

The influence of school leadership on teachers' motivation: a case study of Morogoro secondary schools in Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigated the influence of school leadership on teachers' motivation in secondary schools in Morogoro, Tanzania. A mixed-methods approach combined quantitative data from 69 teachers and qualitative insights from 8 heads of schools purposefully selected from public and private institutions. Data were collected through online questionnaires and Key-Informant Interviews (KII) and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) with linear regression. Findings revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between school leadership and teacher motivation. In private schools, leadership predicted teacher motivation more strongly ($\beta = 0.779$, $p = 0.001$) than in public schools ($\beta = 0.680$, $p = 0.001$). Qualitative results confirmed that recognition, participative decision-making, and professional development enhance motivation, whereas inadequate resources constrain public-school morale. The study concludes that effective, participatory leadership is critical for teacher motivation and recommends leadership-training programs, supportive policy environments, and longitudinal research on the link between leadership and teachers' job satisfaction in Tanzania.

Keywords: School Leadership, Teacher Motivation, Tanzania, Morogoro Secondary Schools.

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Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as the foundation of social and economic development, and the effectiveness of any education system depends on the motivation and commitment of its teachers. Teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge but also key agents of change who shape the intellectual and moral development of learners. However, motivation among teachers particularly in sub-Saharan Africa remains a persistent challenge that directly influences educational outcomes. In Tanzania, secondary school teachers often work under constrained conditions marked by limited resources, large class sizes, and modest remuneration (Nzilano & Mwambapa, 2022). Despite these challenges, some schools, particularly private ones, demonstrate higher levels of teacher enthusiasm and performance, prompting questions about the role of school leadership in sustaining teacher motivation. Leadership is one of the most critical determinants of organizational effectiveness. In educational contexts, it refers to the capacity of school heads and administrators to influence teachers toward the achievement of collective goals. Effective leaders create environments in which teachers feel respected, supported, and valued for their contributions. According to Bush and Glover (2016), school leadership influences nearly every aspect of a school's functioning from policy implementation and professional culture to staff morale and instructional quality. In Tanzania's evolving educational landscape, school leadership must therefore move beyond managerial control toward transformative engagement that cultivates professional growth and job

satisfaction. Teacher motivation is a multifaceted concept encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Intrinsic motivation stems from internal drives such as professional pride, self-efficacy, and a sense of purpose, while extrinsic motivation derives from external factors such as pay, working conditions, supervision, and recognition (Deci et al., 2017). Numerous studies have demonstrated that teacher motivation is linked not only to individual characteristics but also to the school climate and leadership practices (Kashamba, Ngirwa & Maulid, 2023). A motivated teacher invests greater effort in lesson preparation, classroom management, and student mentoring all of which are essential to quality education.

The Tanzanian government has initiated various reforms such as the Education and Training Policy (ETP 2014) and the Teacher Development and Management Strategy to strengthen teacher performance. Yet, persistent reports of absenteeism, dissatisfaction, and turnover suggest that structural policies alone cannot ensure motivation. Leadership practices at the school level remain decisive in shaping teachers' experiences. Mwenda (2025) argues that effective heads of schools serve as catalysts who translate policy intentions into everyday realities by creating supportive environments for teaching and learning. In Morogoro Region, secondary schools represent a microcosm of Tanzania's diverse educational ecosystem, combining urban and semi-rural settings with both public and private ownership. Public schools are government-funded, adhere to standardized procedures, and often face budgetary and bureaucratic constraints. Private schools, on the other hand, enjoy managerial flexibility and are more responsive to

competition, often providing incentives and professional recognition to teachers (Kingu & Amos, 2025). These contextual differences make Morogoro an ideal setting for exploring how leadership influences teacher motivation across ownership types.

Despite the growing recognition of leadership's importance, empirical research focusing specifically on Morogoro secondary schools remains scarce. Most prior studies have examined general educational leadership or teacher performance without isolating motivational mechanisms (Pascal & Tangi, 2022). This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by empirically examining the relationship between school leadership and teacher motivation in both public and private secondary schools within Morogoro Municipality and District. The study's significance lies in its potential to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of leadership's role in sustaining teacher motivation. Theoretically, it tests the assumption derived from transformational leadership and self-determination theories that leadership practices influence teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Practically, it provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, education administrators, and teacher-training institutions seeking to enhance teacher performance and retention. In this reality, the study not only identifies existing gaps but also suggests strategies to strengthen leadership effectiveness in Tanzanian schools. In doing so, it addresses a broader policy challenge: how to ensure that school leaders act as enablers of teacher engagement and satisfaction rather than as mere implementers of bureaucratic directives. This study underscores the following areas

