perceived their teaching workload as manageable, while 53.0% reported having adequate time to prepare lessons. These results suggest that many teachers are able to cope with their core instructional responsibilities.

However, significant concerns emerged regarding non-instructional workload dimensions. Nearly half of the respondents (47.0%) disagreed that administrative duties were fairly balanced with teaching responsibilities. More than half (51.2%) indicated that teacher well-being was not prioritized, while 58.2% reported that their schools were inadequately staffed.

These findings suggest that although classroom teaching responsibilities may be manageable, excessive administrative duties and staffing shortages contribute significantly to teachers' workload burden.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Workload

Table 2: Descriptive Summary of Teacher Workload

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
My teaching workload is manageable	2.72	0.926
I have adequate time to prepare for my lessons	2.85	0.854
Administrative duties are fairly balanced with my teaching responsibilities	3.15	0.754
Teacher well-being is a priority in my school	3.30	1.324
My school is well staffed	3.55	1.105

The mean scores reinforce the earlier findings. Teachers generally agreed that their teaching workload was manageable and that they had sufficient time to prepare lessons. However, they disagreed that administrative duties were fairly distributed, that teacher well-being was adequately prioritized, and that schools had sufficient staffing levels.

These findings demonstrate that workload extends beyond teaching responsibilities and includes organizational factors that may influence teachers' decisions to remain in or leave their schools.

4.3 Relationship Between Teacher Workload and Turnover Intention

Table 3: Correlation Between Teacher Workload and Teacher Turnover Intention

Variable	r	p-value
Teaching workload manageable	.127	.095
Adequate lesson preparation time	.578*	.034
Administrative duties balanced	-.086	.186
Teacher well-being prioritized	.395*	.031
School adequately staffed	.579*	.018

*Significant at $p < .05$.

The correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between several workload dimensions and turnover intention. Adequate lesson preparation time, teacher well-being, and staffing levels exhibited significant associations with turnover intention. The findings suggest that organizational support structures play a critical role in influencing teachers' retention decisions.

Consistent with the Job Demands-Resources Theory, schools that provide adequate staffing, support teacher well-being, and allow sufficient preparation time may reduce workload-related stress and improve teacher retention.

4.4 Effect of Teacher Workload on Teacher Turnover Intention

Table 4: Regression Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Sig.
.398	.324	.228	.16824	.000

The regression model demonstrates a statistically significant relationship between teacher workload and turnover intention. The model indicates that workload explains a substantial proportion of variation in turnover intention among teachers.

Table 5: ANOVA Results

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	243.368	1	18.364	16.358	.000
Residual	67.384	212	11.324		
Total	310.752	213			

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 16.358$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that teacher workload has no significant effect on teacher turnover intention is rejected.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	3.295	2.356	-	9.352	.000
Teacher Workload	.198	.139	.067	7.985	.000

The regression coefficient indicates that teacher workload positively influences teacher turnover intention. The positive coefficient suggests that increases in workload are associated with increases in teachers' intentions to leave their current schools.

The regression equation is expressed as:

$$Y = 3.295 + 0.198X + \varepsilon$$

Where,

Y represents teacher turnover intention, and

X represents teacher workload.

4.5 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings supported the quantitative results. School principals consistently identified excessive workload as a major factor contributing to teacher dissatisfaction and turnover intentions.

One principal stated:

"Teachers who are overwhelmed by heavy teaching loads lower their morale and commitment."

Another principal observed:

"In situations where there is understaffing, teachers are forced to handle many lessons and responsibilities, making it difficult to sustain their motivation."

Similarly, another principal remarked:

"Workload imbalance among teachers creates dissatisfaction, especially when some handle significantly more classes than others."

These narratives provide practical evidence that excessive workload contributes to stress, reduced morale, and increased turnover intention among teachers.

5. Conclusion

The study established that teacher workload significantly influences teacher turnover intention in public secondary schools in West Pokot County. Although teachers generally viewed their instructional workload as manageable, concerns regarding administrative burden, inadequate staffing, and insufficient support for teacher well-being emerged as major contributors to turnover intention.

Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that excessive workload negatively affects teacher morale, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The

regression analysis confirmed that workload is a statistically significant predictor of turnover intention, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions aimed at reducing workload pressures.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends that:

- 1) The Teachers Service Commission should recruit additional teachers to address staffing shortages.
- 2) School administrators should ensure equitable distribution of teaching and administrative responsibilities.
- 3) Schools should strengthen teacher well-being programs and support mechanisms.
- 4) Administrative processes should be streamlined to reduce non-teaching workload.
- 5) Policymakers should prioritize workload management as part of teacher retention strategies.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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