

## **Analysis of Teachers' Work Characteristics in Enhancing Discretionary Work Effort in Public Secondary Schools in Isiolo County**

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### **Abstract**

The Ministry of Education (MoE), Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and principals are expected to create a conducive environment that enable teachers to demonstrate discretionary work effort in secondary schools. This study aimed to assess the influence of teachers' work characteristics on discretionary work effort in secondary schools in Isiolo County. The study was guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. It utilized descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised of 720 teachers, 48 principals and 2 Directors (MoE and TSC) from 48 public secondary schools in Isiolo County. A sample size of 236 respondents was considered in this study. The simple random sampling technique was utilized in selecting school principals and teachers. Both Directors were purposively selected. Information for the study was acquired mainly through questionnaires and interview schedules. The reliability of the data was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, while content validity of research instruments was assured accordingly. The frequencies, percentages and correlation analysis were used in the analysis of quantitative data, while common themes were identified from the qualitative data. The results of the study indicated that teachers' attitude, mastery of the teaching content and co-workers support affected the degree to which teachers applied more effort for self-benefits and learners' satisfaction. The study concluded that teachers' work characteristics and teachers' discretionary were positively correlated. The study recommended that the Ministry of education should provide training for teachers to enhance their mastery of content and foster professional commitment among teachers for improved discretionary work effort.

**Keywords:** *Work characteristics, discretionary work effort, teachers in Isiolo, public secondary schools*

*IJPP 10(3); 1-13*

## 1.0 Introduction

Discretionary work effort refers to the extra effort applied by the employees which is voluntary and beyond that which is minimally required, which in turn affects individual performance and organizational effectiveness (Morris, 2009). The success of every organization, school included, is dependent on the ability and level of employees' expenditure of discretionary work effort, cooperation among employees and teachers' work characteristics. According to Ndungu (2017), employees who are motivated by discretionary work effort are innovative and they are not influenced by intrinsic or extrinsic rewards.

Schools' learning programs have been affected by global policies and pedagogies that are emerging, which calls for teachers to expend extra effort for the survival of schools. Motivated teachers apply more effort in teaching, hence promoting learning procedures (Biney, 2015). This in turn inspires students to learn effectively, and ensures educational policies and practices are executed (Van der Voet et al, 2017). Despite the significance of discretionary work effort in the teaching and learning processes, literature confirms that some teachers hold back their effort in their delivery as they are not motivated to expend discretionary work effort (Ikenyiri & Ihua-Maduenyi, 2011). Existing literatures have indicated that organizations experience discretionary work

effort when they provide rewards for the employees. However, employees fall back to their normal work as soon as the rewards are withdrawn or become monotonous (Berens, 2013). The rewards as highlighted by Kortman et al. (2014) included leaves, good pay and child care centers. However, Grissom and Bartanen (2018) argue that little effort has been applied in inducing employees' work effort. According to Lawrence and Nohria (2002), employees' discretion can be enhanced by distinguishing and minimizing factors that hinder work effort and maximizing factors that motivate employees in expending work effort and giving them opportunities to be innovative.

*“Teachers’ work characteristics influence discretionary work effort which can be explained through teachers’ attitude, co-workers’ support and mastery of the subject”*

In Australia, studies conducted indicated that employees work effort and organizational performance were mainly oriented in organizational behavior and economic performance fields with a dearth of literature on factors influencing discretionary work effort of employees in academic sector (Anitha, 2014; Ndungu, 2017). The study's

findings indicated that employee willingness and commitment influenced discretionary work effort in higher education sector. The study by Adegbuyi et al. (2015) argued that employees work characteristics, job description and organizational factors also affect discretionary work effort. In Africa, factors that affect discretionary work effort were listed to include in service trainings, technology and work characteristics (Gikonyo, 2017; Parrey & Bhasin, 2012; Watetu, 2017). Locally, a survey research conducted by Ndungu (2017) in Kenya indicated that inadequate or ineffective job training opportunities denied teachers the opportunities to enhance their skills, hence resulting to poor school outcomes.

