
THE INFLUENCE OF SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS ON TEACHER MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MBEYA, TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching performance are central to improving educational outcomes in primary schools. This study examined the influence of supportive work environments on these factors in public primary schools within Mbeya district council, Tanzania. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from teachers, headteachers, and ward education officers through interviews, focus group discussions and observation methods. The findings revealed that supportive work environments encompass both material and non-material elements, including adequate classrooms, teaching aids, textbooks, collegial collaboration, mentorship, and constructive leadership. Teachers in schools with well-resourced environments and supportive leadership reported higher motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching performance. Conversely, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and weak administrative support negatively affected instructional effectiveness. The study concludes that holistic interventions addressing infrastructure, leadership, professional development, and collaborative practices are essential for enhancing teacher performance and improving student learning outcomes. The findings offer critical insights for policymakers, school administrators, and education stakeholders aiming to strengthen quality of the primary education.

KEYWORDS: Supportive work environment; teacher motivation; job satisfaction; teaching performance; primary schools; Tanzania.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching performance are widely recognized as the cornerstones of educational quality and student achievement. In the context of Tanzanian public primary schools, teachers serve as the key drivers of educational transformation and social development. However, their effectiveness is often compromised by a complex web of challenges, including insufficient teaching and learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, delayed remuneration, and limited administrative and community support. These constraints directly affect not only teachers' morale but also the quality of instruction and learning outcomes. Consequently, understanding the relationship between supportive work environments, teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and performance is essential for advancing educational quality.

A supportive work environment refers to a setting where teachers are provided with both tangible and intangible resources that enable them to perform their duties effectively and to feel valued in their professional roles. This encompasses both material and non-material aspects. Material aspects include adequate classrooms, textbooks, desks, teaching aids, and technological tools that facilitate effective instruction. A school with well-maintained infrastructure and sufficient teaching materials promotes an atmosphere of order and efficiency, allowing teachers to focus on pedagogical practices rather than logistical difficulties. On the other hand, non-material aspects refer to psychological and professional conditions that foster a sense of belonging, respect, and professional growth among teachers. These include fair supervision, collegial collaboration, recognition of effort, autonomy in instructional decision-making, and continuous professional development. Together, these factors shape the overall school climate, influencing teachers' enthusiasm, commitment, and long-term engagement in their work.

Globally, researchers have underscored that a supportive work environment enhances teachers' sense of professional fulfillment, thereby boosting their motivation and performance. According to Klassen and Chiu (2019), motivated teachers exhibit greater commitment, creativity, and resilience in overcoming instructional challenges. Similarly, Day and Gu (2020) observed that teachers who work in schools with strong collegial networks, fair leadership, and recognition systems tend to demonstrate higher job satisfaction and improved instructional outcomes. Within sub-Saharan Africa, studies in Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana reveal similar trends, where conducive working conditions have been linked to better

teaching quality, reduced teacher attrition, and improved student performance (Ng'ethe et al., 2021; Agyemang & Boateng, 2019). These findings suggest that enhancing teachers' work environments is a strategic pathway toward achieving sustainable educational development.

In the Tanzanian education system, several policy frameworks, including the Education and Training Policy (ETP) of 2014 and the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP), emphasize the centrality of teacher motivation and working conditions in achieving quality education. Despite these policy efforts, disparities in resource distribution, leadership practices, and administrative support remain pronounced, particularly between urban and rural schools. Many teachers in rural areas operate under poor working conditions, facing dilapidated classrooms, shortage of teaching materials, and inadequate housing facilities. Furthermore, limited access to in-service training and professional development opportunities reduces their chances of improving instructional competence and career progression. Such circumstances not only demoralize teachers but also result in high turnover rates, absenteeism, and declining student achievement.

Previous studies have provided mixed evidence on the state of teachers' work environments and their effects on motivation and performance. For instance, Mosha (2018) noted that while teachers in urban schools often enjoy relatively better facilities and administrative support, their counterparts in rural settings experience severe shortages of instructional materials and poor physical infrastructure. These inequalities create a morale gap that impacts teachers' willingness to remain in the profession or perform optimally. Additionally, weak supervision mechanisms and inconsistent leadership styles have further eroded teacher confidence and trust in the education system. Consequently, exploring how supportive work environments influence teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and performance within the Tanzanian context is crucial for informing policy and practice.

Teacher motivation is a multidimensional construct encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive teachers to perform their duties effectively. Intrinsic motivation arises from personal fulfillment and professional passion, while extrinsic motivation stems from external rewards such as salaries, promotions, and recognition. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides a useful framework for understanding this dynamic. According to Herzberg, motivation is influenced by two categories of factors: hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors such as salary, working conditions, and administrative policies prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily motivate. In contrast, motivators such as recognition,

responsibility, and opportunities for advancement directly enhance job satisfaction and performance. In the context of Tanzanian primary schools, both factors must be addressed to foster a stable and motivated teaching workforce.

Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides another theoretical lens for analyzing teacher motivation. Maslow posited that human needs are arranged hierarchically from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. Teachers, like all professionals, require the satisfaction of their lower-order needs (such as adequate pay, safe working environments, and job security) before they can pursue higher-order needs like esteem and professional fulfillment. When schools fail to meet these foundational needs, teachers experience frustration and disengagement, resulting in poor performance and reduced instructional quality. Conversely, when these needs are adequately met, teachers develop a sense of purpose, creativity, and innovation in their teaching practices.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the understanding of how supportive work environments enhance teacher effectiveness in Tanzanian public primary schools. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of teacher motivation and satisfaction, empirical research focusing specifically on the role of the work environment in Mbeya District Council remains limited. The district, characterized by both urban and semi-rural settings, provides a relevant context for examining disparities in school conditions and their effects on teachers' experiences. The findings are expected to provide insights for education stakeholders including policymakers, school administrators, and teacher training institutions on effective strategies for improving teacher welfare and performance.

A supportive work environment also shapes the social and emotional experiences of teachers. Positive interpersonal relationships among staff, open communication channels, and participatory leadership practices create a culture of trust and collaboration. According to Bush and Glover (2021), participatory leadership empowers teachers by involving them in decision-making processes, which enhances their sense of ownership and responsibility. When teachers perceive their opinions as valued, they are more likely to engage constructively with school goals and exhibit greater loyalty to the institution. Conversely, authoritarian leadership styles that disregard teacher input tend to demotivate staff and hinder innovation in the classroom.

Professional development opportunities form another essential component of a supportive environment. Continuous professional learning not only updates teachers' pedagogical skills but also enhances their confidence and adaptability in responding to curricular changes. The Tanzania Institute of Education (TIE) and Teacher Service Department (TSD) have initiated several in-service training programs aimed at equipping teachers with modern instructional techniques. However, many of these programs face implementation challenges due to funding shortages, limited follow-up, and uneven access across schools. Without consistent professional growth opportunities, teachers may feel stagnant and undervalued, diminishing their motivation to perform effectively.

Recognition and reward systems also play a pivotal role in reinforcing positive behavior among teachers. When schools and education authorities acknowledge teachers' achievements through awards, promotions, or public appreciation, it reinforces their sense of worth and inspires others to emulate their performance. Studies by Oduro (2020) and Mkumbo (2021) affirm that recognition is a powerful motivator that can sustain teacher morale even in resource-constrained environments. Unfortunately, in many Tanzanian schools, recognition is often informal or inconsistent, leading to a culture where effort and excellence go unnoticed.

The working environment further affects the psychological well-being of teachers. Stressors such as heavy workloads, poor supervision, and lack of autonomy can lead to burnout, absenteeism, and diminished instructional quality. Conversely, schools that foster emotional support systems such as mentorship programs, peer counseling, and fair workload distribution help teachers manage stress and maintain enthusiasm for teaching. This aligns with findings by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018), who emphasized that teacher well-being is closely linked to perceived support and manageable work demands.

In the Tanzanian context, the government and educational stakeholders have made several efforts to improve teachers' welfare, including salary adjustments, housing allowances, and school improvement grants. However, these measures have often been inadequate or inconsistently implemented. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of primary education under initiatives such as Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE) has increased teacher workloads without proportionate resource expansion. As class sizes continue to grow, teachers face mounting pressure to maintain quality teaching under constrained conditions. This reality underscores

the urgency of strengthening school environments that support teachers both materially and emotionally.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the influence of supportive work environments on teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and teaching performance in public primary schools within Mbeya District Council. Specifically, the study aims to: Identify the supportive work environment factors available to teachers in public primary schools, examine how these factors influence teachers' job satisfaction and motivation and assess the extent to which supportive work environments shape teaching performance. In achieving these objectives, the study employs Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as guiding theoretical frameworks. It is anticipated that the findings will illuminate critical gaps in teacher support systems and propose actionable strategies for policymakers and education leaders. Ultimately, by fostering supportive work environments, Tanzanian schools can enhance teacher motivation, improve instructional quality, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of the education system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research highlights the critical role of supportive work environments in shaping teacher motivation and instructional quality. Globally, studies indicate that adequate physical resources, including classrooms, teaching aids, and textbooks, are essential for effective lesson delivery and student engagement (Adeyemi & Adu, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Similarly, the availability of non-material supports, such as professional development opportunities, mentorship, and collegial collaboration, enhances teacher confidence, encourages reflective practice, and fosters innovation in pedagogy (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that disparities in resource distribution between urban and rural schools adversely affect teaching performance and learning outcomes. Mulkeen (2017) observes that rural schools often experience systemic neglect, with insufficient infrastructure, teaching aids, and administrative support. In Tanzania, despite efforts to expand access to education, inequities remain pervasive, leading to stress, low morale, and limited instructional effectiveness among teachers (URT, 2021; Galabawa, 2020).

