



ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING CONDITIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON TEACHER RETENTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SIERRA LEONE

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Abstract

Teacher retention and educational quality remain significant challenges in secondary schools in Sierra Leone, largely due to disparities in working conditions. This study investigated the influence of working conditions on teacher retention and educational quality in secondary schools across Sierra Leone. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from 380 teachers in public and private secondary schools across several districts and analyzed to examine the relationship between working conditions, and teacher retention. The findings revealed considerable disparities in working conditions, particularly in rural schools, which negatively affected teaching and learning. While some schools had adequate facilities and instructional resources, shortages remained widespread. Administrative support emerged as the most important factor influencing teacher satisfaction, followed by leadership engagement, resource availability, and opportunities for professional development. The study also found that working conditions directly affected educational quality. Factors such as workload, classroom environment, and teacher student relationships played a critical role in teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Concerns about inadequate salaries and limited career progression opportunities were also common. The study concludes that poor working conditions and insufficient compensation negatively affect teacher satisfaction, and retention, in Sierra Leone. It recommends increased investment in school infrastructure, equitable distribution of resources, stronger instructional leadership, expanded professional development opportunities, and fair compensation policies to improve teacher retention.

Keywords: *School, environmental, teacher motivation, education quality, Sierra Leone*

ÉVALUATION DES CONDITIONS DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT DE TRAVAIL ET DE LEURS EFFETS SUR LA RETENTION DES ENSEIGNANTS DANS LES ÉTABLISSEMENTS D'ENSEIGNEMENT SECONDAIRE EN SIERRA LEONE

Résumé

La rétention des enseignants et la qualité de l'éducation demeurent des défis majeurs dans les établissements d'enseignement secondaire en Sierra Leone, en grande partie en raison des disparités des conditions de travail. Cette étude a examiné l'influence des conditions de travail sur la rétention des enseignants et la qualité de l'éducation dans les écoles secondaires de la Sierra Leone. En adoptant une approche méthodologique mixte, des données quantitatives et qualitatives ont été recueillies auprès de 380 enseignants issus d'établissements secondaires publics et privés répartis dans plusieurs districts et analysées afin d'examiner la relation entre les conditions de travail et la rétention des enseignants. Les résultats ont révélé d'importantes disparités dans les conditions de travail, particulièrement dans les écoles rurales, ce qui a eu des effets négatifs sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Bien que certaines écoles disposent d'infrastructures adéquates et de ressources pédagogiques suffisantes, les pénuries demeurent largement répandues. Le soutien administratif est apparu comme le facteur le plus déterminant de la satisfaction des enseignants, suivi de l'engagement du leadership scolaire, de la disponibilité des ressources et des possibilités de perfectionnement professionnel. L'étude a également montré que les conditions de travail influencent directement la qualité de l'éducation. Des facteurs tels que la charge de travail, l'environnement de la salle de classe et les relations entre enseignants et élèves jouent un rôle essentiel dans l'efficacité de l'enseignement et la réussite scolaire des élèves. Les préoccupations liées à l'insuffisance des salaires et aux possibilités limitées d'avancement de carrière ont également été fréquemment signalées. L'étude conclut que les mauvaises conditions de travail et une rémunération insuffisante ont des effets négatifs sur la satisfaction, la rétention des enseignants et, par conséquent, sur la qualité de l'éducation en Sierra Leone. Elle recommande un investissement accru dans les infrastructures scolaires, une répartition plus équitable des ressources éducatives, un renforcement du leadership pédagogique, l'élargissement des possibilités de développement professionnel ainsi que la mise en œuvre de politiques de rémunération équitables afin d'améliorer la rétention des enseignants.

Mots-clés : *École, environnement, motivation des enseignants, qualité de l'éducation, Sierra Leone*

Introduction

Teacher job satisfaction has become a major concern worldwide due to its significant influence on teacher retention, instructional effectiveness, and student achievement. Teaching is widely recognized as a demanding profession, and dissatisfaction with working conditions has been documented across both developed and developing countries (Benoliel & Barth, 2017). Research conducted in Canada, China, Malaysia, Turkey, and several African countries indicates that inadequate resources, excessive workloads, limited administrative support, inadequate remuneration, and restricted opportunities for professional development negatively affect teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession (Stromquist, 2018; Béteille & Evans, 2021). These challenges often contribute to increased teacher attrition, diminished instructional quality, and poorer educational outcomes.