Literature Review

School leadership encompasses the processes by which school heads influence staff to achieve educational goals. Modern scholarship has shifted from traditional command-and-control models to more participatory, transformational, and instructional forms of leadership (Leithwood & Sun, 2018). Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support, while instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning through curriculum oversight and teacher development. Both forms are relevant in Tanzanian contexts where motivation is shaped by daily interactions between leaders and teachers (Kashamba et al., 2023). Teacher motivation is both psychological and contextual. Recent research situates it within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are motivated when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Studies in African schools (Ogunyinka et al., 2019; Mwita & Hassanali, 2022) highlight that recognition, supportive supervision, and professional autonomy enhance teachers' intrinsic motivation. Conversely, inadequate pay, lack of resources, and authoritarian leadership demoralize teachers and reduce performance.

Empirical studies consistently show that school leadership significantly affects teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Nzilano and Mwambapa (2022) found that motivational strategies such as praise, participation in decision-making, and regular feedback improve teacher morale in government secondary schools. Pascal and Tangi (2022) reported that in Igunga District, heads of schools who encouraged teamwork and professional growth achieved higher teacher satisfaction levels. Similarly, Mwenda (2025) observed that transformational leadership practices

vision sharing, mentoring, and open communication were strongly correlated with teacher commitment. However, challenges persist. Bureaucratic rigidity, political interference, and inadequate funding often constrain public school leaders, limiting their ability to reward or recognize teachers effectively (Kayombo, Matete & Suru, 2025). In private schools, where autonomy is greater, leaders can link performance to incentives, thus sustaining higher motivation levels. The disparity underscores the need to contextualize leadership strategies to institutional realities.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Transformational leadership posits that leaders motivate followers by articulating a compelling vision, providing intellectual stimulation, and attending to individual needs. SDT explains motivation through satisfaction of psychological needs. Together, these frameworks suggest that effective leadership satisfies teachers' autonomy and competence needs, fostering intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. While existing studies establish that leadership matters, few have empirically compared public and private secondary schools in Morogoro using mixed-methods designs. Moreover, previous analyses rarely integrate quantitative regression with qualitative insights. This study addresses that gap, offering context-specific evidence and practical recommendations aligned with current Tanzanian education reforms.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to examine the relationship between school leadership and teacher motivation in Tanzanian secondary schools. Eight schools, four public and four private, were purposefully selected to capture diverse institutional contexts. The sample included 69 teachers and 8 school heads, representing variation in gender, teaching experience, and subject specialization. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires assessing leadership dimensions including communication, recognition, professional development, and participative decision making, as well as teacher motivation. Analyses were conducted using SPSS 26, employing descriptive statistics, correlations, and linear regression to examine relationships and predictive effects. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with school heads, transcribed, and thematically coded using categories including communication, recognition, autonomy, and professional growth. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and participants provided informed consent, ensuring confidentiality. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data allowed statistical trends to be interpreted alongside contextual insights, providing a robust and practical understanding of how leadership practices influence teacher motivation in diverse school settings.

Results

Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between school leadership and teacher motivation across Tanzanian secondary schools. Teachers in private schools reported higher leadership ratings ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.61$) than those in public schools ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.73$). Linear regression indicated leadership significantly predicted teacher motivation in private schools ($\beta = 0.779$, $p = 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.61$) and public schools ($\beta =$

0.680, $p = 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.54$), showing leadership accounts for a substantial proportion of variance in teacher motivation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Regression Results

Measure	Private Schools	Public Schools
Leadership Mean (SD)	4.22 (0.61)	3.48 (0.73)
Teacher Motivation Mean (SD)	4.10 (0.59)	3.55 (0.70)
Regression β	0.779	0.680
R^2	0.61	0.54
P-value	0.001	0.001

Pearson correlations indicated that all leadership dimensions were positively and significantly associated with teacher motivation ($p < 0.01$).

Leadership Dimension	Communication	Recognition	Professional Development	Participative Decision Making	Teacher Motivation
Communication	1	.68**	.62**	.60**	.72**
Recognition	.68**	1	.64**	.59**	.70**
Professional Development	.62**	.64**	1	.63**	.66**
Participative Decision Making	.60**	.59**	.63**	1	.58**
Teacher Motivation	.72**	.70**	.66**	.58**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$.