The studies conducted in the fields of organizational behavior and economic aspects are of importance in investigating what influences some employees to expend a lot of effort at work place, whereas others do the minimally expected (De Vita & Vernon, 2007). This phenomenon is experienced in counties that perform below what is expected in national examinations, specifically in Isiolo County where the results of students are poor and wanting over the years. This led to the need to investigate the influence of teachers work characteristics in inducing discretionary work effort among teachers in government high schools in Isiolo County.

### ***Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study***

Discretionary work effort is a critical aspect to achieving organizational goals effectively. Many organizations including schools manage the work effort of their employees by providing extrinsic and intrinsic rewards to keep them engaged. This implies that the organization incur some expense in keeping their employees engaged and motivated. However, the desire of any organization is to have employees who are proactive and voluntarily expend discretionary work effort towards the achievement of organizational goals without incurring extra expense. However, Isiolo County continues to record poor school outcomes characterized by low students retention, indiscipline cases and poor academic results.

Despite the strategies put in place to improve school performance in Isiolo County, such as provision of instructional resources, motivation of teachers, improving teacher-student discipline, improved teachers' remuneration and improved infrastructure, secondary schools continue to post wanting results. The dearth of literature on the relationship between teachers' work characteristics and teachers' discretionary work effort in Isiolo County led to this study. This study aimed to investigate on the role of teachers' work characteristics in enhancing discretionary work effort in public secondary schools in Isiolo County.

### ***Teachers' Work Characteristics in Enhancing Discretionary Work Effort***

Work characteristic refers to the ability or qualifications displayed by a teacher in the implementation of school policies and institutional requirements. These requirements include: the ability to teach effectively, mastery of subject contents, feelings and attitudes towards work. The theory adopted in support of work characteristics was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The theory was used to visualize human motivation and factors that enhance personal development (Kremeret al., 2013).

The theory proposes that individuals must fulfil their lower end needs such as housing and water before fulfilling higher order needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory helps managers to assist employees in self-actualization which refers to the point where employees are assumed to be motivated (Asim, 2013). The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors is explained in this study (Adamma et al., 2018). The theory confirms that employees expend discretionary work effort to extrinsic motivational factors which entails job characteristics. This applies only after the basic job specifications have been satisfied (intrinsic).

Studies conducted globally indicated that the work environment should provide stimulus situations that enable employees to experience psychological and emotional motivation in order to achieve organizational goals (Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Mavhundutse, 2014). Teachers' work

characteristics influence discretionary work effort which can be explained through teachers' attitude, co-workers' support and mastery of the subject. Ndungu (2017) argues that teachers work characteristics determines how an employee behaves towards work and how co-workers relate with one another, which in turn influence work effort of employees.

## **2.0 Materials and Methods**

The study was conducted in all government high schools in Isiolo County. Descriptive survey research design was utilized in this study. Descriptive survey research design refers to a method of acquiring data through questionnaires and interview schedules (Orodho & Kombo, 2003). The target population was drawn from 48 public secondary schools which comprised of 48 principals, 720 teachers and 2 directors of educations from TSC and MoE totaling to 770 respondents.

An appropriate sample was achieved by selecting 20%-30% of the total population (Asiamah et al., 2017). 30% of the population was selected as the sample size comprising of 18 principals, 216 teachers and 2 directors of education making a total sample of 236. Simple random sampling technique was utilized in selecting school principals from 18 public secondary schools, whereas proportionate random sampling was used in selecting 216 teachers. The two directors of education were purposively selected.

Information for this study was mainly collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The questionnaires were used to collect data from principals and teachers while the directors of education underwent an interview. Piloting was conducted in Samburu County where a total of 22 respondents were sampled from 2 schools. A total of 20 teachers and 2 principals were sampled. The importance of piloting was to check the validity and reliability of research instruments and the clarity of the questionnaire (Orodho & Kombo, 2003).

