

Teachers' Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion and its Impact on Turnover Intention in the Gambian Basic and Secondary Education Sector

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ABSTRACT

The absence of a transparent and merit-based promotion policy in public education systems poses a critical threat to workforce stability and quality. This study investigated teachers' perceptions of this longevity-based promotion system and its impact on their turnover intention. Grounded in Organizational Justice Theory, the research employed a mixed-method, research approach. Data were collected via an online questionnaire from 500 teachers across the country with an addition of 8 teachers who participated in interviews. Validated scales measured perceptions of promotion (distributive and procedural justice) and turnover intention. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and hierarchical multiple regression were used for analysis.

Teachers reported negative perceptions of the longevity-based promotion system with distributive justice rated particularly low. This reflects strong feelings that promotions are unfairly tied to years of service rather than qualifications, performance, or effort. Procedural justice was also viewed negatively ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.79$), highlighting perceived deficiencies in transparency, consistency, and opportunities for input. Qualitative findings reinforced these perceptions, with teachers describing the system as inequitable and opaque, limiting recognition of professional growth and contributing to frustration and feelings of stagnation. These systemic issues were reflected in turnover intentions: 61.4% of teachers reported high intent to leave. A strong, negative correlation was observed between promotion perceptions and turnover intention ($r = -0.712$, $p < .001$). Hierarchical regression confirmed that negative perceptions of the promotion system were the strongest predictor of turnover intention ($\beta = -0.703$, $p < .001$). This explains the 45.6% of the variance, and mediating the effect of years of service. Male teachers reported significantly more negative perceptions than female teachers ($M = 2.02$ vs. 2.29 , $t(498) = -3.724$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.36$). Qualitative insights highlighted that lack of merit-based advancement and procedural transparency drives teachers' considerations of leaving the sector, particularly among younger and ambitious professionals.

Keywords: Teacher Turnover, Promotion Policy, Longevity, Organizational Justice, The Gambia, Basic and Secondary Education.

INTRODUCTION

The efficacy of any national education system is fundamentally predicated on the quality, motivation, and stability of its teaching workforce. As the primary implementers of curriculum and policy, teachers are the most critical in-school determinant of student learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2014). The mechanisms that govern teacher management, from recruitment, deployment, motivation, and career progression, are not mere administrative functions but strategic levers for educational development and systemic reform. In The Gambia, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) bears the constitutional mandate for the provision of quality education, overseeing a sector that serves as the foundation for national human capital development. However, the sector's potential for transformative growth is persistently challenged by a human resource management paradigm that fails adequately to incentivize excellence.

A strong pillar for strategic human resource management is a transparent, fair, and competitive promotion system. Globally, effective promotion policies are characterized by clear criteria that balance experience

(longevity) with demonstrated competence, qualifications, and performance (Oduma, 2015). Such meritocratic systems are recognized as vital for organizational justice, enhancing employee motivation, job satisfaction, and commitment (Colquitt et al., 2001). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and its accompanying Teacher Target (SDG 4.c) explicitly advocate for policies that improve teacher motivation, retention, and professional status (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016).

A critical examination of The Gambia's educational administrative framework reveals a profound institutional gap. Despite the existence of a Teaching Cadre Scheme of Service and general civil service regulations such as the General Order (GO), the MoBSE operates without a validated, transparent, and publicly accessible teacher-specific promotion policy (National Education Policy 2016-2030). In practice, this vacuum has resulted in a de facto promotion regime almost exclusively based on longevity, the mere accumulation of years in service. This system marginalizes professional qualifications, further training, classroom performance, leadership initiative, and subject-specific expertise. This practice is an open secret within the sector, widely acknowledged by practitioners and implied in strategic documents that lament the lack of incentives for good performance.

According to earlier studies, the repercussions of this longevity-based system are multifaceted and deleterious. First, it constitutes a direct contravention of the principles of distributive and procedural justice in organizational psychology. Teachers tend to feel disconnected between their inputs (higher qualifications, innovative pedagogy, extra duties) and the distributive outcome, promotion (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This perceived injustice erodes trust in the system and demoralizes the workforce. It also actively disincentivizes professional development. When additional diplomas, degrees, or certifications yield no tangible career acceleration, the economic and motivational rationale for pursuing them is severely weakened.

Most critically, this policy environment precipitates a severe Turnover crisis, particularly among the cohort of early-career, highly competent teachers. The Gambian education sector, like many in Sub-Saharan Africa, invests in training graduate teachers and education specialists, only to see a significant number depart for other sectors, such as burgeoning NGOs, private international schools, or administrative roles in other government ministries, or seek opportunities abroad (commonly referred to as the "Gambian teacher exodus"). The National Education Policy 2016-2030 itself identifies teacher Turnover as a key challenge. For ambitious and talented professionals, the absence of a merit-based growth trajectory signals a career ceiling, leading to frustration and exit. This results in a perpetual loss of innovative capacity, a constant cycle of inexperienced staff, and ultimately, the stagnation of educational quality, a direct contributor to the slow development of the sector as observed. Existing studies focus broadly on teacher motivation or challenges but lack a targeted analysis of the promotion policy as an independent variable.

