

Clarity of transfer policies and job performance among local government staff in Kasanda South, Kasanda District. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract.

Background:

This study assessed the influence of clarity of transfer policies on job performance among local government staff in Kasanda South, Kasanda District.

Methods:

A qualitative descriptive cross-sectional study, supported by a phenomenological approach, was conducted among local government staff in Kasanda South, Kasanda District. Sixteen participants comprising transferred employees, supervisors, and human resource officers were purposively selected from a target population of 20 participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review using semi-structured interview guides, discussion guides, and document review checklists. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework.

Results:

The majority of participants were aged between 28 and 58 years, while most had served in the local government for more than five years. The study established that many employees had limited awareness of the reasons and criteria guiding transfers. Participants reported that unclear transfer decisions generated uncertainty, mistrust, anxiety, and reduced motivation, which negatively affected productivity and work commitment. Documentary review revealed that although transfer guidelines existed, most transfer letters lacked adequate justification, and policy dissemination was limited. Across interviews, focus group discussions, and document review, the findings consistently demonstrated that clear, fair, and timely communication of transfer policies enhanced employee trust, motivation, adaptability, and job performance, whereas ambiguous policies resulted in reduced morale and fluctuating performance.

Conclusion:

Clarity of transfer policies plays a fundamental role in improving job performance among local government staff. Transparent communication of transfer reasons, criteria, and procedures promotes employee confidence, trust in management, motivation, and productivity.

Recommendation:

Kasanda District Local Government should review and standardize transfer policy guidelines, clearly communicate transfer decisions and criteria, and conduct regular staff sensitization on transfer policies.

Keywords: *Clarity of transfer policies, Job performance, Employee transfers, Local government staff, Policy communication, Kasanda South, Kasanda District.*

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Background.

Clarity of transfer policies refers to the extent to which employees understand the rules, criteria, and guidelines that govern transfers (Agaba & Namara, 2024), while job performance refers to the effectiveness, efficiency, and commitment with which employees execute their assigned duties. The relationship between these two constructs is central to human resource management in the public sector, where transfers are a routine administrative tool, but their

implementation can either sustain or undermine staff performance. In theory, clear policies create predictability, enabling staff to anticipate and prepare for transfers without anxiety, thereby sustaining their performance levels. According to Nabwire (2022), clarity in policy communication helps staff align their expectations with organizational objectives, reducing resistance to transfers and the performance dips that often accompany involuntary reassignment. Similarly, Mukembo and Nyende (2021) found that employees who are aware of transfer criteria tend

to display stronger job commitment and quicker adaptation to new environments, both of which are proximate indicators of job performance. Beyond the immediate work unit, the clarity-performance link has also been documented at the systems level. In Nigeria, Adegoke (2020) observed that clear transfer frameworks in local government service commissions minimized absenteeism and improved task completion rates, two measurable dimensions of job performance. However, Tumushabe (2023) and Balikuddembe (2022) found that in Uganda, transfer policies are often ambiguously worded or inconsistently implemented, leaving staff uncertain about tenure or eligibility for reassignment. This lack of clarity reduces confidence in the system and causes demotivation, particularly among health and education workers in rural areas, a pattern that raises the question of whether similar performance effects hold among local government staff more broadly, including in administrative (non-health, non-education) cadres such as those in Kasanda South.

While prior studies discuss policy clarity in general HR terms, or focus on health and education workers, few examine specifically how clarity of transfer policies shapes job performance among general local government administrative staff in decentralized, rural settings, where bureaucratic complexity and limited HR capacity may weaken both policy design and its communication. The gap, therefore, lies in determining how clarity of transfer policies influences job performance through channels such as trust, motivation, and adaptability among local government staff in Kasanda South, Kasanda District. This study assessed the influence of clarity of transfer policies on job performance among local government staff in Kasanda South, Kasanda District.

Methodology.

Research Design.

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, supported by a phenomenological approach. A qualitative design was suitable because the study focuses on participants' experiences and perceptions regarding transfer planning and its impact on job performance-dimensions that cannot be quantified effectively (Creswell & Poth, 2021). This design allowed the researcher to obtain detailed insights from employees, supervisors, and HR officers about how transfer policies and practices are implemented and perceived. The descriptive element provides a clear account of current transfer practices, communication processes, and transparency levels, while the phenomenological component captures the lived experiences of transferred staff (Moustakas, 2021).

