

INFLUENCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE ON STUDENT RETENTION IN CLIMATE-SMART SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES IN KAUMA SUB-COUNTY, KILIFI COUNTY, KENYA

BY

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Abstract

School feeding programmes are globally recognized as effective interventions for improving learners nutrition, attendance, and retention. However, the sustainability of these programmes, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions, depends significantly on the knowledge and competencies of personnel responsible for implementation. This study examined the influence of human resource management knowledge on student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya. Specifically, the study assessed the relationship between staff training, staffing adequacy, supervision, staff motivation, and knowledge building on learner retention. The study was anchored on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Stakeholder Theory. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population comprised 120 respondents, including head teachers, teachers, school feeding programme coordinators, School Management Committee members, and county education and programme officials. A census approach was adopted. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis in SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that human resource management knowledge had a positive and statistically significant influence on student retention ($\beta = 0.466$, $p = 0.000$), making it the strongest predictor among the study variables. Respondents perceived that effective supervision, continuous capacity building, and motivated staff significantly enhanced programme implementation and learner retention. However, challenges including inadequate staff training, staffing shortages, and low motivation were reported. The study concludes that strengthening human resource management through comprehensive training, supportive supervision, and staff motivation is essential for sustaining climate-smart school feeding programmes and improving student retention. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission develop continuous professional development programmes, establish minimum staffing standards, and institute staff motivation strategies to enhance human resource management knowledge in school feeding programmes.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Student Retention, Climate-Smart School Feeding, Staff Training, Supervision, Staff Motivation, Kauma Sub-County, Kenya

1. Background of the Study

School feeding programmes are important interventions for improving learners' nutrition, school attendance, participation, and retention, particularly in low-income and food-insecure communities. Globally, school meals benefit hundreds of millions of children and contribute to health, education, social protection, and human capital development. The sustainability of these programmes, however, depends not only on financial and food resources but also on the knowledge, competencies, motivation, and management capacity of the personnel responsible for

implementation.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, school feeding has become an important strategy for addressing food insecurity and improving educational participation. The expansion of school meal programmes across African countries reflects growing recognition of their contribution to inclusive development, health, gender equality, rural development, and education. Kenya has similarly expanded its school feeding programmes through the Home-Grown School Feeding model, incorporating climate-smart agriculture, local food sourcing, school gardens, resilient crops, and sustainable food

production. These approaches seek to improve programme sustainability, strengthen community ownership, reduce dependence on external assistance, and enhance resilience to climate-related shocks.

Despite these efforts, school feeding programmes in Kenya continue to experience implementation challenges. Inadequate financing, irregular food supplies, late payments, staffing constraints, weak coordination, and climate-related disruptions can affect the consistency and quality of meals provided to learners. Such challenges are particularly important in climate-vulnerable areas where drought, erratic rainfall, poverty, and food insecurity affect school participation.

Kauma Sub-County in Kilifi County provides an important context for examining these challenges. The area experiences poverty, food insecurity, erratic rainfall, and recurrent drought. These conditions contribute to absenteeism and school dropout, with hunger being an important factor affecting learner participation. Consequently, effective management of school feeding programmes is critical to ensuring that learners receive regular and nutritious meals.

Human resource management knowledge refers to the skills, competencies, and practices required to recruit, train, supervise, motivate, and coordinate personnel. Within school feeding programmes, teachers, headteachers, cooks, coordinators, and support staff need appropriate knowledge to manage feeding activities, maintain food safety, coordinate resources, and respond to climate-related disruptions. Effective human resource management can therefore improve the quality and reliability of feeding programmes and contribute to learner retention.

The study identified a gap in empirical knowledge concerning how human resource management knowledge affects student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes. Previous research has largely focused on nutritional, agricultural, financial, and general programme issues, with relatively limited attention to the human resource dimension. The study therefore examined the influence of human resource management knowledge on student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County.