Working conditions constitute a critical dimension of teacher job satisfaction. These conditions encompass both physical factors, such as classroom facilities, teaching resources, class size, and access to technology, and psychosocial factors, including leadership support, workload, interpersonal relationships, opportunities for professional development, and compensation (Sze et al., 2017). Extensive research indicates that supportive working environments enhance teachers' morale, productivity, and retention, whereas unfavorable conditions contribute to increased stress, burnout, and intentions to leave the profession

(Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; World Bank, 2021). Nevertheless, the degree to which these factors influence teacher satisfaction varies across educational systems, institutional settings, and sociocultural contexts.

In Sierra Leone, the teaching profession continues to face significant challenges. Many schools operate under conditions of inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient instructional materials, limited access to professional development opportunities, and remuneration packages that often do not align with the rising cost of living (MBSSE, 2022; Samonova et al., 2025). Rural areas and public schools experience these constraints more severely and persistently due to resource limitations. Although private schools tend to have comparatively better facilities and stronger institutional support, disparities in teachers' experiences across school types remain insufficiently explored. As a result, ongoing concerns about teacher motivation, retention, and instructional effectiveness continue to undermine educational quality and broader national development goals.

Although previous studies have examined teacher motivation, retention, and performance in various countries (Podolsky et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2012; Kim, 2019). Limited empirical research has explored how environmental working conditions influence teacher job satisfaction and retention in Sierra Leone, particularly through an assessment lens of public and private secondary schools. Existing literature has tended to focus on isolated factors such as salary, workload, or professional development, with insufficient attention to the combined effects of physical, administrative, and organizational conditions. Existing literature has tended to focus on isolated factors such as salary, workload, or professional development, with insufficient attention to the combined effects of physical, administrative, and organizational conditions (Adoniou, 2016; McCarthy et al., 2009; Manyisa & van Aswegen, 2017).

The study sought to: (a) assess the adequacy of classroom facilities and teaching resources in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone; (b) examine the level of administrative support available to teachers in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone; (c) evaluate the influence of workload and professional development opportunities in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone; and (d) investigate teachers' perceptions of remuneration and benefits, as well as how these factors collectively affect job satisfaction and retention in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone.

To achieve these objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the status of classroom facilities in terms of space, resources, and technology in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone?
2. To what extent do school administrations provide support for teachers' instructional and professional needs in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone?
3. How do workload and professional development opportunities affect educational quality in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone?
4. How do teachers perceive the fairness of their compensation in comparison to other professions in Sierra Leone?

This study empirically explores the link between environmental working conditions and teacher job satisfaction in Sierra Leone. It offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educational stakeholders to enhance teacher welfare, retention, and educational quality, contributing to ongoing efforts to strengthen the education sector and improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Literature review

Classroom facilities in public and private secondary schools

Classroom facilities play a critical role in shaping teacher satisfaction, instructional effectiveness, and student learning outcomes. Adequate classroom space, teaching materials, and educational technology enhance teacher performance, motivation, and student achievement (World Bank, 2021; Kanyiri, 2025). Conversely, inadequate infrastructure, limited instructional resources, and overcrowded classrooms contribute to teacher stress, reduced commitment, and lower instructional quality (Shonje, 2016). The quality of the learning environment also influences the well-being of both teachers and students, with positive classroom conditions promoting morale and productivity, while under-resourced environments undermine educational effectiveness (Weiland, 2021; Owusu, 2021).

In Sierra Leone, significant disparities exist between public and private secondary schools in terms of classroom facilities and learning environments. Public schools frequently face challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and shortages of teaching and learning materials, whereas private schools generally provide better-equipped and more conducive learning environments (Onikoyi et al., 2025). These differences continue to affect the quality of education and may influence teachers' job satisfaction and retention within the secondary school system (MBSSE, 2022; Omodan, 2023).

Administrative support for teachers' instructional and professional needs

Administrative support is a critical determinant of teacher effectiveness, professional development, job satisfaction, and retention. Effective school leadership characterized by open communication, collaboration, and participatory decision-making fosters teacher engagement, professional commitment, and instructional effectiveness (Evans, 2018; Kanyiri, 2025). Supportive administrative practices, including mentoring, coaching, professional development opportunities, and recognition programs, enhance teachers' instructional competencies, morale, and career growth (Kanwal et al., 2023; Nnah & George, 2025; Celestin et al., 2024; Zuilkowski et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of such support depends on its alignment with teachers' professional needs and workplace realities (Sugrue et al., 2023). Conversely, inadequate administrative support and weak leadership can undermine teacher motivation, reduce instructional effectiveness, and contribute to job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions (Day et al., 2016). In contrast, supportive leadership and recognition promote teacher satisfaction, professional growth, and long-term retention (Gichuhi & Mbithuka, 2018; Imran et al., 2025).