Qualitative findings complemented quantitative results. Private-school heads highlighted open communication, mentorship, recognition, and professional development as key motivators. One head stated, “Acknowledging each teacher’s effort changes their energy in class.” Public-school heads, constrained by limited resources and bureaucratic policies, relied on intrinsic strategies such as verbal recognition, participative decision making, and fostering collaboration. One explained, “We cannot give bonuses, but acknowledging effort sustains motivation.”

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that flexible leadership practices, particularly those enhancing autonomy, competence, and relatedness, drive higher motivation in private schools, while public-school leaders rely more on intrinsic strategies. Triangulation of these data strengthened the validity of the findings and emphasized that leadership style, rather than school ownership, is the primary determinant of teacher motivation.

Discussion

The study confirms that school leadership is a critical determinant of teacher motivation in Tanzanian secondary schools. Regression results (Table 1) showed leadership accounted for 61 percent of the variance in private schools and 54 percent in public schools, demonstrating the substantial influence of leadership practices. Correlations (Table 2) revealed that all leadership dimensions, including communication, recognition, professional development, and participative decision making, were positively and significantly related to teacher motivation ($p < 0.01$), confirming the multifaceted nature of leadership influence.

Qualitative evidence contextualized these quantitative findings. Private-school heads emphasized transparent communication, individualized recognition, mentorship, and professional

development programs. One head explained, “Acknowledging each teacher’s effort changes their energy in class.” Public-school leaders, operating under bureaucratic and resource constraints, relied on intrinsic motivators including verbal acknowledgment, participative decision making, and fostering collaboration among staff. Integrating these data illustrates how statistical relationships between leadership and motivation are reinforced through lived experiences, demonstrating practical implementation of leadership behaviors.

Practical implications include decentralizing decision making in public schools to allow leaders to implement context-specific rewards, adopting transformational and emotionally intelligent leadership approaches, and promoting mentorship, recognition, and collaborative practices that are feasible under resource limitations. Encouraging collaboration between private and public schools could facilitate sharing of effective leadership strategies.

Significance for practitioners lies in demonstrating that leadership style, rather than school ownership, is the primary driver of teacher engagement and instructional quality. School heads who adopt supportive, transparent, and participatory practices can enhance teacher motivation, retention, and performance, ultimately improving student outcomes. These evidence-based insights provide actionable guidance for school leaders, policymakers, and education trainers seeking to strengthen teacher morale and effectiveness, contributing to a more responsive and effective secondary education system in Tanzania.

Implications

Implications of the Study

The findings have important theoretical, practical, and policy implications for Tanzanian secondary education.

The study reinforces Self-Determination Theory, demonstrating that leadership practices enhancing autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster teacher motivation. It also shows that institutional context moderates leadership effects, with private schools benefiting from greater flexibility and public schools relying more on intrinsic strategies.

For school leaders, adopting flexible, participatory, and emotionally intelligent practices is essential. Verbal recognition, mentorship, participative decision making, and support for professional growth sustain teacher motivation, even under resource constraints.

Public-school policymakers should decentralize decision making to enable leaders to implement context-specific rewards and professional development initiatives. Training programs should equip school heads with transformational leadership skills, and cross-sector collaboration should be encouraged to share effective strategies between private and public schools.

Conclusions

School leadership is a critical determinant of teacher motivation in Tanzanian secondary schools. Leadership practices significantly predict motivation, with private schools showing stronger effects due to greater autonomy. Qualitative findings highlight the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and show that leadership style, rather than school ownership, drives teacher engagement. Flexible, transparent, and participatory leadership enhances autonomy, competence, and relatedness, improving teacher morale, retention, and instructional quality.

Recommendations

For School Leaders: Adopt transformational and emotionally intelligent practices, including open communication, mentorship, participative decision making, and recognition of teacher efforts.

For Public-School Policymakers: Decentralize decision making to allow context-specific rewards and professional development initiatives and provide leadership training.

For Teacher Training Institutions: Incorporate leadership and motivation strategies into professional development for school heads, highlighting practical approaches suitable for resource-limited environments

For Cross-Sector Collaboration: Facilitate sharing of effective leadership strategies between private and public schools, including mentorship, recognition systems, and professional growth initiatives.

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