2. Problem Statement

School feeding programmes are widely recognized as

effective mechanisms for improving learner nutrition, attendance, participation, and retention while reducing dropout. Nevertheless, learner retention remains a challenge in food-insecure and climate-vulnerable areas of Kenya. In Kilifi County, poverty, food insecurity, recurrent drought, and erratic rainfall continue to affect school participation. During prolonged dry periods, shortages of food can disrupt school feeding programmes and increase learner absenteeism.

The Government of Kenya and development partners have expanded the Home-Grown School Meals Programme and incorporated climate-smart approaches such as local food sourcing, school gardens, climate-resilient crops, and sustainable food production. However, challenges remain, including irregular food supplies, inadequate financing, weak stakeholder coordination, limited technical knowledge, and interruptions in meal provision. These challenges can reduce the reliability of school feeding programmes and undermine their contribution to learner attendance and retention.

An important but underexplored factor is human resource management knowledge. Successful implementation requires trained, adequately staffed, supervised, motivated, and knowledgeable personnel. Without these competencies, schools may have difficulties planning feeding activities, maintaining food safety, coordinating resources, responding to climate disruptions, and ensuring consistent meal provision.

Although climate-smart school feeding initiatives are increasingly implemented in Kilifi County, empirical evidence on the influence of human resource management knowledge on student retention remains limited. This study addressed this contextual and empirical gap by investigating how staff training, staffing adequacy, supervision, staff motivation, and knowledge building influence student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County.

3. Objectives and Hypothesis

General Objective

The general objective was to evaluate the influence of human resource management knowledge on student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya.

Specific Objective

The specific objective was to assess the relationship between human resource management knowledge, represented by staff training, staffing adequacy, supervision, staff motivation, and knowledge building, and student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes.

Null Hypothesis

H₀₃: Human resource management knowledge has no statistically significant influence on student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The study was partly anchored on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, developed by Abraham Maslow. The theory proposes that human motivation is influenced by five categories of needs: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The theory suggests that individuals are unlikely to effectively pursue higher-level needs when basic physiological and safety needs remain unmet.

The theory is relevant because school feeding programmes address learners' basic physiological needs by providing nutritious meals. Climate-smart practices such as school gardens, local food sourcing, drought-tolerant crops, rainwater harvesting, improved food storage, and clean cooking systems can increase the reliability and sustainability of food provision.

Human resource management knowledge supports this process because trained, supervised, and motivated staff are better able to manage feeding activities, maintain food safety, and provide meals consistently. Consistent meal provision helps meet learners' basic needs, which can encourage school attendance, participation, and continued enrolment. Conversely, weak human resource management can contribute to irregular feeding services and negatively affect learner participation and retention.

4.2 Stakeholder Theory

The second theoretical foundation was Stakeholder Theory, developed by R. Edward Freeman. The theory emphasizes that organizational success depends on recognizing and balancing the interests of individuals and groups that influence or are affected by

organizational activities.

The theory is relevant to school feeding programmes because successful implementation involves numerous stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, county government, school administrators, teachers, feeding programme coordinators, School Management Committees, parents, learners, local farmers, agricultural extension officers, community leaders, and development partners.

Human resource management knowledge facilitates coordination among these stakeholders by ensuring that personnel understand their responsibilities and possess the competencies required to implement programme activities. Effective supervision, training, motivation, and accountability can strengthen collaboration and improve programme performance, thereby contributing to student retention.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component employed a descriptive correlational approach to examine relationships among the study variables, while the qualitative component explored stakeholders' experiences and perceptions through semi-structured interviews.

The design enabled the researcher to obtain statistical evidence concerning the relationship between human resource management knowledge and student retention while also obtaining contextual explanations of how human resource management practices operate within school feeding programmes.

A cross-sectional approach was used, allowing data to be collected at a single point in time without manipulating the study variables.

6.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kauma Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya. The area was purposively selected because it experiences recurrent drought, food insecurity, poverty, and climate variability. These conditions make school feeding particularly important for supporting learner participation and retention.

The area has also adopted climate-smart initiatives, including school gardens, local food sourcing, and

community participation in feeding programmes, making it appropriate for examining human resource management and student retention.