Against this backdrop, this research is urgently carried out. It aims to move the discourse from anecdotal complaint to data-driven analysis by assessing the perceptions of basic and secondary school teachers regarding the longevity-based promotion system and rigorously examining its correlation with their Turnover intentions. The findings are intended to provide MoBSE, the Public Service Commission, and educational stakeholders with actionable, evidence-based insights. The ultimate goal is to catalyze the development of a validated, transparent, and merit-integrative promotion policy which is a foundational step towards enhancing professional morale, retaining top talent, and accelerating the quality-driven development of The Gambia's basic and secondary education sector.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Gambian education sector is confronted with a paradoxical challenge. While the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) has articulated ambitious goals for quality enhancement under its Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2021-2030 (MoBSE, 2021), its capacity to achieve these aims is critically undermined by systemic human resource deficiencies, particularly the erosion of a stable, motivated, and professionally rewarded teaching corps. This erosion manifests in a persistent attrition of teaching talent, a phenomenon the National Education Policy 2016-2030 directly links to "lack of incentives" and "limited career progression" (MoBSE, 2016, p. 40). Importantly, this attrition is not random but is hypothesized to selectively impact early-career and high-potential educators who may perceive a disconnect between their professional inputs and the institutional mechanisms for recognition and advancement (World Bank, 2018).

The core of this institutional failing lies in the operational framework for teacher career progression. Despite the ESSP's emphasis on Teacher Professionalization and Motivation, the sector lacks a codified, meritocratic, and transparent promotion policy (MoBSE, 2021). In practice, career advancement within MoBSE is governed by inherited civil service regulations that prioritize seniority (longevity in post) over demonstrable competencies, further qualifications, or teaching performance which is a model at odds with global evidence on effective teacher management. Research consistently indicates that promotion systems perceived as procedurally unjust and distributively inequitable where rewards are unlinked to effort or merit, corrode job satisfaction and organizational commitment which are key antecedents of turnover intention (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Oduma, 2015). This misalignment between individual merit and organizational reward represents a fundamental breach of the psychological contract, fostering professional cynicism and exit behaviors (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994).

Therefore, this study addresses a critical evidence gap by seeking to generate empirical insights to answer three pivotal questions. The research provides an evidentiary foundation essential for transforming the promotion policy from a presumed contributor to sectoral malaise into a targeted lever for professional motivation, talent retention, and systemic improvement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are teachers' perceptions of longevity based promotion? What is the Turnover intention status of teachers in The Gambia?

What is the relationship between Longevity-Based Promotion Practices and Turnover Intention?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds significant theoretical and practical importance, addressing a critical areas of human resource management and educational development within a low-resource, public-sector context. Theoretically, it contributes to the discourse on organizational justice by testing the application of equity theory and psychological contract frameworks in a non-Western, bureaucratic civil service environment. It provides an empirical case study on how the violation of procedural and distributive justice translates into concrete withdrawal cognitions (turnover intention), thereby extending models of teacher motivation beyond remuneration to encompass career progression structures. Practically, the findings offer the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) of The Gambia and the Public Service Commission a data-driven, diagnostic audit of a core systemic flaw implicated in the sector's brain drain. The research moves advocacy from anecdote to evidence, providing the necessary leverage for policymakers to prioritize the development of a validated, transparent, and merit-integrative career progression policy. Ultimately, this research serves as a crucial evidence base for breaking the cycle of demoralization and attrition, aiming to transform promotion policy from a contributor to stagnation into a catalyst for professionalization and educational quality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To systematically investigate the relationship between teachers' perceptions of a longevity-based promotion system and their intention to stay on the profession, this study is anchored in Organizational Justice Theory, specifically the multidimensional model developed by Colquitt (2001). This framework provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing the core problem, as it directly addresses perceptions of fairness in organizational procedures and outcomes.

Organizational Justice Theory argues that employees' attitudes and behaviors are profoundly influenced by their assessments of fairness within their workplace. These assessments are categorized into distinct, but interrelated, dimensions. For this research, two core dimensions are paramount: Distributive Justice and Procedural Justice. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the outcomes or allocations one receives, judged against a relevant rule such as equity (inputs relative to outcomes), equality, or need (Adams, 1965; Leventhal, 1976). In the context of MoBSE, the promotion outcome, awarded primarily for longevity, is likely to be perceived as

distributively unjust by teachers who invest additional inputs such as higher qualifications, exemplary performance, or leadership initiatives, as these inputs are not proportionately rewarded.

Procedural justice, conversely, concerns the perceived fairness of the processes and methods used to determine those outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Leventhal, 1980). Key principles include consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality. The absence of a validated, transparent promotion policy in The Gambia's basic and secondary education sector inherently violates these principles. The process is seen as opaque, inconsistent, and outside the teachers' control, lacking clear, communicated criteria against which they can gauge their career progression.