### **3.0 Results and Discussion**

The reliability of the study’s constructs was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha. A Cronbach’s Alpha value greater than 0.7 was obtained; hence, the instruments were dependable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). An overall response rate of 98.3% was achieved

where all the teachers and directors of education availed themselves for the study, while 14 (77.8%) principals were available. The high response rate was attributed to good prior preparations and planning of the field work. The study began by investigating the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The demographic characteristics were investigated using various aspects such as gender, work experience and the educational level of the respondents. The study’s findings indicated that majority of the respondents were males, representing (74.6%), and females were 56 (25.4%).

#### ***Respondents’ educational level***

The educational level of the respondents can be used as a parameter for gauging the level of productivity. The findings were as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
***Respondents’ Educational Level***

| Respondents | CDE       |      | Principals |       | Teachers  |        |
|-------------|-----------|------|------------|-------|-----------|--------|
|             | Frequency | %    | Frequency  | %     | Frequency | %      |
| PhD         | 1         | .431 | 0          | 0     | 0         | 0      |
| Masters     | 1         | .431 | 5          | 2.155 | 12        | 5.174  |
| Degree      | 0         | 0    | 9          | 3.879 | 184       | 79.310 |
| Diploma     | 0         | 0    | 0          | 0     | 20        | 8.62   |

The results from Table 1 indicated that the highest number of respondents had bachelor’s degree (83.2%), followed by those

with masters (7.93%), 7.76% of the respondents were diploma holders and 0.431% had PhD. These findings indicated

that all the respondents were knowledgeable and had high degree of the mastery of course content.

***Teaching experience of principals and teachers***

The study also sought to analyze the teaching experience of both teachers and principals. The results were summarized as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
***Principals' and Teachers' Teaching Experience***

| Years of service | Principals |       | Teachers  |       |
|------------------|------------|-------|-----------|-------|
|                  | Frequency  | %     | Frequency | %     |
| 1-3years         | 0          | 0     | 10        | 4.62  |
| 4 – 6 years      | 3          | 21.43 | 143       | 66.20 |
| 7 -9 years       | 4          | 28.57 | 14        | 6.49  |
| 10+ years        | 7          | 50.00 | 49        | 22.69 |

From the findings of the study, it is clear that majority of the principals had a teaching experience of 10 years and above (50%), 4 (28.57%) had an experience of between 7-9 years, while 3 (21.43%) had an experience of 4-6 years. All the principals had an experience of 4 years and above. This implied that they had administrative knowledge which enhances the teachers discretionary work effort. The teachers' teaching experience was distributed as follows: 10 (4.62%) had an experience of between 1-3 years, 143 (66.20%) had an experience of 4-6 years, 14 (6.49%) had an experience of 7-9 years and 49 (22.69%) had an experience of 10 years and above. The higher the work experience of teachers, the higher the mastery

of subject content and the higher the discretionary work effort. The higher the work experience meant that teachers were knowledgeable in discretionary work effort, hence the data collected was dependable. These findings correlate with Sogoni (2017) and Wambui (2017) who argued that high experience of teachers, deputy head-teachers and head-teachers increased their confidence.

***Teacher's Work Characteristics and Discretionary Work Effort***

The study sought to investigate teachers work characteristics under 7 aspects and the results were tabulated as shown in Table 3.