6.3 Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 120 stakeholders involved in climate-smart school feeding programmes. The population consisted of:

- 22 headteachers;
- 44 teachers;
- 22 school feeding programme coordinators;
- 22 School Management Committee members; and
- 10 county education or programme officials.

These respondents were selected because of their direct involvement in decision-making, resource allocation, coordination, implementation, and monitoring of school feeding programmes.

A **census approach** was used. All 120 members of the target population were included because the population was relatively small, manageable, and accessible. The approach eliminated sampling error associated with selecting a smaller sample.

6.4 Research Instruments

Two primary instruments were used:

1. **Structured questionnaires**, administered to headteachers and teachers; and
2. **Semi-structured interview guides**, used with school feeding programme coordinators, School Management Committee members, and county education or programme officials.

The questionnaire contained items addressing the study variables. Human resource management knowledge was assessed using indicators covering staff training, staffing adequacy, supervision, staff motivation, and knowledge building. Student retention was assessed through attendance, dropout, re-enrolment, and academic participation.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from **1 = Strongly Disagree** to **5 = Strongly Agree**.

Interviews were used to obtain detailed information on respondents' experiences, perceptions, and practices concerning human resource management and student retention.

6.5 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert evaluation. Five experts reviewed the research instruments, comprising university lecturers in project management, educational research, measurement and evaluation, and a practitioner experienced in climate-smart school feeding programmes.

The experts assessed the relevance of questionnaire and interview items using a four-point scale. A Content Validity Index of **0.80 or above** was considered acceptable.

Construct validity was strengthened by deriving questionnaire items from the study's objectives, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A pilot study involving **12 respondents**, equivalent to 10% of the target population, was conducted in schools excluded from the main study. The human resource management knowledge construct produced a Cronbach's alpha of **0.856**, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. A coefficient of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable.

For the qualitative component, dependability was enhanced through standardized interview procedures, detailed field notes, and an audit trail.

6.6 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in two phases. First, questionnaires were administered in person to headteachers and teachers. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality, and their participation rights.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school feeding programme coordinators, School Management Committee members, and county education or programme officials. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Secondary information was obtained from school attendance records, retention reports, and official education documents to complement and triangulate primary data.

6.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using **SPSS**. Data cleaning involved checking for missing values, outliers, inconsistencies, and errors.

Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Pearson correlation was used to examine the direction and strength of relationships among variables, while multiple linear regression was used to determine the predictive influence of human resource management knowledge while considering other resource-management variables.

Statistical tests were conducted at a **5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$)**. Regression assumptions, including linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and absence of multicollinearity, were assessed before conducting regression analysis.

The regression model was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Student retention;
- X_1 = Financial resource management knowledge;
- X_2 = Community resource coordination knowledge;
- X_3 = Human resource management knowledge;
- X_4 = Food resource management knowledge;
- β_0 = Constant;
- β_1 – β_4 = Regression coefficients; and
- ε = Error term.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically. Interview recordings were transcribed, repeatedly reviewed, coded, categorized, and organized into themes corresponding to the study objectives. Quantitative and qualitative findings were subsequently integrated through triangulation.

6.8 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the University's Institutional Ethics Review Committee and obtained a research permit from NACOSTI. Additional authorization was sought from relevant county and sub-county authorities and school administrators.

Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, duration, and intended use of the study. Written informed consent was obtained, and participation was voluntary. Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through identification codes rather than names. Hard-

copy materials were securely stored, while electronic data were password-protected and encrypted.

7. Results and Findings

7.1 Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics

All 120 targeted respondents participated, resulting in a 100% response rate.

The respondents comprised 56.7% males and 43.3% females, demonstrating relatively balanced gender representation. The largest age group was 36–45 years, followed by 26–35 years and 46–55 years.

In terms of academic qualifications, 62% had certificate-level qualifications, 25% had diplomas, 8% had degrees, and 5% had postgraduate qualifications.

Regarding work experience, 32.5% had 11–15 years of experience, 28.3% had 6–10 years, 24.2% had more than 15 years, while 15% had less than five years. This indicates that most respondents had substantial professional experience.

7.2 Human Resource Management Knowledge

The findings revealed weaknesses in several aspects of human resource management within school feeding programmes.