The theory further establishes that when employees perceive injustices, either in outcomes (distributive) or processes (procedural), they experience negative affective states such as anger, frustration, and resentment. These states, in turn, drive a range of counterproductive work behaviors and withdrawal cognitions, with turnover intention being a primary and well-documented consequence (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013). The logic is sequential: an unfair procedure (longevity-only promotion) leads to an unfair outcome (lack of recognition for merit), which generates perceived injustice, resulting in reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and culminating in the intention to withdraw from the organization.

Therefore, Organizational Justice Theory is not merely an adjacent concept but the foundational scaffold for this study. It theoretically explains why a longevity-based promotion system would be problematic. It also provides the predictive pathway linking these perceptions to the key dependent variable, Turnover intention. The research questions flow directly from this framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Empirical research globally highlights that the structure and perceived fairness of promotion systems are critical determinants of teacher motivation and career satisfaction. A seminal quantitative study by Chiong, Lim, and Ch'ng (2017) in Malaysia found that when teachers perceived their organization's promotion system as transparent and merit-based, it significantly enhanced their career satisfaction and reduced feelings of stagnation. On the other hand, systems perceived as biased had the opposite effect. This finding is supported by work in Nigeria, where Okeke and Mtyuda (2017), through a survey of secondary school teachers, established a strong positive correlation between merit-based promotion opportunities and teachers' commitment to their schools. Their regression analysis showed that the perceived likelihood of advancement based on performance was a more powerful predictor of organizational commitment than salary satisfaction alone. In a different context, a mixed-methods study in Kenya by Muthoni (2020) revealed that the subjective experience of a "blocked" career path, often due to politicized or seniority-heavy promotion panels, was a primary source of frustration, particularly for younger, university-educated teachers. These studies collectively indicate that the mechanics of promotion are not merely administrative but are deeply psychological, influencing a teacher's sense of professional worth and future within the system.

The specific model of seniority or longevity-based promotion has been the subject of empirical scrutiny, with consistent findings highlighting its demotivating effects. An extensive quantitative analysis of U.S. public school systems by Fuller, Mansour, and Pendola (2019) examined districts with strict "step-and-lane" salary schedules tied solely to years of experience and educational credits. Their hierarchical linear modeling demonstrated that while these systems provided predictability, they also flattened performance incentives and were associated with lower reported levels of innovative teaching practices compared to districts with more differentiated career ladders. In Sub-Saharan Africa, qualitative case study research by Akyeampong (2017) in Ghana documented teacher narratives describing seniority-based promotion as a "waiting game" that discouraged initiative. Teachers reported that once minimal service requirements were met, there was little professional incentive to excel, as extra effort would not accelerate advancement. This created a culture of minimal compliance. Further empirical evidence from a large-scale survey in Tanzania by Nguvulu and Biao (2021) quantified this effect, finding a significant negative correlation between the perceived dominance of seniority in promotion decisions and teachers' self-reported levels of intrinsic motivation. The more teachers believed longevity was the primary criterion, the lower their motivation to engage in continuous professional development.

The construct of organizational justice provides a robust framework for understanding teacher reactions to promotion policies. Empirical validation of this framework in educational settings is strong. A quantitative study by Iqbal, Ahmad, and Nazir (2018) involving 650 college teachers in Pakistan used structural equation modeling to confirm that perceptions of distributive justice (fairness of outcomes) and procedural justice (fairness of processes) were significant direct predictors of job satisfaction. Their model showed that procedural justice perceptions also indirectly influenced turnover intention through their impact on satisfaction. Similarly, research by Ofori and Attiogbe (2019) in Ghanaian technical universities employed multiple regression analysis on survey data. They found that teachers' perceptions of procedural justice in administrative decisions, including promotions, accounted for a significant variance in organizational citizenship behavior. When procedures were seen as inconsistent or biased, discretionary effort declined. These findings are mirrored in Western contexts. A longitudinal panel study by Frenzel, Taxer, and Schwab (2019) following German teachers over three years found that a decline in perceptions of procedural justice from school leadership predicted a subsequent increase in emotional exhaustion which is a key component of burnout and a precursor to turnover intention.

Teacher turnover intention, as the planned withdrawal from the profession or institution, has been extensively modeled as the final step in a chain of negative workplace perceptions. Meta-analytic work by Borman and Dowling (2008) consolidated findings from over thirty quantitative studies, identifying poor administrative support, limited advancement opportunities, and perceived unfairness as consistent predictors of turnover intention, beyond the oft-cited factor of salary. A more recent and methodologically sophisticated study by Sorensen and Ladd (2020) used survival analysis on state-wide data from the United States. They demonstrated that teachers in schools with weaker leadership support and less collegial collaboration had significantly higher "hazard rates" of actually leaving the profession, with intention surveys serving as a reliable proximal predictor of this behavior.

In Africa, empirical research specifically links policy environments to attrition. Mulenga and Mwanza's (2022) quantitative study in Zambia, using logistic regression, identified lack of clear career progression as one of the top three factors, alongside workload and remuneration, that statistically increased the odds of a teacher actively seeking alternative employment. Their study differentiated between intention and action, showing that intention strongly predicted job-search behavior.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, specifically an explanatory sequential design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study begins with a quantitative phase using a descriptive survey design, followed by a qualitative phase aimed at explaining and enriching the quantitative findings. This design facilitates the systematic collection of data from a sample of a population to describe current conditions (perceptions and intentions) and to examine the relationships that exist between variables without any manipulation (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The cross-sectional nature of the survey, administered at a single point in time, enables an efficient snapshot of the prevailing attitudes and their interconnections within the teaching workforce.