**Table 3**

***Descriptive Statistics on Teachers Work Characteristics***

| Statements on Leadership Characteristics (N= 216)                    | Disagree      |     | Agree         |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|
|                                                                      | Frequenc<br>y | %   | Frequenc<br>y | %   |
| 1. Ability to learn from other teachers                              | 11            | 51  | 205           | 94. |
| 2. Ability to apply different strategies in the classroom            | 25            | 11. | 191           | 88. |
| 3. Ability to apply pedagogy skills in handling different subjects   | 29            | 13. | 187           | 86. |
| 4. Having a clear understanding and mastery of the teaching subjects | 34            | 15. | 182           | 84. |
| 5. Teachers being engaged and committed                              | 34            | 15. | 182           | 84. |
| 6. Being able to cope with other teachers                            | 37            | 17. | 179           | 82. |
| 7. Being optimistic when pursuing new approaches                     | 61            | 28. | 155           | 71. |

The results from Table 3 indicated that teachers agreed with all the aspects investigated, with the highest agreement level being the ability to learn from other teachers (94.9%) and the lowest agreement level being optimistic when pursuing new approaches (71.8%). An overall agreement level of 84.7% was recorded, indicating that all the sentiments influenced the ability of teachers to expend discretionary work effort. These findings were in agreement with those of Mugizi et al. (2015), Blackman (2018) and Tentama and Pranungsari (2016) who argued that teacher self-efficacy, high teaching

proficiency, motivation and involvement in leadership engagements increased teacher commitment and the level at which teachers expend discretionary work effort.

The study’s findings also indicated that lack of mastery of the subject content by teachers affected discretionary work effort. Another aspect that affect the rate of expending the discretionary work effort was lack of cooperation from co-workers (84.3%). These findings are in support of Shakoora and Iqbal (2017), Atieno, (2015) and Sogoni, (2017) who argued that cooperation from co-workers

affected teachers individual discretionary work effort. The teachers also argued that the involvement of parents in the implementation of curriculum, influenced their discretionary work effort. This was also evident in the studies by Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), Newchurch (2017) and Ramanlingam and Maniam (2020) who pinpointed the significance of parental involvement in school activities.

The TSC county director argued that teachers lacked commitment to their work which in turn made them ineffective and affected their discretionary work effort. These findings correlate with Ni (2017), Kuncoro and Dardiri (2017) and Billingsley et al. (2020) who noted that job commitment plays a part

in influencing discretionary work effort. The information gathered from the respondents indicated that the teachers work characteristics can be narrowed down to internal and external factors. The internal factors included managerial, teachers and students; while external factors were majorly parents and government influence on teachers' ability to expend discretionary work effort.

The relationship between work characteristics and discretionary work effort was assessed and results were tabulated as shown in Table 4.  $X_1$  represent work characteristics while Y stand for discretionary work effort.

**Table 4**

*Correlations analysis on dependent and independent variables*

| Spearman's rho |                         | X1     |
|----------------|-------------------------|--------|
| X <sub>1</sub> | Correlation Coefficient | 1      |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)         |        |
|                | N                       |        |
| Y              | Correlation Coefficient | .698** |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000   |
|                | N                       | 216    |

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

The null hypothesis concluded that teachers' work characteristics do not affect teachers' discretionary work effort. The results recorded in Table 4 showed a Spearman's (rho) correlation value of  $r = .698^{**}$  and a correlation coefficient P value of less than 0.05. This indicated a statistically positive

relationship between work characteristics and discretionary work effort ( $r = .698, p < 0.05$ ), hence, the null hypothesis was rejected as this study indicated that there was a statistically positive relationship between teachers' work characteristics and teachers' discretionary work effort in Isiolo county public secondary



schools. This positive significant relationship implies that an increase in work characteristics results to a corresponding increase in teachers' performance. These findings were in line with those of Duyar et al. (2016) and Nwosu et al. (2018) who demonstrated that healthy work characteristics led to allocation of administrative tasks by leaders. However, their study did not look at secondary schools; hence the need for this study.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicated that all the sentiments investigated with regard to teachers' work characteristics influenced teachers' discretionary work effort. In

conclusion, the study indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between teachers work characteristics and teachers discretionary work effort in Isiolo County public secondary schools.

#### **5.0 Recommendations**

The study recommended that professional commitment should be enhanced among the teachers as this would increase teachers' motivation and discretionary work effort. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should expose teachers to trainings to increase their competency and enhance mastery of teaching content. This will in turn result to high discretionary work effort.

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