

**STAFFING CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN PUBLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF GATANGA DISTRICT, MURANG'A COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the staffing practices employed by public primary schools in Gatanga District. Specifically, the study sought to identify the staffing levels in the District, the staffing challenges faced by public primary schools in Gatanga District and to investigate the coping strategies employed by headteachers in Gatanga District. This study utilized a mixed research methodology using a descriptive research design. The study was conducted in public primary schools in Gatanga District in the month of August 2013. The population of the study was drawn from all teachers, headteachers and District Staffing Officers in Gatanga District. The total sampling frame within the population was 646 from which a total sample size of 211 was used in this study representing 33% of the total population. Data for this study was collected using a questionnaire for headteachers and teachers, and structured interviews for the District Staffing Officer. The questionnaires included both open ended and closed questions. Data was analyzed using SPSS for descriptive analysis of means, modes and standard deviations. Analyzed data was presented using figures and tables. According to the headteachers most schools had an average of 376 students and 12 teachers in each school. However, some schools had very many pupils (900) while others had very few pupils (68). Similarly, some schools had nine teachers while others had 25 teachers especially the schools with a high population of pupils. The average number of pupils per class in Gatanga District was 41 – 50 pupils. Further analysis of the staffing levels data indicated that the average number of pupils per teacher in each school ranged between 30 - 35 teachers per while the mean ratio for the District was 33 pupils per teacher. Head teacher related factors, teacher specific, government bureaucracy, geographical factors and working conditions affected the levels of staffing in Gatanga District. According to this study, inability to measure the performance and effectiveness of teachers and the lack of training on staffing were some of the major headteacher specific factors affecting staffing. Teacher specific factors influencing staffing were negative attitude of teachers and teachers' preferences and tastes. Delay in hiring, late transfer of funds and inflexible regulations were the major government bureaucracy factors influencing staffing in the district. The geographical factors influencing staffing were preference to teach in hardship areas for higher salaries and preference to teach in schools close their homes. Working conditions factors influencing staffing were: conducive working environment, teacher workload and teacher motivation. The major coping strategies employed by headteachers in the District were: frequent meetings to discuss staffing and how to distribute classes, improved working conditions through enhanced discipline and performance, use of alternative paths to teacher; and mentoring of teachers.