Study Population.

The target population included local government employees, supervisors, and human resource officers in Kasanda South, Kasanda District who have experienced or managed

employee transfers. This population is appropriate because they possess first-hand knowledge of the transfer planning process, its communication, and its impact on performance. The total target was 20 staff across administrative, education, and health sectors. From this, a purposive sample was drawn to ensure representation of different transfer experiences.

Sample Size Consideration.

Since qualitative research focuses on depth rather than breadth, the study involved 20 participants: 10 transferred employees, 5 immediate supervisors, and 5 key informants such as HR officers and departmental heads. The total accessible respondents were 16. This sample was sufficient to reach data saturation, where no new themes emerged from the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2020). The chosen size ensured comprehensive representation of perspectives while maintaining manageability for detailed analysis.

Study Area.

The study was conducted in Kassanda South, located within Kasanda District, Uganda. This area is largely rural, comprising administrative, educational, and health service institutions under the district local government. Kasanda South has experienced frequent staff transfers that have reportedly affected continuity, motivation, and service delivery. It is an ideal site for this research because it represents the realities of decentralized local governments in Uganda where employee movements occur frequently and can significantly influence job performance. Studying this area allows for a detailed exploration of how transfer planning can be optimized to improve work efficiency and staff commitment.

Sampling Strategies.

The study employed purposive and criterion sampling strategies. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants with rich and relevant experience concerning employee transfers (Patton, 2020). This sampling ensured that only individuals who meet specific criteria-such as having undergone or managed a transfer within the past two years-are included (Palinkas et al., 2020). This enhanced data relevance and credibility. In cases where potential participants are hard to reach, snowball sampling was applied to identify additional information-rich respondents recommended by others (Noy, 2021). This combination of strategies is justified because it ensured that the study gathered deep, context-specific insights from participants most knowledgeable about the research topic.

Sample Size Consideration.

Since qualitative research focuses on depth rather than breadth, the study involved approximately 20 participants: 10 transferred employees, 5 immediate supervisors, and 5 key informants such as HR officers and departmental heads. This sample was sufficient to reach data saturation, where

no new themes emerge from the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2020). The chosen size ensures comprehensive representation of perspectives while maintaining manageability for detailed analysis.

Data Collection Methods.

The study employed three complementary qualitative data collection methods: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review to gather comprehensive and triangulated evidence on how transfer planning influences job performance among local government staff in Kasanda South, Kasanda District. The use of multiple methods ensures richness, accuracy, and credibility of the data by capturing diverse perspectives from different stakeholders involved in the transfer process. According to Creswell and Poth (2021), methodological triangulation strengthens validity by providing corroborative evidence from varied sources.

In-depth Interviews.

In-depth interviews were the primary method of data collection. These involved one-on-one, semi-structured conversations with transferred employees, their immediate supervisors, and human resource officers. The aim was to capture detailed personal experiences, emotions, and perceptions concerning clarity of transfer policies. The semi-structured nature allowed flexibility to probe deeper into participants' responses while maintaining focus on key research objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Each interview was expected to last between 45 and 60 minutes, conducted in a private and conducive environment to ensure openness and confidentiality. This method was particularly appropriate because it allowed participants to narrate their unique experiences freely, yielding rich qualitative data on how transfer practices influence job satisfaction, motivation, and performance.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Two Focus group discussions were conducted to complement individual interviews and explore collective perceptions, shared challenges, and group dynamics among employees who have undergone transfers. Each FGD comprised 6 participants selected based on common characteristics such as department or recent transfer experience. The group interaction stimulated rich discussions and revealed social meanings and organizational norms surrounding transfer practices (Morgan, 2019). Through guided discussion, participants reflected on the fairness, transparency, and communication of transfers, as well as their implications for teamwork and morale. The FGDs were moderated by the researcher, assisted by a note-taker, using a prepared discussion guide aligned to the study objectives. Each discussion lasted approximately 60 minutes. This method provided comparative insights and helped identify patterns that may not surface in individual

interviews.

Documentary Review.