To complement and deepen the quantitative findings, the qualitative phase incorporates semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected subset of participants. This phase seeks to explore in greater depth the reasons underlying teachers' perceptions, the lived experiences surrounding promotion practices, and the contextual factors influencing their decisions to remain in or leave the profession. The qualitative data help explain patterns observed in the statistical results and provide insights that may not be fully captured through structured survey instruments.

The integration of both methods enhances the validity and credibility of the study through triangulation. While the quantitative data establish measurable relationships and generalizable patterns, the qualitative findings offer contextual interpretation and explanatory depth. This mixed-methods approach therefore aligns with the study's objectives to (1) describe teachers' perceptions and retention intentions, (2) determine the degree and nature of their association, and (3) provide contextual understanding of how promotion practices influence teachers' career decisions within the Gambian education sector.

The target population for this study comprised all professionally qualified teachers employed by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) in The Gambia across both basic and secondary cycles. A simple sampling technique was employed, targeting teachers through their professional networks. The study utilized online teacher association platforms, prominent social media groups dedicated to Gambian teachers, mainly WhatsApp to disseminate the survey. This approach yields a statistically representative sample, ensured wide geographic and demographic reach across the country's regions.

Participation was entirely voluntary, with the survey link accompanied by a detailed participant information sheet outlining the study's purpose, anonymity guarantees, and data usage protocols. A total of five hundred and thirty (530) teachers commenced the survey. After a rigorous data cleaning process that removed incomplete responses, straight-lining patterns (identical responses across large sets of items), and responses completed in an implausibly short duration, a final valid sample of $N = 500$ was retained for analysis. An addition of 8 teachers were added for the qualitative part, making the total sample 508 participants. This sample size is deemed more than adequate for the planned statistical analyses, providing sufficient power for correlation and regression tests (Cohen, 1992). The demographic profile of respondents included variation in years of service, academic qualification, geographic location, and school level, providing a diverse cross-section of the teaching corps for analysis.

For the qualitative phase of the study, purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide relevant insights into the promotion system. A total of eight teachers were interviewed, with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. Selection criteria required participants to have served for at least five years in the education sector, to have been formally confirmed by the Public Service Commission, the body responsible for teacher appointments and promotions, and to be willing to participate in an audio-recorded interview. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience with the promotion system and could provide informed perspectives on how longevity-based promotion practices influence their professional experiences and retention intentions.

Data Collection, Instrumentation and Measures

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered online questionnaire. The instrument was divided into four sections. Section A collected demographic and professional data, including years of teaching service, highest academic qualification. Section B measured the independent variable, Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion (PLBP), using a 12-item scale adapted from Colquitt's (2001) Organizational Justice Scale. Items were modified to specifically address promotion contexts. This scale captured both Distributive Justice (fairness of the promotion outcome) and Procedural Justice (fairness of the promotion process) sub-dimensions. Section C measured the dependent variable, Turnover Intention (RI), using a validated 4-item scale from Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978). All items in Sections B and C employed a five-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with appropriate reverse-coding for negatively worded items. Section D contained one open-ended item soliciting suggestions for improving the promotion system, providing qualitative context for the quantitative findings. The instrument was subjected to a pilot test with 30 teachers not included in the main study to assess clarity, face validity, and the reliability of the scales. Based on pilot feedback, minor wording adjustments were made to enhance contextual understanding.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the psychometric rigor of the adapted scales, tests for validity and reliability were conducted on the data from the main study ($N=500$). Content validity was established during the instrument development phase through expert review by two senior academics in educational administration. Construct validity was assessed via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) which confirmed the two-factor structure for the PLBP scale and the single-factor structure for the RI scale. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity was satisfactory, with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.5. The internal consistency reliability of the scales, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, was found to be excellent, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Scale Reliability Statistics

Scale/Sub-scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Perceptions of LBP (PLBP) – Total	12	.91	.58
Distributive Justice Sub-scale	6	.87	.62
Procedural Justice Sub-scale	6	.89	.61
Turnover Intention (RI)	4	.84	.65

DATA ANALYSIS

All the data analysis for the quantitative part was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. The cleaned dataset was first screened for missing values, normality, and outliers to meet the assumptions of parametric tests. The analysis proceeded in three phases, directly aligned with the research questions. All data for the qualitative part were analysed using thematic approach.

To answer Research Question 1 which was about teachers' perceptions of longevity-based promotion, descriptive statistics were the primary analytical tool. The mean score and standard deviation for the overall PLBP scale and its two sub-scales (Distributive and Procedural Justice) were computed. Given that the Likert-scale data are treated as interval for the purpose of analysis (as is standard practice in social science research when using validated multi-item scales), the mean provides a direct measure of the central tendency of perceptions. A mean score below the scale midpoint (3.0) would indicate a negative or unfair perception, while a score above 3.0 would indicate a positive or fair perception. The standard deviation quantified the degree of consensus or divergence in these views among the teacher sample. Thematic approach was used to analyse the interview data for research question 1.

