

INFLUENCE OF REWARD MANAGEMENT ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF OASIS ACADEMY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya. Specifically, the paper focused on the influence of reward management on employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya.

Problem Statement: Private primary schools play a significant role in supporting access to basic education in Kenya. However, many of these institutions experience high employee turnover, particularly among teachers and support staff. Frequent staff turnover disrupts learning continuity, reduces institutional stability and affects overall quality of education. Despite the growing number of private primary schools, limited empirical evidence exists on how these factors affect employee retention. It is against this gap that this study will be undertaken to evaluate the influence of reward management on employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya with a case study of Oasis Academy.

Methodology: The descriptive research design was used to guide the entire research process. Questionnaires were used for collection of primary data. The target population was 50 teachers at Oasis Academy. This was a census study. Data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively through descriptive statistics. The results were presented using tables, figures, percentages and frequencies.

Result: The results were presented using tables, figures, percentages and frequencies. The findings demonstrated that reward management had a great influence on employee retention with salary often cited as a reason why employees chose to leave or remain.

Recommendation: The study recommends that private primary schools should come up with competitive reward systems to be able to retain their employees. Adopting a total reward approach will go a long way in retaining teachers in private primary schools.

Keywords: *Retention, Reward Management, Private Primary Schools*

INTRODUCTION

Private primary schools play a significant role in supporting access to basic education in Kenya. However, many of these institutions experience high employee turnover, particularly among teachers and support staff. Frequent staff turnover disrupts learning continuity, reduces institutional stability and affects overall quality of education. Factors such as inadequacy of reward management and inappropriate supervision style may influence employees' decision to remain in or leave these schools. Despite the growing number of private primary schools, limited empirical evidence exists on how these factors affect employee retention. It is against this gap that this study will be undertaken to evaluate the influence of reward management on employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya with a case study of Oasis Academy.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To determine the influence of reward management on employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does reward management influence employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

The study was anchored on the social exchange theory (SET) by Homans (1958). The Social Exchange theory (SET) was advanced by Homans (1958). This theory characterizes social behavior as a mutually rewarding process involving the exchange of material and nonmaterial goods, such as symbols of approval or prestige (Homans, 1958). It integrates behavioural psychology and economics, suggesting that human interaction is driven by a comparison of benefits gained and costs incurred (Gautam & Bhalla, 2024). SET theory posits that individuals engage in social transactions after evaluating perceived gains against associated costs, with profit defined as the reward minus the cost (Gautam & Bhalla, 2024). Cost is often viewed as the equivalent of a foregone alternative value (Homans, 1958). A central tenet is that individuals feel indebted to a donor until they repay an obligation (reciprocity), creating a reinforced exchange cycle over time (Pham et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). When people perceive positive outcomes from an interaction, they are more likely to continue the exchange (Wang et al., 2024). The principle of distributive justice suggests that the profits of all parties involved should tend toward equality (Homans, 1958). If an individual's costs are higher than another's, justice requires that their rewards also be higher to maintain balance and avoid complaints (Homans, 1958).

The theory has been criticized on several grounds. First, in generalized exchange systems, self-interested rational actors may benefit by receiving resources without giving any, which can threaten the stability of the entire system (Krishnan et al., 2021). Some scholars argue that traditional SET often overlooks the mechanisms by which individuals perceive benefits and costs

within specific social situations or interaction rituals (Hien et al., 2024; Krishnan et al., 2021). Much extant research has historically treated social exchanges as independent of the participants and the concrete social situations they are embedded in, often relying on lab experiments rather than real-life dynamics (Krishnan et al., 2021). Low levels of perceived justice can trigger negative emotional reactions like anger, anxiety, or psychological distress, leading to destructive behaviors that disrupt the exchange relationship (Anwar et al., 2023).

Despite the criticism, SET provides a robust framework for understanding why employees choose to remain with an organization. Employees develop beliefs regarding how much the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being (Pham et al., 2024). When organizations provide high support, employees develop a sense of obligation to repay the organization through loyalty and continued membership, which directly promotes employee retention (Pham et al., 2024). Employee commitment the emotional, normative, and continuance bond with an organization acts as a critical mechanism linking organizational investments to retention (Boateng & Appiah, 2025). When employees perceive a fair and reciprocal relationship, they are more likely to stay (Boateng & Appiah, 2025; Botezat et al., 2025). By allowing employees to proactively modify their tasks, relationships, or perceptions (job crafting), organizations foster a sense of reciprocity and fit (Boateng & Appiah, 2025). Relational crafting, in particular, strengthens social ties and commitment, making employees significantly more likely to remain (Boateng & Appiah, 2025). Both formal (procedural) and social (interactional) justice serve as symbolic resources (Anwar et al., 2023). Perceived justice lowers the risk of psychological distress, which is a significant precursor to decreased performance and increased turnover intentions (Anwar et al., 2023; Botezat et al., 2025).