Respondents generally disagreed that teachers and support staff were adequately trained to manage school feeding programmes, with a mean of **2.22**. This indicates a perceived training deficit.

Similarly, respondents expressed low agreement that schools had sufficient staff to support feeding programme implementation, with a mean of **2.31**, indicating staffing constraints.

The issue of staff motivation recorded a mean of **2.50**, reflecting neutral or mixed perceptions concerning whether staff motivation enhances feeding programme effectiveness.

Respondents were more positive regarding supervision, recording a mean of **2.82**, although this remained within a relatively moderate range.

Knowledge building received a mean of **2.98**, indicating that respondents recognized its contribution to staff performance.

The highest mean, **3.23**, was recorded for the statement that effective human resource management contributes to improved student retention. This demonstrates respondents' recognition of the importance of human resource management in keeping learners in school.

Overall, the findings indicate that although

respondents recognized the importance of human resource management, weaknesses remained in training, staffing adequacy, and motivation.

7.3 Student Retention

The findings showed strong agreement concerning the contribution of school feeding programmes to student retention.

Respondents agreed that school feeding programmes improve student attendance, with a mean of **4.05**. They also agreed that dropout rates had reduced because of school feeding programmes, with a mean of **4.18**.

Learner motivation to remain in school recorded a mean of **4.61**, while academic participation improved due to feeding programmes, recording a mean of **4.66**. Respondents further agreed that retention rates were higher in schools with feeding programmes, recording a mean of **4.68**.

The highest mean, **4.98**, was recorded for the statement that school feeding programmes contribute to long-term learner retention. This indicates very strong agreement among respondents concerning the long-term contribution of school feeding to keeping learners in school.

8. Regression Analysis

8.1 Model Summary

The regression model produced a correlation coefficient of **R = 0.509**, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the combined predictor variables and student retention.

The **R² value was 0.259**, meaning that the four predictor variables jointly explained **25.9% of the variation in student retention**. The adjusted R² was 0.233.

The results demonstrate that resource-management factors collectively contribute to explaining differences in student retention, although other factors not included in the model account for a substantial proportion of the variation.

8.2 ANOVA Results

The ANOVA results showed that the overall regression model was statistically significant:

F = 10.037, p = 0.000.

Since the significance level was below 0.05, the four predictor variables jointly had a statistically significant relationship with student retention.

8.3 Regression Coefficients

Human resource management knowledge was the **strongest and only statistically significant individual predictor** of student retention in the regression model.

It recorded:

- **B = 0.508**
- **$\beta = 0.466$**
- **t = 5.674**
- **p = 0.000**

The positive coefficient indicates that improvements in human resource management knowledge were associated with improvements in student retention, holding the other variables constant.

The other predictors were not statistically significant:

- Financial resource management knowledge: **$\beta = -0.023$, p = 0.869;**
- Community resource coordination knowledge: **$\beta = 0.031$, p = 0.827;** and
- Food resource management knowledge: **$\beta = 0.130$, p = 0.126.**

Therefore, human resource management knowledge emerged as the strongest predictor of student retention in the study.

9. Hypothesis Testing

The study tested the null hypothesis that human resource management knowledge has no statistically significant influence on student retention.

The regression results produced **$\beta = 0.466$ and p = 0.000**. Since the p-value was below the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was **rejected**.

The study therefore established that:

Human resource management knowledge has a positive and statistically significant influence on student retention in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya.

10. Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results and provided explanations for the observed relationship.

Staff Training

Interviewees reported that training was irregular and inadequate. Staff occasionally received training in areas such as food safety, nutrition, kitchen hygiene, and climate-smart agriculture, but respondents indicated that these sessions were not sufficiently

regular. Continuous training was viewed as necessary for strengthening staff capacity.

Staffing Adequacy

Respondents reported shortages of trained cooks and support personnel. Staffing shortages were considered particularly problematic in schools with high learner enrolment because limited personnel made it difficult to implement feeding activities efficiently.