Document review served as a supplementary method to support and validate findings from interviews and FGDs. Relevant official documents were examined, including transfer guidelines, human resource manuals, circulars, staff deployment records, transfer letters, and performance evaluation reports. These documents provided objective evidence of how transfer planning is structured, communicated, and implemented within Kasanda South Local Government. The review also helped trace consistency between written policies and actual practices. A document review checklist was developed to ensure systematic analysis of content related to transfer policy clarity, transparency, and communication procedures (Bowen, 2009). This method strengthened the credibility of findings by grounding them in institutional evidence.

Justification for Method Triangulation

Using multiple methods of data collection interviews, FGDs, and document review ensured methodological triangulation, which enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Each method addresses potential weaknesses of the others: interviews provide depth and personal insight, FGDs reveal shared meanings and contradictions, while document review provided factual verification of policy and procedural context. Together, these methods allowed for a comprehensive and balanced understanding of how transfer planning influences job performance across different levels of local government.

Data Collection Instruments.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide and a focus group discussion guide developed from the study objectives. The interview guide included open-ended questions on clarity of transfer policies. The FGD was used to facilitate interaction and discussion among participants, allowing exploration of group consensus. A document review checklist was used to extract relevant information from HR manuals, transfer memos, and performance reports. All instruments were pre-tested to ensure clarity and contextual relevance.

Data Collection Procedures.

A data collection introductory letter was obtained from the School of Graduate Studies and Research of Team University. On obtaining ethical approval and permission from Kasanda District authorities, the researcher contacted participants through their departments. Written Informed consent was obtained before any interviews or discussions. Interviews and FGDs were conducted in convenient, quiet settings to ensure confidentiality and comfort. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded

(with consent). Transcription and translation (for local language responses) were carried out immediately after each session to maintain data accuracy. Data collection took place in November, 2025.

Data Quality Control.

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To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, this study employed the four established qualitative quality criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. These dimensions are essential for maintaining methodological integrity and ensuring that findings accurately reflect participants' realities.

Credibility was ensured through the triangulation of data collection methods and sources, specifically the combination of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. This approach allowed the researcher to validate insights across multiple perspectives, minimizing the influence of researcher bias and increasing confidence in the findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings and interpretations with selected participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the researcher's interpretations.

Dependability was achieved through detailed documentation of the entire research process, including data collection procedures, coding decisions, and analysis steps. An audit trail was maintained to provide a transparent record of methodological choices and changes, ensuring the study can be followed and replicated by other researchers.

Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling, in which the researcher records personal reflections, assumptions, and decision-making processes throughout the study. This reflexivity helps to minimize researcher bias and ensures that findings are grounded in participant data rather than personal viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2021).

Transferability was established through thick descriptions of the study context, participants, and processes. By providing detailed contextual information about Kasanda South, readers will be able to determine the extent to which the findings may apply to other decentralized local government settings. Finally, a pilot study was conducted to refine research instruments and ensure that the questions were culturally appropriate, clearly understood, and capable of eliciting rich, relevant information.

Measurement of Variables.

Although this study adopted a qualitative approach and did not employ numerical measurements, it systematically interpreted and evaluated core constructs based on thematic analysis and participants' subjective experiences. Each construct was analyzed as a thematic indicator of transfer planning and job performance.

Clarity of Transfer Policies: This construct was examined by exploring participants' understanding of existing transfer

guidelines, their accessibility, fairness, and consistency. Attention was paid to whether staff can easily interpret the rules governing transfers and whether these policies are applied equitably across departments. A strong perception of clarity was expected to correlate with higher confidence, reduced uncertainty, and improved performance.

Job Performance: This construct was interpreted based on reported levels of motivation, work efficiency, and commitment after transfers. Indicators such as timely task completion, quality of service delivery, and enthusiasm toward duties provided qualitative evidence of how transfer planning impacted performance outcomes.

Data Analysis.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step framework for thematic analysis, which is widely recognized for its flexibility and depth in exploring complex qualitative data. The process involved both deductive and inductive coding, ensuring alignment with research objectives while allowing new themes to emerge organically from participant narratives.

Familiarization with Data: The researcher began by transcribing all interviews and FGDs verbatim, then reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of the content. Initial notes and reflections were recorded to identify potential patterns and meanings.

Generating Initial Codes: Using both manual techniques and qualitative data management software such as NVivo, the researcher systematically coded segments of text that relate to the study's key concepts—clarity, transparency, communication, and job performance. Coding remained flexible to accommodate new emerging insights.