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Reward Management and Retention of Teachers

Research from Chile demonstrates that targeted financial incentives can be highly effective for specific demographics. Elacqua et al. (2022) found that a bonus equivalent to 16% of an average annual salary increased the retention of high-performing teachers in disadvantaged schools by 17 to 21 percentage points. However, the same study noted that in more advantaged schools, such awards did not improve retention but instead acted as a "quality signal" that encouraged teachers to move toward even higher-achieving institutions.

In the childcare sector in Singapore, remuneration was found to be a significant but complex predictor of retention. While fair HR practices (including rewards) were positively related to the intention to stay, remuneration alone showed a negative relationship with intention to stay in some models. This suggests that for teachers in low-wage professional sectors, higher pay is often secondary to intrinsic rewards, such as developmental progress of children and compliments from supervisors (Pek-Greer et al., 2016). On the other hand, Kinman (2016) identified three reward types: finance/status, esteem/support, and job security. Notably, esteem and support rewards were the most powerful predictors of an academic's intention to leave, suggesting that feeling respected and supported is more critical for long-term retention than salary alone. Zhan et al. (2023) highlight that leadership-driven rewards must address teachers' psychological needs and role clarity to effectively mask the stressors that lead to attrition.

A study by Makhuzeni and Barhuizen (2015) in North-Western Province in South Africa, found that teachers strongly considered leaving the teaching profession as a result of poor rewards. Research on the influence of non-financial rewards on teaching staff turnover in private primary

schools in Embakasi Sub county reported that job security, working conditions and fringe benefits have a negative influence on staff retention (Mburu & Ndeto, 2021). While studying the role of Human Resource Management practices, Kamau et al (2021) reported that compensation and training significantly influenced turnover intentions while career development and performance appraisal insignificantly influenced public secondary schools' teachers' turnover intentions in Murang'a county Kenya. The context of this study was public secondary schools which could be different from private primary schools, necessitating this study.

Employee Retention

Employee retention is defined as the process or set of measures an employer takes to encourage qualified and productive employees to remain with the organization for the maximum possible duration (Alajlani & Yesufu, 2022; Marozva et al., 2024). It is considered one of the most critical challenges for modern organizations, as the success and sustainability of any entity depend largely on the retention of its employees, their specialized skills, and their accumulated knowledge (Devassia et al., 2025; Mashile et al., 2021).

High employee turnover is an aggravating and costly occurrence that imposes multiple burdens on an organization (Devassia et al., 2025; Nakin et al., 2023). These include obvious financial expenses such as advertising, recruitment, and training, as well as significant indirect costs like lost productivity, the destabilization of organizational structures, and the loss of time that could have been spent pursuing organizational objectives (Nakin et al., 2023). Frequent turnover can also lead to understaffing, which increases the workload and potential dissatisfaction of remaining employees (Devassia et al., 2025).

Strategic HR practices, including recruitment, selection, training, and performance appraisals, are vital for building the perceptions that define the employee-employer relationship (Alajlani & Yesufu, 2022). Performance appraisals are often cited as the most critical predictor of retention, particularly in private-sector environments (Alajlani & Yesufu, 2022). An effective total rewards strategy involves both monetary and non-monetary benefits designed to satisfy the needs of both the organization and its stakeholders fairly (Nakin et al., 2023). While competitive salaries are essential for hiring and retention, they must be balanced with non-monetary elements (Nakin et al., 2023). Research indicates a significant inverse relationship between a support culture and turnover intentions; employees are more likely to stay when they feel cared for and valued. Conversely, a power culture, characterized by superiors exercising excessive control, is positively related to turnover intention (Mashile et al., 2021).

Prioritizing employee health and well-being reduces intent to leave and fosters loyalty (Richardson et al., 2025). Work-life balance is an increasingly important factor, with employees being attracted to organizations that appreciate family duties and offer flexible arrangements (Marozva et al., 2024). Factors such as life satisfaction, self-esteem, and pedagogical activity (for teachers) are also strong predictors of job satisfaction and retention (Holgado-Apaza et al., 2023).