Theoretical perspectives provide further insights into the mechanisms underlying teacher motivation. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors, such as infrastructure and basic resources, and motivators, such as recognition and professional growth, both of which influence job satisfaction. Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that higher-level psychological needs, including esteem and self-actualization, can only be realized when basic needs are met (Herzberg, 2017; Maslow, 2018). Thus, supportive work environments must address both tangible and intangible factors to enhance teacher motivation and performance effectively.

Despite growing evidence on the importance of supportive environments, limited research has examined the combined influence of material, social, and institutional factors on teacher performance in Tanzanian primary schools. This study addresses this gap by integrating multiple dimensions of support to understand how work environments shape teacher satisfaction, motivation, and instructional effectiveness.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Mbeya District Council, Tanzania, which includes both urban and rural schools with diverse learning environments. The area was chosen because of its variation in school infrastructure, teacher-student ratios, and resource allocation. Despite reforms such as the fee-free basic education policy and teacher development initiatives, many schools still face overcrowding, limited teaching materials, and inadequate support systems (MoEVT, 2020). These factors make Mbeya District a suitable setting for studying how supportive work environments influence teacher motivation and performance.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

The study adopted a case study design, allowing detailed examination of real-life teaching experiences in specific school contexts. This design supported the use of multiple data collection methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, which strengthened triangulation and the credibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It provided a holistic understanding of how institutional, social, and physical conditions influence teacher motivation and performance in Mbeya's public primary schools.

A qualitative research approach was employed to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding their working conditions. This approach enabled the researcher to

collect in-depth data on how factors such as leadership, collegial collaboration, and resources affect teacher satisfaction and instructional effectiveness. Through interviews and discussions, teachers' personal experiences and insights were captured to provide a rich understanding of the school environment (Mussa & Komba, 2020). The study obtained ethical approval from relevant authorities, including the Mbeya District Council and the researchers' institution. Participants gave informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose and their rights to withdraw. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms and securing all collected data. Participation was voluntary, and the study adhered to ethical research principles ensuring no harm to respondents (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wiles, 2013).

3.3 Target Population and Sampling Techniques

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling methods. Teachers with at least three years of teaching experience were chosen for their practical understanding of the school environment. The sample comprised 30 participants, including teachers, headteachers, and ward education officers from five wards. This composition ensured diverse perspectives on school management and teaching conditions. Snowball sampling further helped identify other knowledgeable participants, especially in remote schools (Miles et al., 2020).

3.4 Data Sources and Data Collection Methods

Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, which provided firsthand insights into teachers' daily experiences. Secondary data such as policy documents, school records, and government reports provided background information and supported the validation of primary data. The combination of these sources enhanced the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study findings.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with headteachers and ward education officers to explore leadership practices, supervision, and teacher support initiatives. Focus group discussions were held with teachers from urban and rural schools to encourage open sharing of experiences and challenges. Classroom observations provided objective evidence of physical facilities, teacher-student interactions, and instructional practices. Document analysis further validated information obtained from participants.

3.5 Data Organization and Analysis

Thematic and content analysis techniques were applied in data analysis. Data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes reflecting major issues such as motivation, resources, and collaboration. Triangulation was employed to cross-verify findings from different sources, ensuring accuracy and consistency in interpretation. procedures, while confirmability was achieved by linking interpretations to participants' actual statements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Supportive Work Environment Factors

The study identified both material and non-material factors as critical components of supportive work environments in Mbeya District's public primary schools. Material factors included classrooms, teaching aids, textbooks, and functional furniture, which directly influenced teaching efficiency. For example, during interviews, a teacher from School A stated, "With enough textbooks and teaching aids, I can plan interactive lessons that engage all students. When we lack these, we often fall back on lectures, and some students get left behind." Similarly, FGD participants highlighted that overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching resources led to challenges in delivering individualized attention and fostering creativity. One participant noted, "In large classes, it's difficult to use learner-centered methods; we mostly teach to the whole class at once."

Non-material factors were equally influential and encompassed leadership support, professional development, and peer collaboration. Teachers emphasized that constructive supervision, recognition, mentoring, and opportunities to share lesson strategies significantly strengthened their morale, confidence, and motivation. For instance, one teacher explained during an interview, "When the headteacher praises our work or allows us to attend workshops, I feel valued and motivated to improve my teaching." FGD participants also confirmed that collaboration among colleagues encouraged joint problem-solving, sharing innovative ideas, and mutual learning, creating a positive school culture that enhanced teacher enthusiasm and professional growth.