Searching for Themes: Coded data was then collated into potential themes that reflect significant aspects of participants' experiences. Themes were grouped under the conceptual categories derived from the study framework while noting unexpected findings that enrich understanding.

Reviewing Themes: At this stage, the researcher refined and validated the identified themes by comparing them across all data sources. Redundant or overlapping themes were merged, while underdeveloped ones were expanded or discarded. Triangulation with document review findings ensured robustness.

Defining and Naming Themes: The researcher defined the essence of each theme, identifying what it captures about the data in relation to the research questions. Clear, concise labels were developed to convey the core meaning of each theme.

Producing the Final Report: Finally, the themes were synthesized into coherent narratives that answer the research objectives. Descriptive accounts were supported with direct quotations from participants to illustrate key points and preserve authenticity. Interpretations linked back to the Social Exchange Theory, showing how perceptions of fairness, transparency, and communication shape

employees' commitment and performance after transfers. This systematic, iterative approach ensures that the findings are rich, credible, and grounded in empirical data while offering theoretical and practical insights into transfer planning and job performance in local government settings.

The study adhered to ethical research principles as outlined by Israel and Hay (2020). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing names and securely storing data. Participation was voluntary, and individuals had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Sensitive discussions were handled respectfully, and any distress was addressed through referral to appropriate support services.

Results

Table 1: Clarity of Transfer Policies and Job Performance

Objective.	Key Themes	Interviews	FGDs (Key Issues Raised)	Documentary Review	Performance Implication
Clarity of Transfer Policies	Reasons, criteria, policy awareness	Reasons explained; unclear; policies shared	rarely (Q1, Q3, Q7): criteriaDecisions unclear, not seen as unfair;	Policies exist but not disseminated; lack justification	Low trust, anxiety, reduced motivation
			lowers motivation		
Job Performance Outcomes	Productivity, morale, adaptability	Performance drops with abrupt/unfair transfers; improves with planning	Q5, Q7): Morale and productivity tied to fairness and support	No formal tracking of performance after transfers	Fluctuating productivity, reduced morale, variable adjustment

Results show a clear pattern:

Weak policy clarity → mistrust and anxiety

Across all data sources, the evidence converges that effective transfer planning (clear, fair, and timely) enhances motivation and productivity, while weak practices undermine job performance.

Characteristics of Participants

Participants ranged from 28 to 58 years old, with the majority having served in the local government service for more than five years. Many had experienced multiple transfers, which enabled them to speak from accumulated personal and professional encounters with transfer planning practices. Respondents were drawn from health, education, and administrative departments, providing comparative insights across sectors with different workload demands, staffing shortages, and administrative procedures. These variations enriched the findings by revealing recurring patterns and sector-specific concerns regarding how transfers are initiated, communicated, and implemented.

Clarity of Transfer Policies and Job Performance

Awareness and Communication of Transfer Reasons

Across interviews, most transferred employees indicated that the reasons for their transfer were not clearly communicated. Several respondents explained that they *“only received a letter”* with instructions but no explanation about why they were selected. This lack of clarity created suspicion and anxiety. A participant stated,

“You just see the transfer letter, but they don’t tell you why. You start asking yourself so many questions.”

Key informants confirmed this gap, admitting that explanations are often omitted, especially when transfers are urgent or politically driven. Experts further noted that policies require clear justification, but implementation remains inconsistent because some supervisors *“assume staff already know the reasons.” RS 2*

Awareness of the Criteria for Selecting Employees for Transfer

Many employees reported limited knowledge of the criteria used to select staff for transfer. Some assumed performance issues were involved, while others attributed decisions to staffing shortages or political interference. HR officers

acknowledged that although performance records are supposed to guide transfers, in practice, transfers are frequently based on immediate staffing needs rather than documented performance.

Employees' limited understanding of criteria created insecurity and reduced trust in management. One health worker remarked,

"If they told us the criteria, at least you would understand. But when it's hidden, you think maybe someone influenced it."