Effects of working conditions on the quality of education

Working conditions also play a crucial role in determining teacher performance, motivation, and overall educational quality. Supportive leadership, adequate teaching resources, manageable workloads, and positive work environments enhance instructional effectiveness and contribute to improved student learning outcomes (Kanwal et al., 2023; Tytarenko et al., 2025). Conversely, inadequate resources, excessive workloads, overcrowded classrooms, poor infrastructure, weak support systems, and limited opportunities for professional growth can reduce teacher morale, job satisfaction, and instructional quality (Shonje, 2016; Evans, 2018; Antoninis et al., 2023). Factors such as role conflict, overcrowding, and insufficient professional development further undermine classroom effectiveness and student achievement (Owusu, 2021; Iliya & Ifeoma, 2015). In Sierra Leone, persistent resource constraints and challenging working conditions continue to affect teacher performance and

hinder the delivery of quality education, thereby undermining educational outcomes across the secondary school system (Mgode, 2020; Samonova et al., 2025).

Teachers' perceptions of the fairness of their compensation relative to other professions

Teachers' perceptions of compensation fairness play a significant role in shaping job satisfaction, professional commitment, and retention. Competitive salaries, benefits, and recognition enhance motivation and reinforce a sense of professional value, whereas inadequate remuneration is associated with dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and increased turnover intentions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Tytarenko et al., 2025). Benefits such as pensions, health insurance, and access to professional development opportunities further influence teachers' perceptions of fairness and overall job satisfaction (Evans, 2018). Inadequate pay relative to comparable professions, particularly in developing contexts such as Sierra Leone and other African countries, continues to undermine teacher morale and retention (Lurvink et al., 2023; Mboya, 2023).

When teachers perceive their compensation as unfair, particularly in relation to workload and alternative occupational opportunities, their motivation and organizational commitment tend to decline, increasing the likelihood of attrition (Shonje, 2016). Conversely, teachers who feel valued through fair remuneration and professional recognition are more likely to remain committed to the profession, underscoring the importance of equitable compensation systems and supportive working conditions in promoting teacher retention (Iliya & Ifeoma, 2015; Imran et al., 2025).

Methodology

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' job satisfaction in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone. The mixed-methods approach was selected because the study sought not only to measure the extent of teachers' job satisfaction and the factors influencing it but also to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions of their working conditions.

The quantitative component of the study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate teachers' perceptions and experiences in Sierra Leone's public and private schools. The qualitative component included interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to assess teachers' job satisfaction in public and private schools, with a focus on their lived experiences and perceptions. In total, 380 questionnaires were distributed to 60 school administrators, 170 public school teachers, 100 private school teachers, and 30 non-PIN-coded teachers. In addition, interviews were conducted with 5 officials from the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU), 5 from the Community Teachers' Association (CTA), 5 from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), and 5 from the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), along with 15 FGDs (3 in each district). According to the study design, two separate analyses were conducted: survey data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019, while interview data were analyzed using MAXQDA for thematic and contextual analysis. The quantitative and qualitative findings were then triangulated through integration of statistical and thematic results.

Study Area

The study was conducted in five district headquarters representing the major geographical regions of Sierra Leone. These included Freetown in the Western Area Urban

Region, Port Loko in the North-West Region, Bombali in the Northern Region, Bo in the Southern Region, and Kenema in the Eastern Region. The selected districts provided a balanced representation of urban and rural settings, as well as public and private secondary schools. The geographical diversity of the study area enabled the researcher to capture variations in teachers' experiences, working conditions, and levels of job satisfaction across different educational environments.

Population of the Study.

The target population comprised 36,446 stakeholders directly involved in teaching, educational administration, and teacher welfare within the secondary school system in Sierra Leone (Stats SL, 2022). Specifically, the study population included 2,430 public school teachers, 579 private school teachers, 6,301 non-pincoded teachers, 3,009 school administrators, 13 officials of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU), 14 representatives of Community Teachers' Associations (CTA), 10 officials from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), and 10 officials from the Teaching Service Commission (TSC). These groups were considered relevant due to their direct involvement in teacher management, policy implementation, and educational service delivery.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

A total of 380 respondents participated in the study. The sample comprised 170 public school teachers, 100 private school teachers, 30 non-pincoded teachers, 60 school administrators, five officials from the Sierra Leone Teachers Union, five representatives from Community Teachers Associations, five officials from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education, and five officials from the Teaching Service Commission. In addition, 15 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted, with three discussion groups organized in each of the five study districts.