Table 1: Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Indicators	Measurement Scale	Tools Analysis	of Data Collection Tool	
Reward Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salary • Benefits • Training • Recognition 	Likert (Ordinal)	Scale	Descriptive statistics, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis	Questionnaire
Employee Retention (Dependent Variable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover intention frequency • Exit • Employee dissatisfaction • Retention rate 	Likert (Ordinal) & data (Ratio)	Scale & HR	Descriptive statistics, Correlation Analysis, Regression Analysis	Questionnaire & HR Records

Methods

This study used descriptive survey research design conducted within a case study context (Oasis Academy). This design provides quantitative description of a population’s trend, attitudes, or opinions by studying a sample of that population. It included a cross-sectional study using questionnaires for data collection to generalize from a sample. A survey design provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes and opinions of a population, or tests for association among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population. Survey designs help answer descriptive questions like what percentage and questions about the relationship between variables like whether there is an association between variables (Creswel & Creswel, 2022). The purpose of descriptive studies on the other hand is to gain an accurate profile of events, persons or situations. The aim is to answer the questions of who, what, where, when or how without any manipulation of the variables and therefore report the situation as it is. The accessible population was all the teachers in Oasis Academy which is 50 teachers. Since the population was small, the study adopted a census.

A pilot study was conducted to evaluate whether the tool works as intended and if not, be able to correct it in a timely manner as advocated by Saunders and Lewis, (2017) and to assure validity and reliability. The pilot study was carried out using 10% of the population which is 5 members of staff. The respondents were drawn from a comparable school and did not participate in the final study. Once the pilot data was analyzed, the questionnaire was adequately revised to incorporate any corrections.

To establish validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by academics and professionals with expertise in human resource management, research methods and education. Their feedback informed adjustments to ensure the tool measured what it is supposed to measure. Content validity was ensured by aligning the items with study’s objectives and theoretical constructs. An internal consistency reliability was tested using the test-retest approach. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated where a threshold of 0.75 was achieved. The study was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire to gather primary data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Once the data was collected, it was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The quantitative data was presented in tables, figures and percentages while the qualitative data was categorized thematically.

Out of the 50 questionnaires that were administered, 45 were returned duly completed and ready for the analysis, representing 90 percent response rate. This was considered adequate for analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2019), 70% response is considered excellent, 60% is good and 50% is adequate for analysis. This information is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Response Rate

Category	F	%
Response	45	90
Non-response	5	5
Total	50	100

Out of the 45 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 15 (33.3%) were male while 30 (66.7%) were female. Saunders et al., (2018) indicate that gender is a key consideration as it influences how they respond to certain issues. This information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Gender

Gender	F	%
Male	15	33.3
Female	30	66.7
Total	45	100

Age of respondents

From the responses, 15% of the respondents were aged below 24 years while 25% of the respondents were aged between 24 and 33 years. A further 27% were aged between 34 and 44 years, while still another 22% was in the 45 to 54 age brackets. Lastly, 11% of the respondents were aged 55 years and above. This shows a fair age distribution which according to Bordens and Abbott (2021) is relevant in influencing how respondents respond to certain issues in a study. This information is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Age Bracket

Age in years	F	%
Less than 24 years	7	15
24-33	11	25
34-44	12	27
45-54	10	22
55 years and above	5	11
Total	45	100

Education background

When asked about the highest level of education attained, the responses indicated that 45% of the respondents had P1 certificate, 33% had diploma, 5% had a degree, 2% masters while 4% indicated others. This clearly shows that the respondents were in a position to clearly articulate the issues in the questionnaire. This information is presented in table 5.

Table 5: Education Level of Respondents

Education	F	%
P1 Certificate	20	45
Diploma	15	33
Degree	5	11
Master	1	2
Others	4	9
Total	45	100

Years of service

The respondents were asked to indicate the number of years they had served in the school. The findings indicated that 9% had served for less than 1 year, 33% had served for between 1 and 3 years while 42% had served for 4 to 6 years. Only 5% of the respondents had worked in the school for more than 10 years.

Table 6: Years in Service

Years	Frequency	%
Below 1 year	4	9
1-3	15	33
4-6	19	42
7-10	5	11
Over 10 years	2	5
Total	45	100

Reward Management

The respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with regard to the various indicators of reward management. The responses are presented in table 7.