Research Question 2 which was about turnover intention of basic and secondary school teachers in The Gambia, employed frequency distributions and descriptive statistics. The mean score for the overall Turnover Intention scale was calculated. Furthermore, to provide a more interpretable metric for stakeholders, the percentage of teachers exhibiting high turnover intention was derived. Respondents with a mean score of 4.0 or above on the RI scale (i.e., Agree or Strongly Agree with statements about leaving) were categorized as having "High Turnover Intention" (in reality, high turnover intention). This dichotomization facilitated a clear presentation of the scale of the potential attrition problem. The qualitative part was analysed using thematic approach to put similar opinions into common themes.

To answer Research Question 3 which was about the relationship between Longevity-Based Promotion and turnover Intention, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was first computed to assess the strength and direction of the bivariate linear relationship between the composite PLBP score and the composite RI score. Subsequently, to model the predictive relationship and control for potential confounding demographic variables, a standard multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Turnover Intention was entered as the dependent variable. The independent variables were entered in two blocks: Block 1 contained the demographic controls, and Block 2 added the composite PLBP score. This hierarchical approach allowed for the assessment of the unique variance in Turnover intention explained by promotion perceptions after accounting for the demographic factors.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to stringent ethical principles. Formal ethical approval was sought obtained even though the entire research was independently done by the researchers. Informed consent was obtained digitally from all participants at the beginning of the survey. Anonymity was guaranteed, as no personally identifiable information

was collected. Data were stored on a password-protected server, and findings are reported in aggregate form only. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence.

FINDINGS

The findings provide teachers’ perceptions of the existing promotion system and their current intentions regarding Turnover. The data presented here offer empirical evidence of the systemic challenges arising from the absence of a validated merit-based promotion policy.

RQ1: Teachers’ Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion

Descriptive statistics were computed for the composite Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion (PLBP) scale and its two sub-scales: Distributive Justice and Procedural Justice. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), with a neutral midpoint of 3.0.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion (PLBP)

Scale	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
PLBP (Composite)	2.18	0.73
Distributive Justice Sub-scale	1.95	0.81
Procedural Justice Sub-scale	2.41	0.79

As detailed in Table 2, the composite mean score for the PLBP scale is 2.18 (SD = 0.73), which falls substantially below the scale’s neutral midpoint of 3.0. This indicates a pronouncedly negative overall perception of the longevity-based promotion system among the sampled teachers. The breakdown into sub-scales reveals the dimensions of this negativity. The mean for the Distributive Justice sub-scale is 1.95 (SD = 0.81), approaching the "Strongly Disagree" anchor. This demonstrates that teachers overwhelmingly perceive the outcomes of the promotion system, where longevity is the primary determinant, as highly unfair, failing to correspond to their professional inputs such as qualifications, performance, or extra responsibilities.

The mean for the Procedural Justice sub-scale is 2.41 (SD = 0.79), also below the neutral point. This indicates a negative perception of the processes governing promotion. Teachers view the procedures as lacking in transparency, consistency, and opportunities for appeal or voice. The slightly higher mean for procedural justice compared to distributive justice suggests that while the process is seen as flawed, the resulting outcome, advancement based solely on time served, is viewed as even more inequitable. The standard deviations for all scales, ranging from 0.73 to 0.81, indicate a moderate degree of dispersion, yet the consistently low mean scores confirm that negative perceptions are widespread and not limited to a specific subgroup.

The qualitative phase provides deeper insight into teachers’ perceptions of longevity-based promotion and how these perceptions influence their retention intentions. Thematic analysis of the eight interviews generated themes that are presented below.

Degree of Fairness of the Promotion Outcomes

Participants described the promotion system as unfair because advancement is based primarily on years served rather than merit, qualification, or performance. Several teachers expressed frustration that professional inputs are not rewarded.

T1 explains: “It does not matter how hard you work or how qualified you are. If someone has stayed longer than you, they move ahead. That is not fair.”

T4: “I upgraded my qualification, but nothing changed. Promotion is not about competence or qualification; it is about time.”

T7: “You can be innovative and dedicated, but the system does not recognize that. It only counts how many years you have sat in the service.”

These responses show that teachers perceive the promotion outcomes as inequitable and misaligned with professional effort. This system may actually contribute to a lot of teachers leaving the sector to take roles in other sectors.

Transparency in the Process

Consistent with the low procedural justice, participants also criticized the transparency and clarity of the promotion procedures.

T2: “There is no clear guideline that explains how promotion decisions are made. We just wait and hope.”

T6: “Even if the outcome is not good, at least let the process be clear. But we don’t even understand how decisions are finalized.”

While participants acknowledged that longevity provides objectivity, they emphasized that the system lacks mechanisms for performance recognition or transparency.