A combination of stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques was employed to select participants. Stratified sampling ensured adequate representation of public and private schools across all districts. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used to select teachers who participated in the survey. Purposive sampling was applied in selecting school administrators, educational officials, union representatives, and other key informants due to their knowledge and experience regarding teacher welfare, motivation, and job satisfaction. The use of multiple sampling techniques enhanced both the representativeness and depth of the data collected.

Variables of the Study

The study examined both dependent and independent variables. The dependent variable was teacher job satisfaction, defined as the overall level of contentment teachers experience in relation to their work. The independent variables included working conditions, salary and benefits packages, administrative support and supervision, professional development opportunities, teacher autonomy and resource availability, interpersonal relationships among teachers, and recognition and promotion opportunities. Working conditions were further operationalized through indicators such as classroom facilities, teaching resources, workload, class size, and workplace safety. These variables were selected in line with the study objectives and existing literature on teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and retention.

Instruments for Data Collection

Three main instruments were used to collect data for the study. The first instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and Likert-scale items. The

questionnaire was administered to 380 teachers and school administrators and generated quantitative data on job satisfaction, working conditions, salary and benefits, professional development, supervision, and retention. The second instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, used to collect qualitative data from key informants, including 5 MBSSE, 5 TSC, 5 SLTU, 5 CTA, and 60 selected school administrators. The interviews provided in-depth insights into policy implementation, teacher welfare, and institutional support mechanisms. The third instrument was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide used to facilitate discussions among 30 teachers. The FGDs generated collective perspectives on workplace experiences, motivation, professional growth, and retention challenges.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the data collection, official permission was obtained from relevant educational authorities and participating schools. Research assistants were trained on the objectives of the study, the administration of research instruments, and ethical considerations. Questionnaires were personally distributed to respondents and collected upon completion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with key informants, while Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organized at designated venues within each district. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights as research participants before the commencement of data collection. Interview and discussion sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent, while supplementary field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information. Data collection was conducted over several weeks to ensure adequate coverage of all selected districts and respondent categories.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The validity of the research instruments was established through expert review and pilot testing. To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire, interview guide, and FGD guide were reviewed by specialists in educational research, measurement, and evaluation. Their comments and recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the instruments with the study objectives. A pilot study was subsequently conducted in schools outside the selected sample areas. Feedback from the pilot exercise was used to revise ambiguous items and strengthen the overall quality of the instruments. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Reliability coefficients above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 were considered evidence of satisfactory internal consistency. This process ensured that the instrument measured the intended constructs consistently and accurately.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were coded, entered, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, tables, and charts, were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and views. Inferential statistical analyses, including independent samples t-tests and regression analysis, were employed to examine differences and relationships among variables related to teacher job satisfaction. Qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using MAXQDA software. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes, patterns, and categories emerging from participants' responses. Findings from both qualitative and quantitative analyses were triangulated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the study results and to strengthen the credibility of the conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from relevant educational authorities and participating institutions prior to the commencement of data collection. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any adverse consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by guaranteeing that respondents' identities were not disclosed in any report, publication, or presentation arising from the study. Data collected were used strictly for academic purposes and were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. The researcher adhered to the ethical principles of honesty, integrity, respect, and professional responsibility throughout the conduct of the study.

Results

The findings are presented according to the study's objectives. First, the results examine the state of working conditions in public and private secondary schools, including classroom facilities, teaching materials, administrative support, professional development opportunities, workload, and compensation. Second, the findings explore the influence of these working conditions on teacher retention and job satisfaction. Third, the results assess how workload and professional development opportunities affect educational quality and teaching effectiveness. Where appropriate, comparisons are made between public and private schools and across different geographic contexts.

Evaluation of Classroom Facilities: Space, Resources, and Technology

Classroom facilities were assessed as a key dimension of teachers' working conditions. During the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate the adequacy of classroom space, the availability of instructional resources, and access to technological facilities that support teaching and learning. These variables were included because the physical teaching environment is an important component of working conditions and directly relates to the study's objective of examining how workplace conditions influence teacher retention and educational quality in secondary schools in Sierra Leone. By assessing teachers' perceptions of classroom facilities, the study sought to determine whether the availability and quality of physical resources contribute to teacher satisfaction, professional commitment, and effective instructional delivery.