Table: 7 Reward Management

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
The salary paid by the school is not competitive	54%	40%	6%	0%	0%	4%	0.885
The school does not provide employees with benefits like medical and pension	43	55	2	0	0	4.38	0.678
Staff do not get frequent trainings to enable them perform their work effectively	44	52	4	0	0	4.1	0.919
Teachers who excel in their work are not recognized and rewarded	46	51	3	0	0	4.21	0.872
Average						4.1725	0.8385

To determine how reward management affects retention, the respondents were asked whether the salary provided was competitive. A total of 94% of the respondents were of the opinion that the salary is not competitive (40% agreed, 54% strongly agreed), and 6% were neutral with a SD of .885, the mean was 4.00. On the question of provision of benefits like medical and pension, 98% of the respondents indicated that they were not provided with the benefits in question while 2% were neutral (4.38 mean and SD of .885). Regarding the question on training to enable them perform their work effectively, 96% of the respondents (44% strongly agreed, 52% agreed) opined that they were not receiving frequent training, and 4% were neutral, with mean=4.10 and SD = .919. Asked about recognition and reward for excellent work, 97 percent of the respondents indicated that they were not recognized and rewarded, 3% were neutral and the average score was 4.38 with SD of .678. Reward management mean = 4.1725 and SD = 0.8385, indicating that it has a great influence on the employee retention.

When asked to suggest ways in which reward management can help in improving staff retention, majority of the respondents indicated that salaries should be reviewed regularly. They also suggested that annual bonuses based on performance should be part of the package.

Employee Retention

On employee retention, the respondents were asked whether they would leave the school given an opportunity elsewhere. The responses are presented on table 8.

Table 8: Employee retention

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
I will leave the school given an opportunity elsewhere	43%	51%	3%	3%	0%	3.95	.739
The school has recorded frequent exits by teachers every term	47%	38%	9%	4%	2%	3.96	.725
I am dissatisfied working for this school	43%	52%	4%	0%	0%	4.10	.919
The school has not been able to retain many teachers for at least 3 years	43%	51%	3%	3%	0%	3.95	.739
Average						3.99	0.7805

On employee retention, the respondents were asked whether they would leave the school given an opportunity elsewhere. The responses were as follows: Those who disagreed were 3%, 51% agreed, 43% strongly agreed, and 3% were neutral. With a mean of 3.95 mean and SD 0.739. Regarding whether the school had recorded frequent exits by teachers every term, 47% strongly agreed, 38% agreed, 9% neutral, 4% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed with a mean of 3.96 mean and SD 725. When asked about dissatisfaction with working for this school, 43% strongly agreed, 52% agreed, and 4% were neutral, with a mean of 4.10 and SD .919, with. The study also required the respondents to indicate their level of agreement with whether the school had been unable to retain many teachers for at least 3 years, 43% strongly agreed, 51% agreed, 3% were neutral and 3% disagree with a mean of 3.95 and a SD of 739. On the question of what private schools should do to retain their employees, majority of the respondents indicated that the school management should support those who want to further their education and also ensure job security for the teachers in addition to competitive pay.

Summary of Finding

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of reward management on employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya. Majority of the respondents (94%) were of the opinion that the salary offered by the school is not competitive. On the question of provision of benefits like medical and pension, most of the respondents (80%) indicated that they were not provided with the benefits in question while. Regarding the question on training to enable them perform their work effectively, Majority of the respondents (95%) opined that they were not receiving frequent training. On recognition and reward for excellent work, majority of the respondents indicated that they were not recognized and rewarded. These findings concur with those of Elacqua et al., (2022) and Mburu and Ndetto (2021).

When asked to suggest ways in which reward management can help in improving staff retention, respondents indicated that salaries should be reviewed regularly and made comparable with what other teachers were earning. They also suggested that annual bonuses based on performance should be part of the package. Majority of the respondents indicated that the school management should

support those who want to further their education and also ensure job security for the teachers in addition to competitive pay for them to be able to retain the teachers

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that reward management has a critical influence on employee retention in private primary schools in Kenya. To retain employees, managers have to ensure that salaries paid to teachers are competitive, medical benefits and pension are included in the remuneration package, staff get frequent training and those who excel in their work are recognized and rewarded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The management of private primary schools should carry out a salary survey and establish competitive salaries to retain their employees. In addition, they should enroll their teachers in private pension schemes and medical insurance to enhance their social security and welfare. This is likely to increase the level of retention. The schools should make arrangements for teachers to participate in various workshops and seminars for capacity building purposes.

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