

# Correlation of Workplace Environment Factors and Job Satisfaction: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Day Primary Schools in Mbeere North Subcounty

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## ABSTRACT

The school environment serves as the physical and psychological platform for teaching and learning. This study aimed to determine the relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction among primary school teachers in Mbeere North Sub-county, Embu County, Kenya. Grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study utilized a descriptive survey design. A sample of 126 teachers (68 public, 58 private) was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation via SPSS version 26. Findings revealed that working conditions and job satisfaction had a weak but statistically significant positive relationship in public schools ( $r = 0.244$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In private schools, the relationship was found to be strong and statistically significant ( $r = 0.644$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The study concludes that while working conditions influence satisfaction across both sectors, their impact is far more profound in private institutions. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and school managers prioritize infrastructural improvements and a safe work environment to enhance teacher well-being.

**Keywords:** Working Conditions, Job Satisfaction, Public Schools, Private Schools, Mbeere North.

## INTRODUCTION

Employees play a major role in the success or failure of an organization or company (Susanto et al., 2023). Odisa (2022) declares that among the various inputs required in an organization for the production of goods and services, the human input is a critical one. According to Morgan (1997) and Hagenimana et al. (2018), employees are a valuable resource that may contribute in several ways to a company's activities provided that the company gives them an appropriate chance. Moran (2013) states that a motivated employee is enthusiastic and eager to work as well as accomplish tasks. Furthermore, a well-managed business organization views employees as primary providers and promoters of its productivity gains (Atia et al., 2017). Employees in an organization are the greatest asset in a dynamic and competitive business environment (Robbins and Coulter, 2005). It follows that investment in employees is critical for attaining organizational performance and goals as well realizing employee job satisfaction.

Employee motivators are the factors which encourage employees to perform their jobs and consequently realize individual job satisfaction. These motivators are a mixture of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Herzberg (1923; 1966) categorized motivational factors into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The theory shows that determiners of job satisfaction are different from dissatisfactors. According to the theory, factors which increase job satisfaction are motivators, while factors whose absence leads to dissatisfaction are known as hygiene factors. For educators, the environment in which they work—encompassing physical safety, workload, and resources—serves as a primary hygiene factor (Herzberg, 2015).

In the specific context of Mbeere North Sub-county, teachers operate in a semi-arid region characterized by extreme temperatures, dust, and limited infrastructure. These environmental hardships exacerbate the physical and mental demands of the teaching profession (Gesimba, 2020). Working conditions in this region often involve

poorly ventilated classrooms and high teacher-to-pupil ratios, which may contribute to professional burnout (Mbogo, 2017). This study examines how these environmental variables correlate with job satisfaction in both public and private sectors, providing an empirical basis for educational policy reforms in hardship areas.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Concept of Working Conditions

Working conditions refer to the environment in which an employee is involved in their work. This includes the physical environment, health, safety, and well-being of the employees (Atia et al., 2017). A conducive work environment is one that is safe, healthy, and provides the necessary resources for employees to perform their jobs effectively. Luthans (2011) emphasizes that physical surroundings are fundamental requirements for professional stability.

### Empirical Review of Working Conditions and Satisfaction

Research indicates that the work environment significantly impacts employee performance and satisfaction. Atia et al. (2017) established that there is a significant and positive relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction. Similarly, Kiiru (2022), in a study on the work environment and performance of employees in the public health sector in Nairobi, established that physical work environment, supervisor support, and psychological work environment had a positive and significant influence on employee performance.

However, challenges in the workplace can lead to dissatisfaction. Gitahi (2021) examined the effect of the workplace environment on employee performance at the Communication Authority of Kenya and found that employees were uncomfortable with their environment, specifically regarding furniture, office space, and undisturbed work areas. In the education sector, Imoit (2014) conducted a study in Turkana West and revealed that administrative support, teacher security, and housing were factors linked to job satisfaction among public primary school teachers.

In the Kenyan context, public schools often face overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure due to high transition rates, whereas private schools may offer more controlled environments (Alyaha & Mbogo, 2017). This study fills a gap by investigating how these conditions specifically manifest in the semi-arid Mbeere North Sub-county and their subsequent impact on teacher satisfaction levels.

### Theoretical Framework: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

This research is anchored on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), where working conditions are classified as "hygiene factors." According to Herzberg (2015), hygiene factors are those whose presence does not necessarily motivate an employee to higher levels of satisfaction, but whose absence or poor quality leads to profound dissatisfaction. For teachers in Mbeere North, the quality of the physical workplace, safety, and administrative support are critical hygiene factors that determine their professional stability (Alrawahi et al., 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive survey research design (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The target population consisted of all teachers in public and private day primary schools in Mbeere North. A sample of 126 respondents was obtained through stratified random sampling, ensuring representation from both school categories. This represents an 89% response rate, which is rated as exceptional for data analysis (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

Data was collected using structured questionnaires featuring a five-point Likert scale. Reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.78, while content validity was established through expert review. Data analysis was executed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation) to test the relationship between variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of Respondents

The analysis of the general information on the respondents based on gender, professional qualification, and work experience is described in this section. Table 1 provides a consolidated view of these demographic variables across both public and private schools.

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Public (Freq)	Public (%)	Private (Freq)	Private (%)	Total (Freq)	Total (%)
Gender	Male	22	32%	21	36%	43	34%
	Female	46	68%	37	64%	83	66%
Qualification	Certificate P1	34	50%	28	48%	62	49%
	Diploma	28	41%	21	36%	49	39%
	Graduate	6	9%	9	16%	15	12%
Work Experience	Below 5 Years	15	22%	16	28%	31	25%
	5-10 Years	22	32%	24	41%	46	36%
	Above 10 Years	31	46%	18	31%	49	39%

As shown in Table 1, the study sought background information on respondents in terms of gender, professional qualifications, and work experience. Findings revealed that in public schools, the majority of teachers were female (68%) compared to males (32%). A similar trend was observed in private schools where 64 percent were female and 36 percent male. Overall, 66 percent of the respondents were female while 34 percent were male, indicating that the teaching profession in the sub-county may be female-dominated.