RQ2: Turnover Intention of Teachers

Analysis of the Turnover Intention (TI) scale, also measured on a 5-point Likert agreement scale, provided clear evidence of a workforce at risk.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics and Frequency Distribution for Turnover Intention

Statistic	Value
Mean (M)	3.82
Standard Deviation (SD)	0.88
% with High Turnover Intention (TI Score \geq 4.0)	61.4%

The composite mean score for the Turnover Intention scale is 3.82 (SD = 0.88), as shown in Table 3. This score lies above the scale midpoint and approaches the Agree response category (4.0), signifying a generally high level of agreement with statements about leaving the profession. To present a more policy-relevant indicator, teachers with a mean TI score of 4.0 or higher were categorized as having High Turnover Intention. This classification revealed that a substantial majority, 61.4% of the sample, falls into this high-risk category. This finding quantifies a profound Turnover crisis, indicating that well over half of the responding teachers are actively contemplating departure from the public education sector.

The qualitative findings provide additional explanation about teachers’ intention to leave the teaching field for other areas. Excerpts from the interviews are presented below. The interviews revealed that most participants had contemplated leaving the public education sector, reinforcing the high turnover intention the quantitative findings.

T4: “Honestly, if I get another opportunity outside education, I will leave.”

T6: “I love teaching, but there is no growth for the young ones. Sometimes I ask myself how long I can continue like this.”

T7: “The lack of career progression makes you feel stuck. And when you feel stuck, you start looking elsewhere.”

T1: “It is not just about salary. It is about recognition and growth. When those are missing, you don’t see a future here.”

T4: “With time, you adjust your expectations. But younger teachers are not willing to wait that long.”

This are perceptions from teachers who are currently in the system. If careful attention is not given to these factors, a lot of young and talented teachers may leave for other sectors.

RQ3: The Relationship between Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion and Turnover Intention

A two-stage analytical process was employed to answer this question. First, a Pearson’s product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the initial bivariate relationship. Second, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive power of promotion perceptions on Turnover intention while statistically controlling for key demographic variables, including gender, given its potential influence.

Bivariate Correlation

The Pearson correlation analysis tested the linear relationship between the composite scores for Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion (PLBP) and Turnover Intention (TI). The analysis revealed a strong, negative, and statistically significant correlation.

Table 4: Correlation between PLBP and Turnover Intention

Variable	1	2
1. PLBP	-	
2. Turnover Intention	-.712	-

p < .001

As shown in Table 4, the correlation coefficient is r = -.712, p < .001. This indicates a strong inverse relationship. As teachers’ perceptions of the promotion system become more negative (lower PLBP scores), their intention to leave the profession (higher TI scores) increases substantially. This significant correlation provides the foundational evidence for a direct link between the two core variables of this study.

Predictive Relationship: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

A two-block hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to assess the unique contribution of promotion perceptions in predicting Turnover intention after accounting for demographic factors. Turnover Intention was the dependent variable. In Block 1, control variables were entered, and Gender (Male, Female). Block 2 added the composite PLBP score to examine its added explanatory power.

Table 5: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Turnover Intention

Model & Predictors	B	SE B	β	T	p	R ²
Model 1 (Demographics)						.085
Gender (Male)	0.241	0.078	.134	3.090	.002	
Years of Service	-0.108	0.043	-.112	-2.512	.012	
Qualification	0.067	0.051	.058	1.314	.189	

Location (Rural)	0.119	0.081	.063	1.469	.142	
School Level (Secondary)	0.092	0.079	.050	1.165	.244	

Model 1, the demographic variables alone explained a modest but significant 8.5% of the variance in Turnover Intention ($R^2 = .085$). Gender emerged as a significant predictor, with male teachers ($\beta = .134, p = .002$) reporting higher turnover intention than female teachers. Years of Service was also significant, with a negative beta ($\beta = -.112, p = .012$), indicating that more experienced teachers reported slightly lower intentions to leave.

Model 2 (Add PLBP)						.541	.456
Gender (Male)	0.153	0.058	.085	2.638	.009		
Years of Service	-0.049	0.032	-.051	-1.532	.126		
PLBP	-0.832	0.032	-.703	-26.019	<.001		

Note: Only statistically significant demographic predictors in the final model are shown with full statistics; others are summarized. Dummy coding: Gender (0=Female, 1=Male); Location (0=Urban, 1=Rural); School Level (0=Basic, 1=Secondary).

Model 2 shows that the addition of the Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion (PLBP) variable dramatically improved the model. The total variance explained jumped to 54.1%, with PLBP alone accounting for an additional 45.6% of the variance in Turnover Intention ($\Delta R^2 = .456$). This is a very large effect. In the final model, PLBP was by far the strongest predictor ($\beta = -.703, p < .001$), confirming its overwhelming influence. The negative standardized beta confirms the direction of the relationship: more negative perceptions predict higher turnover intention.

Notably, when PLBP was entered, the predictive significance of Years of Service was reduced to non-significance ($p = .126$). This suggests that the apparent effect of experience on Turnover intention is largely mediated through teachers' perceptions of the promotion system. Gender remained a significant but much smaller predictor in the final model ($\beta = .085, p = .009$), indicating that while male teachers express a higher intention to leave, this difference is eclipsed by the powerful effect of promotion perceptions shared across genders.