Supervision

The qualitative findings indicated that regular supervision improved accountability and service delivery. Recognition of teachers' and cooks' efforts was also viewed as a means of encouraging commitment to programme implementation.

Staff Motivation

Low remuneration was identified as a significant challenge. Respondents noted that inadequate compensation made it difficult to retain cooks and casual workers. Volunteer support could also decline during farming seasons, creating additional difficulties for programme continuity.

Student Retention

Participants consistently linked effective human resource management to reliable feeding programme implementation. When programmes operate consistently and learners receive meals regularly, attendance improves, absenteeism decreases, and student retention is strengthened.

11. Discussion of Findings

The study established that human resource management knowledge was the strongest and only statistically significant predictor of student retention, with $\beta = 0.466$ and $p = 0.000$.

The results suggest that the knowledge and competencies of personnel involved in school feeding are critical to programme effectiveness. Although respondents identified inadequate training, staffing shortages, and motivation challenges, they also recognized that effective supervision and continuous knowledge building can improve programme implementation.

The findings were consistent with previous studies cited in the document, including research by Mwikali

and Ndunda (2023), Kitsao and Mwadzaya (2024), Mushi and Kimaro (2025), Achieng and Ocen (2023), Banda and Mwale (2024), and Mwanza and Tembo (2022). These studies similarly emphasized the importance of staff competencies, training, leadership, and human resource management in sustaining school feeding programmes and improving learner retention. The qualitative findings further reinforced the quantitative evidence. Schools with committed and competent teachers, cooks, and support staff were perceived to provide more consistent feeding services. Reliable meals increase parents' confidence in schools and encourage learners to attend regularly.

The study consequently identified human resource management knowledge as a critical institutional intervention for strengthening climate-smart school feeding programmes and enhancing student retention.

12. Conclusion

The study concluded that **human resource management knowledge positively and significantly influences student retention** in climate-smart school feeding programmes in Kauma Sub-County, Kilifi County.

Although schools face challenges associated with inadequate staff training, insufficient staffing levels, and varying levels of staff motivation, effective supervision, continuous knowledge building, and sound human resource management were found to strengthen feeding programme implementation.

The regression results confirmed that human resource management knowledge was the strongest predictor among the variables examined. The findings demonstrate that investment in personnel knowledge and competencies is essential for sustaining reliable school feeding programmes and improving learner retention.

Strengthening human resource management systems can therefore help schools maintain consistent feeding services, improve learner attendance and participation, reduce dropout, and support long-term retention.

13. Recommendations

13.1 Continuous Professional Development

The **Teachers Service Commission (TSC)**, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Education** and the State Department for Basic Education, should establish continuous professional development programmes for

headteachers, teachers, and support staff involved in climate-smart school feeding programmes.

Training should address programme management, food safety, nutrition, climate-smart agriculture, monitoring, and resource management.

13.2 Minimum Staffing Standards

The Ministry of Education should establish minimum staffing standards for schools implementing school feeding programmes. Additional support staff should be provided to schools experiencing significant shortages.

Adequate staffing would reduce workload pressures and improve the efficiency and reliability of feeding programme implementation.

13.3 Knowledge-Building Programmes

The County Government of Kilifi, in collaboration with development partners, should facilitate regular knowledge-building workshops covering:

- Food safety;
- Nutrition;
- Financial management;
- Programme monitoring;
- Climate-smart agricultural practices; and
- School feeding programme management.

Regular capacity building would ensure that staff remain equipped to respond to emerging programme and climate-related challenges.

13.4 Staff Motivation

Boards of Management should develop staff motivation strategies, including recognition programmes, supportive supervision, and improved working conditions.

Improved motivation can strengthen staff commitment, reduce turnover among cooks and support workers, and improve programme performance.

13.5 Strengthening Programme Sustainability

Human resource interventions should be integrated into broader school feeding programme planning. The sustainability of climate-smart feeding programmes requires not only food and financial resources but also competent, adequately staffed, supervised, motivated, and knowledgeable personnel.

Strengthening human resource management can consequently improve the quality and consistency of

feeding services and contribute to improved attendance, reduced dropout, and enhanced student retention.

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