With regard to professional qualifications, half (50%) of the respondents in public schools held a Certificate P1, 41% had a Diploma, while 9% were graduates. In private schools, 48% had a Certificate P1, 36% were Diploma holders, and 16% were graduates. When combined, 49% of the teachers in the study were Certificate P1 holders, 39% held Diplomas, while 12% were graduates. This shows that while Certificate P1 remains the most common qualification in both public and private schools, private schools had a slightly higher proportion of graduates compared to public schools.

In terms of teaching experience, 22% of public school teachers and 28% of private school teachers had less than 5 years of teaching experience. About one-third (32%) of public school teachers and 41% of their counterparts in private schools had worked between 5–10 years. A larger proportion of public school teachers (46%) had above 10 years of experience compared to 31% of private school teachers. Overall, 25% of respondents had less than 5 years of teaching experience, 36% had between 5–10 years, while 39% had more than 10 years. This suggests that public schools had a more experienced teaching workforce compared to private schools, where teachers tended to be relatively younger in service.

### Descriptive Analysis for Working Conditions

The descriptive analysis in Table 2 shows the perceptions of teachers regarding their work environment.

**Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Working Conditions**

Statement	Public (Mean)	Public (S.D)	Private (Mean)	Private (S.D)
Work environment is safe	3.29	1.12	4.35	0.97
Workload is moderate	2.72	1.08	4.09	1.00
Relationships among colleagues are good	3.94	0.88	4.47	0.68
Classrooms are safe and comfortable	3.25	1.26	4.35	0.81
There is work-life balance	2.44	1.01	3.93	1.11
Composite Mean	3.13	1.07	4.24	0.91

The results indicate that private school teachers enjoy significantly more favorable conditions (Composite Mean = 4.235) than those in public schools (Composite Mean = 3.129). A critical deficit was found in public schools regarding work-life balance (2.441) and workload (2.721). In contrast, both sectors reported high satisfaction with colleague relationships (3.941 and 4.466).

### Inferential Analysis

The study tested the relationship between working conditions and job satisfaction using Pearson Correlation (r).

**Table 3 Correlation Between Working Conditions and Job Satisfaction**

School Category	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Public Schools	0.244*	0.045	68
Private Schools	0.644**	0.000	58

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## DISCUSSION

The inferential analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how the occupational environment influences teacher morale. In public schools, the correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.244$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) indicates a weak but statistically significant relationship. This finding suggests that while working conditions do play a role in teacher satisfaction, they are currently not the dominant driver in the public sector. This weak correlation may be attributed to the "hygiene" nature of working conditions as proposed by Herzberg (2015). In public schools, where resources are often stretched thin and workloads are high (Mean = 2.72), the working conditions likely fall below the "hygiene" threshold, leading to dissatisfaction rather than acting as a source of positive motivation. This mirrors the findings of Gitahi (2021), who noted that uncomfortable workplace environments—specifically lack of space and furniture—lead to negative performance and dissatisfaction.

Conversely, private schools exhibited a strong and statistically significant positive relationship ( $r = 0.644$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that for private school teachers in Mbeere North, the work environment is a primary determinant of their professional fulfillment. The high descriptive mean for safety and comfort in private schools (Mean = 4.35) suggests that these institutions have successfully crossed the "hygiene" threshold. Once the basic physical needs are met, as Luthans (2011) suggests, the environment becomes a platform that enables higher-level motivation. These results align closely with Atia et al. (2017), who established that working conditions are primary promoters of productivity and satisfaction when managed effectively.

The stark difference between the r-values (0.244 vs 0.644) highlights a critical disparity in resource management. In the public sector, the weak correlation suggests that improvements in conditions are perhaps so marginal or overshadowed by external stressors that they fail to register as significant satisfy-ers. This corroborates Imoit (2014), who found that in hardship areas like Turkana, administrative support and housing (key components of working conditions) were vital but often unmet, leaving teachers in a state of professional "limbo." Furthermore, the significant result in private schools supports Kiiru's (2022) assertion that a positive physical and psychological work environment has a direct and significant influence on employee performance and morale.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that working conditions function as a critical "hygiene" baseline that significantly dictates teacher job satisfaction in Mbeere North. Empirically, the research demonstrates a definitive "environmental dividend" in private schools, where superior working conditions yield a high correlation ( $r=0.644$ ) with teacher morale. In contrast, the weak correlation in public schools ( $r=0.244$ ) suggests that environmental stressors—specifically high workloads and poor work-life balance—have pushed these institutions below the functional hygiene threshold. In line with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, while improving conditions in public schools may not immediately create high motivation, the current deficiencies are a guaranteed source of professional

dissatisfaction. Therefore, the school environment in semi-arid regions is not merely a background variable but a fundamental pillar of professional stability that requires active, differentiated management.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and school management boards prioritize the development of hardship-compliant infrastructure that addresses the unique climatic challenges of Mbeere North, specifically focusing on dust reduction and the provision of climate-controlled, well-ventilated classrooms. Furthermore, public school administrators should urgently implement teacher-support systems to alleviate the high workloads and poor work-life balance identified in this study, while simultaneously institutionalizing bi-annual occupational health and safety audits to ensure that the physical school environment remains a source of professional satisfaction rather than a driver of dissatisfaction.

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