Gender Differences in Perceptions of Longevity Based-Promotion

Given the regression result for gender, an independent samples t-test was conducted to explore if the core independent variable, PLBP, differed significantly between male and female teachers.

Table 6: Gender Differences in Perceptions of Longevity-Based Promotion

Gender	N	Mean (PLBP)	SD	t (498)	p	Cohen's d
Male	210	2.02	0.70	-3.724	<.001	0.36
Female	290	2.29	0.72			

The analysis (Table 6) confirmed a statistically significant difference, $t(498) = -3.724, p < .001$. Male teachers ($M = 2.02, SD = 0.70$) held significantly more negative perceptions of the promotion system than their female colleagues ($M = 2.29, SD = 0.72$). The effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.36$) indicates a small-to-moderate practical difference. This helps contextualize the regression finding: male teachers' higher Turnover intention is associated with their more negative evaluation of the career advancement system.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The empirical findings of this study provide statistical explanation of a critical systemic pathology within the education sector. The data substantiate the anecdote that the absence of a validated, meritocratic promotion policy, replaced by a de facto longevity-based system, is a primary driver of professional discontent and a looming talent exodus. The strong negative correlation ($r = -.712$) and the substantial predictive power of promotion perceptions ($\beta = -.703$, $\Delta R^2 = .456$) in explaining Turnover intention offer compelling evidence that moves the discourse from anecdotal grievance to empirical diagnosis. This discussion interprets these findings through the lens of Organizational Justice Theory (Colquitt, 2001), situates them within the broader literature on teacher management in developing contexts. It highlights their novel contribution to understanding the specific mechanisms of attrition in bureaucratic public-sector education systems.

To deepen this empirical diagnosis, the qualitative findings provide narrative that aligns with the statistical relationships observed. Interview participants consistently described the promotion system as “discouraging,” “unfair,” and “demotivating,” reinforcing the quantitative evidence of widespread negative perceptions. One participant stated, “It does not matter how hard you work or how qualified you are. If someone has stayed longer than you, they move ahead.” Such accounts transform the statistical correlation into lived experience, demonstrating that the perceived injustice is not abstract but deeply internalized.

The profoundly negative perceptions of the promotion system, with distributive justice scores ($M=1.95$) indicating a near-total rejection of outcome fairness, align precisely with the theoretical predictions of equity theory (Adams, 1965). Teachers perceive a severe imbalance in the effort-reward ratio. Their professional inputs such as higher qualifications, innovative pedagogy, and additional responsibilities, are invested with the expectation of proportional career advancement. The longevity-based system, by design, renders these meritocratic inputs irrelevant, creating a profound state of distributive injustice. This finding extends the work of Akyeampong (2017) and Nguvulu & Biao (2021) by quantifying the intensity of this injustice perception within a specific educational context. The slightly higher, yet still negative, score for procedural justice ($M=2.41$) further illuminates the problem. It suggests teachers are not only aggrieved by the unfair outcome but also by the opaque and inconsistent process that delivers it, confirming Thibaut and Walker’s (1975) assertion that process control is vital for perceived fairness. The absence of a codified policy inherently violates Leventhal’s (1980) procedural justice rules of consistency, accuracy, and correctability, fostering a climate of arbitrariness and powerlessness. This dual violation of distributive and procedural justice creates the potent negative affective state like frustration, resentment, demoralization, that theory posits as the precursor to withdrawal behaviors.

The interview results corroborate the dual violation of distributive and procedural justice identified quantitatively. Teachers repeatedly emphasized that professional upgrading, innovation, and commitment yield no tangible advancement benefits. As one teacher explained, “I upgraded my qualification, but nothing changed. Promotion is not about competence; it is about time.” This directly mirrors the low distributive justice mean ($M = 1.95$). Furthermore, concerns about procedural opacity were vividly expressed. A participant remarked, “There is no clear guideline that explains how promotion decisions are made. We just wait and hope.” These narratives substantiate the procedural justice findings ($M = 2.41$) and concretize Leventhal’s (1980) framework by demonstrating how inconsistency and lack of transparency translate into feelings of powerlessness. Together, the qualitative and quantitative strands reveal not only dissatisfaction with outcomes but also erosion of trust in the institutional process itself.

A novel and critical insight from this study is the mediating role of promotion perceptions. The regression analysis revealed that when perceptions of the promotion system (PLBP) were accounted for, the initially significant effect of years of service on Turnover intention was rendered non-significant. This is a pivotal finding. It indicates that the oft-observed phenomenon of early-career teacher attrition is not simply a function of inexperience or age but is fundamentally channelled through their evaluation of the career structure. A young, ambitious teacher does not leave merely because they are young; they leave because the system signals that their ambition and competence will not be recognized or rewarded for decades. This reframes the Turnover challenge from a generic issue of “working conditions” to a specific, targetable failure in the strategic human resource architecture. It suggests that interventions focusing solely on initial training or early-career support, without concomitant reform of the advancement ladder, will be insufficient to stem the tide of departure.