The evaluation of classroom facilities shows notable variation. Among respondents, 21 teachers (5.5%) rated the facilities as excellent, 147 respondents (38.7%) rated them as very good, 91 (23.9%) rated them as good, 48 (12.6%) rated them as fair, and 73 (19.2%) rated them as poor. These results highlight disparities in learning environments and underscore the need for targeted improvements by educators, administrators, and policymakers (see Table 1).

Table 1: Rating on Classroom Facilities Space, Resources, and Technology.

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	21	5.5
Very Good	91	23.9
Good	147	38.7
Fair	48	12.6
Poor	73	19.2
Total	380	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2025

The focus group discussions revealed that teachers in Sierra Leone regard classroom facilities positively, acknowledging their impact on student engagement and achievement. One teacher stated:

There is sufficient instructional space. We face challenges like overcrowding, and lack of collaborative space persists. For resources, we have insufficient textbooks and teaching aids, which hinder instructional quality, and limited access to technology.

These insights suggest that focused investments in facilities and resources, alongside professional development and feedback systems, can significantly improve teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Administrative Support for Teaching Needs

Administrative support was measured as a key variable representing the organizational dimension of teachers' working conditions. During the survey, respondents were asked to assess the extent to which school administrators supported their instructional activities through leadership engagement, communication, and supervision, provision of resources, problem-solving assistance, and responsiveness to teachers' professional needs. This variable was included to address the study's objective of examining how working conditions influence teacher retention and educational quality in secondary schools in Sierra Leone. Administrative support is widely recognized as a critical factor affecting teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, and effectiveness. Therefore, evaluating teachers' perceptions of administrative support provides important insights into how organizational practices contribute to teacher retention and the delivery of quality education.

Out of 380 multiple responses, 178 (46.5%) respondents identified administrative engagement as the primary form of support. Another 125 (32.6%) cited adequate resources, while 80 (20.9%) highlighted professional development opportunities. These results highlight the varied dimensions of administrative support and its central role in shaping the teaching experience in Sierra Leone's secondary schools. The survey findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Administrative Support for Teaching Needs.

Supports	Frequency	Percentage
Availability of adequate resources	125	32.6
Overall administrative engagement	178	46.5
Professional development opportunity	80	20.9
Total	383	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2025

Most teachers and school administrators revealed during the focus group discussions and key informant interviews (KIIs) that limited opportunities for professional development hinder career growth and pedagogical innovation. One teacher from a public secondary school stated:

"We rarely receive training after being recruited. Without regular professional development, it becomes difficult to learn new teaching methods or keep up with changes in the curriculum."

Similarly, another participant observed:

"Many teachers want to improve their skills, but there are very few workshops or refresher courses available. This affects our confidence and effectiveness in the classroom."

A school administrator also emphasized the importance of continuous learning:

"When teachers are given opportunities for training, they return to the classroom with new ideas and strategies that improve student engagement and performance. Unfortunately, such opportunities are limited because of funding constraints."

Working Conditions Affecting the Quality of Education

The influence of working conditions on educational quality was assessed as a key outcome variable in this study. During the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate how various aspects of their working environment, including classroom facilities, availability of teaching and learning materials, administrative support, workload, professional development opportunities, and compensation, affected their ability to deliver effective instruction and support student learning. This variable was included to address the study's objective of evaluating how working conditions influence educational quality in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone. By examining teachers' perceptions of the relationship between workplace conditions and instructional effectiveness, the study sought to determine the extent to which improvements in the school environment contribute to better teaching practices, enhanced student engagement, and improved educational outcomes.

The findings presented below therefore reflect teachers' assessments of how different dimensions of working conditions influence the quality of education provided in their schools.

Survey multiple responses reveal that several dimensions of working conditions shape educational quality. Administrative support and salary were cited by 38.2% of respondents, professional development opportunities by 20.5%, the physical environment by 16.0%, workload by 13.4%, and teacher-student relationships by 11.9%. These results emphasize the multifaceted nature of educational quality, indicating that diverse school-based factors influence teaching and learning. Table 3 presents the survey results.

Table 3: Working Conditions Affecting the Quality of Education.