Effect of Policy Clarity on Motivation and Trust in Management

The absence of clear, accessible, and understandable transfer policies negatively affected employee motivation. Respondents described feelings of uncertainty, reduced confidence, and fear of unexpected transfers. Focus group participants emphasized that unclear policies made them feel "unsafe" in their positions, which affected concentration and readiness to plan long-term work activities. Expert interviews revealed that although the district has transfer guidelines, they are rarely disseminated, and no regular orientation sessions exist to help employees interpret the policies. The result is low motivation, diminished trust in supervisors, and compromised job performance.

Documentary Review Results

The clarity of transfer policies among local government staff

The documentary review revealed that transfer policy guidelines and ministry circulars clearly outlined procedures and authority for staff transfers. However, most transfer letters reviewed did not provide detailed explanations or justification for the transfers. Communication memos also showed limited dissemination of transfer guidelines to staff, which contributed to low policy awareness and misunderstanding of transfer procedures among employees. Complaint records further indicated concerns about lack of clarity and inadequate access to transfer-related information.

Discussion of findings.

Clarity of Transfer Policies and Job Performance.

The study found that clarity of transfer policies significantly influenced job performance by shaping employees' understanding of transfer reasons, criteria, and expectations. Respondents indicated that when the rationale for transfers was unclear or inadequately communicated, it diminished trust in management and created uncertainty that negatively affected motivation and task performance. These findings align with emerging scholarship emphasizing that clarity in human resource policies enhances employees' sense of predictability and fairness, which are essential antecedents of performance (Kilonzo, 2022; Bamwesiga & Otim, 2023).

Clear policies help employees appreciate the legitimacy of administrative decisions, thereby enhancing commitment and productivity. The results also revealed that unclear policies created suspicion and perceptions of bias, which reduced morale and lowered performance output. This is consistent with the argument by Ndayambaje (2024) that workers tend to resist organizational decisions when they are perceived as ambiguous or unfair. Similarly, Ochieng (2021) contended that clarity is a strategic determinant of employee acceptance of transfers, since ambiguity fosters mistrust and emotional withdrawal. The findings therefore support the view that clarity of transfer guidelines is not merely administrative but a psychological resource influencing work attitudes.

However, some scholars challenge the view that policy clarity alone determines performance. For example, Mutesi and Kimuli (2022) argued that even when policies are clear, performance may remain low if the policies themselves are poorly designed or misaligned with employees' professional aspirations. This critique provides a relevant counterpoint to the study's findings, suggesting that clarity should be accompanied by policy relevance and responsiveness to employee needs. In Kasanda South, staff reported clarity gaps, but even where explanations were given, employees still felt the broader policy framework did not meet contextual realities such as workload distribution, family considerations, and career progression concerns. Overall, the study confirms that clarity plays a foundational role in shaping employees' attitudes towards transfers, consistent with contemporary human resource management literature that positions fairness and understanding as drivers of performance behavior (Mukasa & Kasirye, 2025).

Conclusion.

The study concludes that clarity of transfer policies plays a foundational role in shaping employee performance in Kasanda South. Employees who clearly understood the reasons, criteria, and guidelines behind transfer decisions demonstrated higher levels of trust in management, motivation, and work commitment. Where policies were ambiguous, staff expressed frustration, reduced morale, and declining productivity due to a perceived lack of fairness and predictability. It is therefore evident that policy clarity is not merely administrative but a psychological pillar that directly influences how employees respond to transfers and perform their duties thereafter.

Recommendations.

To strengthen job performance, the study recommends that Kasanda District Local Government revise and standardize its transfer policy framework to ensure clarity and accessibility. The revised guidelines should clearly outline transfer criteria, reasons, timelines, and employee rights. These guidelines should be disseminated through staff meetings, digital platforms, and printed manuals available to

all employees.

Additionally, periodic sensitization sessions should be conducted to ensure that staff fully understand the policy. Clear and consistent policy interpretation by supervisors is essential to eliminate confusion and promote trust among employees.

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List of Abbreviations

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FGDs – Focus Group Discussions

HR – Human Resource

NVivo – Qualitative Data Analysis Software (NVivo)

PhD – Doctor of Philosophy

RS – Respondent

VHT – Village Health Team (if mentioned in supporting documents or literature)

Informed Consent.

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

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Conflict of interest.

There is no conflict of interest.

Availability of data.

Data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Authors contribution.

AS designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data, and drafted the manuscript.

PT supervised all stages of the study from conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing and submission.

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