The finding that male teachers held significantly more negative perceptions and reported higher turnover intention introduces an important gendered dimension to the discourse. While the effect size was moderate, it suggests that the perceived injustice of the longevity system may intersect with societal expectations of male career progression and breadwinning roles, potentially amplifying frustration. This aligns with broader sociological research indicating that men often report higher sensitivity to distributive injustice in contexts of blocked upward mobility. However, the overwhelming dominance of the PLBP variable in the final model underscores that this gendered difference, while noteworthy, is subsidiary to the universal, system-wide demoralization caused by the promotion policy. The crisis is generalized, affecting all teachers, but is acutely felt by those for whom career advancement is a paramount professional goal.

The interviews provide explanatory depth to this mediating mechanism. Several teachers explicitly linked their intention to leave to the promotion structure rather than to teaching itself. One participant stated, “It is not just about salary. It is about recognition and growth. When those are missing, you don’t see a future here.” This clarifies that turnover intention is cognitively anchored in perceived career stagnation. Importantly, more experienced participants expressed a form of adaptive resignation, with one noting, “With time, you adjust your expectations. But younger teachers are not willing to wait that long.” This insight helps explain why years of service initially predicted turnover but lost significance once promotion perceptions were entered into the regression model.

The quantification of Turnover intention reveals a sector in acute crisis, with over 61% of teachers at high risk of departure. This figure transcends the normative challenges of teacher turnover documented in meta-analyses like Borman and Dowling’s (2008) and provides a stark, context-specific metric of system failure. It empirically validates the concerns flagged in MoBSE’s own policy documents (MoBSE, 2016, 2021) and aligns with the regional patterns observed by Mulenga and Mwanza (2022). The strong linkage of this intention to promotion perceptions provides a clear causal pathway: an unfair system begets discontent, which begets the intention to leave. This creates a vicious cycle of stagnation, where the departure of competent, often younger teachers further entrenches a system run by those who have simply endured the longest, not necessarily those who are the most effective, thereby perpetuating the very conditions that drive attrition.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Despite the contributions of this study, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis did not incorporate additional demographic and contextual moderating variables such as school location (urban versus rural), qualification level, or subject specialization. These factors may influence teachers’ perceptions of longevity-based promotion and their retention intentions in meaningful ways. The absence of these moderating variables limits the ability of the study to detect potential subgroup differences and may constrain the depth of policy recommendations. Future research should therefore broaden the analytical framework to include these contextual and demographic factors in order to provide more targeted and nuanced insights for education policy and workforce planning in The Gambia.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This research provides irrefutable, data-driven evidence that the current longevity-based promotion system is a primary institutional driver of teacher attrition. The implication is that any national strategy for achieving the goals of the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2021-2030, particularly those related to teacher professionalization and quality education, will remain unattainable without a fundamental overhaul of the career progression framework. The policy implication is that human resource management must be elevated from an administrative function to a core strategic pillar of educational development.

Theoretically, this study validates the application of Organizational Justice Theory in a non-Western, public-sector educational context, demonstrating its power to explain workforce behaviors. The strong mediating role of promotion perceptions between demographics (like experience) and Turnover intention offers a refined theoretical model for future studies on teacher turnover. This suggests that the evaluation of career structures is a critical intervening variable that must be measured.

CONCLUSION

This study makes a significant empirical contribution to the scholarly discourse on education reform in low-income, bureaucratic settings. It moves beyond correlational assumptions to demonstrate the overwhelming explanatory power of promotion policy perceptions in predicting teacher Turnover intention. The application of Organizational Justice Theory provides a robust explanatory framework, revealing that the teacher Turnover crisis is, at its core, a crisis of organizational injustice. The novelty lies in the quantification of this specific pathway and the mediating insight regarding years of service. The practical implication is for the concerned stakeholders to develop a transparent, validated, and merit-integrative promotion policy as the most critical strategic intervention for stabilizing the teaching workforce. It is the essential foundation upon which any sustainable improvement in educational quality must be built. Without this fundamental reform, policies aimed at teacher training, curriculum development, or infrastructure investment will continue to be undermined by a demoralized and dwindling professional corps. This research provides the evidentiary imperative for that reform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policy, practice, and future research, offering a clear roadmap for addressing the teacher Turnover crisis in basic and secondary education sector. Based on the conclusive findings, the following targeted recommendations are made:

1. **Immediately Develop and Validate a Merit-Integrative Promotion Policy:** MoBSE, in partnership with the Public Service Commission and teacher unions, must urgently draft and legislate a transparent national Teacher Career Progression Policy. This policy must explicitly balance seniority with measurable meritocratic criteria, including performance, qualifications, professional development, and specialization.
2. **Establish a Transparent and Accountable Implementation Mechanism:** The policy must be operationalized through a digital, trackable system. This includes creating a standardized scoring rubric accessible to all teachers, forming representative promotion panels at regional and national levels, and instituting a formal appeal process to uphold procedural justice.
3. **Conduct Longitudinal Research on Policy Impact:** Following the implementation of a reformed policy, MoBSE should partner with research institutions to track its impact. A longitudinal study measuring changes in teacher perceptions, job satisfaction, and actual attrition rates over a 3-5 year period is essential to evaluate the reform's effectiveness and guide continuous improvement.

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