Working conditions	Frequency	Percentage
Physical environment	67	16.0
Administrative Support	160	38.2
Workload	56	13.4
Professional development opportunities	86	20.5
Attitude of Teachers and Students	50	11.9
Total	419	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2025

During the focus group discussions, the teachers identified key factors impacting educational quality, emphasizing the importance of strong administrative support for effective curriculum management and resource allocation. One teacher stated:

Professional development is important for us. Also, the physical learning environment and good workloads contribute to our well-being.

This suggests that a holistic approach combining leadership, professional growth, adequate facilities, and a positive school culture is essential to improving teacher performance, student engagement, and academic achievement.

Availability of Adequate Teaching Materials

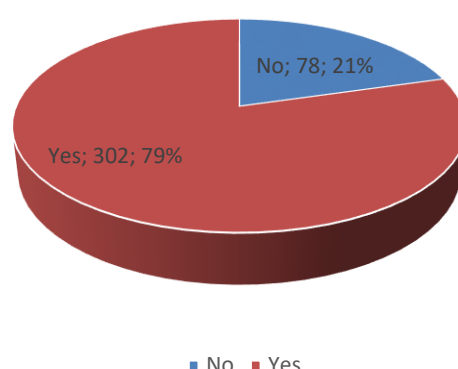
The availability of teaching materials was assessed as a key variable representing the resource dimension of teachers' working conditions. During the survey, respondents were asked to evaluate the adequacy and accessibility of instructional materials required for effective teaching and learning, including textbooks, teaching aids, laboratory equipment, reference

materials, and other classroom resources. This variable was measured because access to adequate teaching materials is essential for instructional effectiveness and directly relates to the study's objective of examining how working conditions influence teacher retention and educational quality in secondary schools in Sierra Leone. Adequate teaching resources can enhance lesson delivery, improve student engagement, reduce teacher frustration, and strengthen teachers' commitment to their profession. Therefore, assessing teachers' perceptions of the availability of teaching materials provides important evidence on how resource conditions contribute to both teacher satisfaction and the quality of education.

The findings presented in this section examine the extent to which teachers perceived teaching materials to be available and sufficient in their schools and how these perceptions relate to broader issues of educational quality and workplace conditions.

Among 380 respondents, 270 teachers (71.1%) reported that teaching materials were adequate, while 110 respondents (28.9%) reported shortages. These results indicate progress but also highlight persistent challenges in providing sufficient instructional resources in Sierra Leone's secondary schools (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Availability of Adequate Teaching Materials for Subjects



Source: Field Data, 2025

In one focus group, a 44-year-old public school teacher from Bombali stated:

Almost 30% of teachers lack adequate resources, especially in rural schools. It increases our workload, and sometimes students share one book among five or six of them.

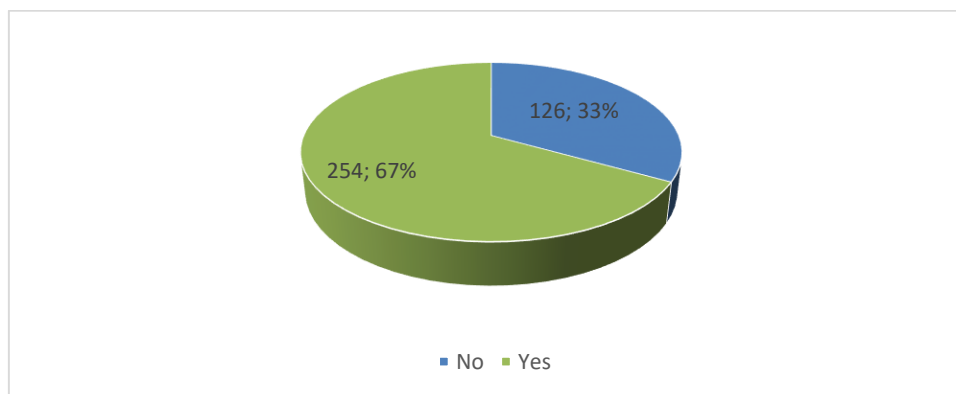
By contrast, a 47-year-old private school teacher from the Western Area noted:

Most of us, over 70%, have what we need, and it boosts confidence in the classroom. It reduces stress and helps with lesson planning.

Teachers' perceptions of the fairness of their compensation relative to other professions

Among the 380 participants, 254 (66.8%) respondents reported feeling fairly compensated in relation to other professions in Sierra Leone. In contrast, 126 (33.2%) respondents disagreed. These findings offer insight into teachers' perceptions of remuneration within the national socioeconomic context. Results are presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Fair Compensation



Source: Field Data, 2025

Many teachers in Sierra Leone perceive their salaries as fair compared to other professions. The stability of public sector salaries and recent government initiatives to raise compensation shape this perspective. Nevertheless, a considerable number of teachers remain dissatisfied. A female teacher stated during the focus group discussions:

Teachers frequently expressed dissatisfaction with their compensation, noting that it does not match their professional qualifications, workload, or the rising cost of living. As one participant stated, *“My pay doesn’t reflect my qualifications, workload, and the rising cost of living.”* This sentiment reflects broader concerns about the adequacy of salaries in relation to the demands of the teaching profession and highlights compensation as a key factor influencing teacher motivation and retention. This suggests that holistic measures are vital to fostering teacher well-being and supporting retention.

Discussion

The research aimed to evaluate how environmental working conditions influence teachers' retention. Findings indicated that workplace climate significantly affects teachers' decisions to remain in the profession. Focus groups and interviews affirmed that these conditions are crucial for teacher satisfaction. The study corroborated Benoliel & Barth (2017), noting teaching as a highly stressful profession with widespread dissatisfaction globally. In Alberta, Canada, educators face challenges like limited control and work-life balance issues, while similar barriers exist in places like China, Malaysia, and Turkey, where factors such as gender bias, low pay, and poor conditions contribute to high turnover rates among teachers.

Discussions with school authorities highlight that classroom facilities significantly impact satisfaction and effectiveness, with adequate space, resources, and technology boosting motivation and outcomes. Findings align with the World Bank (2021), which emphasizes that well-equipped classrooms enhance teaching quality, while Kanyiri (2025) indicates that appropriate tools alleviate stress and improve satisfaction. Furthermore, variations in facilities between public and private schools affect workplace perceptions. Administrative support is another key factor; Bêteille & Evans (2021) found that teachers who receive timely assistance and clear communication exhibit higher engagement. Supportive leadership fosters positive workplace perceptions, with Kanyiri (2025) noting that differences in administrative support across school types influence satisfaction levels.

The findings align with Bêteille & Evans (2021), indicating that class size and student-teacher ratios influence workload and instructional quality. Large classes in under-resourced

public schools contribute to fatigue and lessen individualized support, while reasonable ratios enhance engagement and lesson delivery (Antoninis et al., 2023). Additionally, Tytarenko et al. (2025) emphasize that excessive teaching hours and administrative duties elevate stress and diminish motivation. Heavy workloads limit preparation time, disrupt balance, and adversely affect satisfaction, especially in public schools (World Bank, 2021).

Research findings indicate that pay and benefits significantly influence employee motivation and retention. Low salaries lead to increased attrition, aligning with previous studies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Timely and fair compensation bolsters employee commitment (Tytarenko et al., 2025). Interviews with Sierra Leone Teachers Union officials highlight that comprehensive benefit packages, including health insurance and pensions, enhance security and morale. Additionally, perceived inequities in pay between professions deter long-term engagement, with notable dissatisfaction stemming from disparities between public and private sector remuneration in Sierra Leone.

Workplace conflict negatively impacts teacher engagement and leads to stress and attrition, as shown in focus group discussions with the Community Teachers Association. Effective conflict management and a collaborative culture can alleviate these issues (Tytarenko et al., 2025). Across Africa, teaching is perceived as undervalued, suffering from long hours, low pay, and inadequate resources. Specifically, in Sierra Leone, teachers endure significant challenges, including political pressures, poor living conditions, and overcrowded classrooms (Samonova et al., 2025).

The study corroborates Omodan (2023) that high teacher-student ratios, reaching 1:88 in Tanzania against a recommended 1:40, pose significant challenges, particularly in terms of management and satisfaction. Overcrowding and poor infrastructure, notably in public schools of Sierra Leone compared to more resourced private institutions, adversely affect educational quality despite training efforts (MBSSE, 2022). Additionally, findings align with Shonje (2016) that teacher satisfaction is linked to working conditions, with deficiencies in resources and compensation fostering demoralization. The research echoes Kanwal et al. (2023) regarding excessive workloads and the necessity of supportive environments for teacher morale. It reflects global trends by highlighting links between turnover and inadequate support (Gichuhi & Mbithuka, 2018) while also emphasizing that effective management and recognition influence job satisfaction (Imran et al., 2025). Ultimately, a holistic approach towards improving classroom conditions and support is essential for retaining educators.

Teacher satisfaction is significantly influenced by working conditions, as confirmed by focus group discussions and interviews. Key issues include insufficient offices, computers, and security, along with low compensation compared to similar professions, which negatively impact morale and professional commitment. Excessive workload and administrative burdens also reduce teachers' motivation. Conversely, supportive environments with collegiality, recognition, and adequate resources improve morale and efficiency. The study corroborates that workplace culture, management style, and human resource policies are vital for retention, highlighting that fairness, transparency, and responsive leadership enhance satisfaction. In contrast, inadequate resources and poor infrastructure can lead to increased stress and attrition.

Discussions with volunteers and non-PIN-coded teachers reveal that inadequate classroom conditions erode professional value, aligning with the findings of Day et al. (2016), which emphasize that supportive leadership fosters collaboration. Sze et al. (2017) highlight that work conditions include both physical (infrastructure, class size, and noise) and psychosocial factors (relationships and workload). Weiland (2021) supports the notion that these factors influence teacher and student well-being. Teacher satisfaction varies, with some

thriving despite issues, while others endure stress from poor facilities. McPheron (2019) connects expanded mentoring roles to increased workload and role conflict. Positive conditions-manageable class sizes and fair pay-enhance morale, whereas overcrowding undermines it (Owusu, 2021). Targeted professional support improves skills in resource-limited environments, contingent upon addressing teacher needs (Sugrue et al., 2023). Teacher morale significantly influences instructional effectiveness, but challenges like heavy workloads and limited growth opportunities persist (Iliya & Ifeoma, 2015), indicating a need for systemic reforms to overcome structural barriers.

The study affirms that working conditions worldwide differ based on governance and policy. In Turkey, centralized systems heighten workloads due to curricular reforms and technological integration, while inadequate resources contribute to dissatisfaction. In Sweden, decentralization provides autonomy but also increases responsibilities, leading to new pressures. Financial incentives alone are insufficient as motivators; factors like belongingness, recognition, and student success rank higher. Research from Mauritius and Ghana emphasizes the importance of communication, achievement pride, and supportive environments. Sustainable positive conditions necessitate continuous investment and context-sensitive interventions, alongside strong leadership and collaboration, to ensure equitable educational outcomes. Without comprehensive reforms addressing both material and relational aspects, satisfaction and retention may remain unstable.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of working conditions on teacher retention and the quality of education in public and private secondary schools in Sierra Leone. The specific objectives were to assess the effects of classroom facilities and teaching resources, administrative support, workload and professional development opportunities, and remuneration on teachers' job satisfaction, retention, and instructional effectiveness. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from 380 teachers across selected public and private secondary schools.

The findings show that working conditions significantly shape teacher satisfaction, retention, and educational quality. Inadequate classroom infrastructure and limited teaching resources, particularly in rural and public schools, negatively affect instructional delivery. Administrative support emerged as a key determinant of motivation and commitment, while manageable workloads and access to professional development enhance teachers' effectiveness. Conversely, poor remuneration and limited benefits contribute to dissatisfaction and attrition.

Overall, the study concludes that teacher retention and educational quality depend on a combination of physical, organizational, and financial working conditions. Improving these areas in a coordinated manner is essential for strengthening the teaching workforce and enhancing student learning outcomes in Sierra Leone.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This study analyzes environmental working conditions affecting teacher retention, addressing factors like facilities, administrative support, and compensation through a mixed-methods approach involving 380 teachers in Sierra Leone. It reveals systemic inequities and suggests improvements, contributing to discussions on educational quality. However, limitations include a lack of exploration into structural causes of disparities, generalizability issues due to a focus on secondary schools, reliance on subjective compensation perceptions, and excluding views from non-teacher stakeholders.

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Conflicts of Interest

I declare that I am not subject to any conflict of interest. No funding, personal, or institutional commitment has interfered with the objectivity and integrity of this research.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

I certify that this research is entirely original and that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in its preparation, except for the Grammarly editing tool, which was utilized solely for language editing and proofreading.

Authors' contribution:

Tony Patrick George was responsible for the conceptualization of the study and led the data collection, data analysis, original draft writing, revision and editing, and validation processes. Philip Foday Yamba Thulla contributed to data collection, data analysis, manuscript review, and validation. Saffa Barbee Massaquoi and Moses Fayiah provided support in the study design and contributed to data collection, data analysis, revision of the manuscript, and validation of the study findings. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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