4.2 Influences on Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Teachers working in supportive environments reported higher job satisfaction and motivation compared to those in poorly supported schools. Recognition from school leaders, ward education officers, and parents emerged as a consistent source of encouragement. One teacher

remarked, “Even a simple thank you from my head teacher makes me feel proud and dedicated to my work.” Another participant in FGDs added, “When we are recognized during staff meetings, it motivates us to keep improving our lessons.”

Professional development opportunities were critical in enhancing teacher morale. Teachers who attended workshops, mentoring sessions, or in-service training gained confidence and acquired innovative teaching strategies. As one interviewee noted, “The training I received on learner-centered approaches helped me make lessons more interactive and meaningful for students.” Conversely, inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, and poor infrastructure were demotivating factors. Teachers in these contexts reported increased stress, fatigue, and reduced enthusiasm. An FGD participant stated, “Sometimes, we feel frustrated when we don’t have enough textbooks or desks for students; it’s hard to teach effectively.” These findings indicate that both psychological factors, such as recognition and support, and structural factors, like resources and training, jointly influence teacher motivation.

4.3 Influences on Teaching Performance

Supportive work environments strongly enhanced teaching performance. Teachers with sufficient teaching materials, manageable class sizes, and supportive leadership were able to plan lessons effectively and implement interactive, learner-centered strategies. One teacher reflected during an interview, “With support from the head teacher and enough teaching aids, I can use group activities, role plays, and discussions, and students participate actively.” FGD participants corroborated this, noting that constructive supervision and feedback encouraged reflection, creativity, and continuous improvement in instructional techniques.

Peer collaboration was another key driver of effective teaching. Teachers reported sharing resources, exchanging innovative methods, and mentoring one another to solve classroom challenges collectively. One teacher explained, “We learn a lot from each other if someone has a new way of teaching, we adopt it in our classes.” In contrast, schools with poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, high pupil-to-teacher ratios, and weak leadership demonstrated low instructional effectiveness and poor learner engagement. Teachers in these settings expressed feelings of demotivation and lack of support. As an FGD participant highlighted, “It’s hard to stay motivated when the classroom is crowded, the furniture is broken, and there’s no support from the administration.” These findings underline that sustained teaching performance depends on the integration of adequate resources, strong leadership, and a collaborative professional culture.

5. DISCUSSION

The study confirms that supportive work environments are multidimensional, encompassing both material and non-material components that directly influence teacher motivation, satisfaction, and teaching performance. Adequate material resources such as classrooms, teaching aids, and textbooks create the physical conditions necessary for effective teaching and meaningful student engagement. These findings correspond with the observations of UNESCO (2021) and Adeyemi and Adu (2019), who emphasized that well-equipped schools provide an enabling atmosphere that promotes instructional quality and learner achievement. The results underscore that educational infrastructure remains a vital determinant of teacher productivity and morale.

Non-material aspects of support, including collegial cooperation, mentorship, ongoing professional development, and constructive school leadership, were found to significantly enhance teacher confidence, creativity, and job satisfaction. Teachers in schools that promoted positive interpersonal relationships and participatory management reported greater enthusiasm and stronger engagement in instructional tasks. These outcomes are consistent with Herzberg's (2017) assertion that motivators such as recognition, responsibility, and growth opportunities are crucial for sustained professional satisfaction. A supportive culture that values teachers as professionals cultivates trust and encourages innovation in teaching.

Continuous professional development should be prioritized as a key strategy for improving teacher competence and innovation. Regular workshops, mentoring programs, and in-service training sessions should be organized to help teachers update their pedagogical skills and stay informed about modern instructional methods. These initiatives should emphasize active learning, inclusive education, and the integration of technology in teaching. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that professional development opportunities are extended equitably to teachers in rural schools, who often face challenges of isolation and limited access to training. By including rural teachers in such programs, the government can help reduce professional disparities, enhance motivation, and improve the overall quality of education delivery across different regions.

Furthermore, the study underscores the synergistic effect that arises when physical, social, and institutional supports are effectively combined. Schools possessing sufficient resources but lacking strong leadership or collegial collaboration often failed to achieve maximum instructional success. Conversely, schools integrating all dimensions of support adequate

materials, strong leadership, and peer cooperation demonstrated higher teacher morale and performance. This aligns with Maslow's (2018) framework, which suggests that higher-order needs such as esteem and self-actualization are achievable only when fundamental needs like safety, security, and belonging are adequately fulfilled.

Despite these positive findings, persistent challenges remain within Tanzanian public primary schools. Overcrowded classrooms, shortages of teaching materials, and inequitable resource distribution between urban and rural institutions continue to hinder effective teaching. Such disparities weaken teacher motivation and limit opportunities for professional development. These findings mirror the observations of Mulkeen (2017) and Bennell and Akyeampong (2019), who highlighted that systemic constraints such as poor infrastructure and inadequate supervision remain major barriers to teaching effectiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa. Addressing these challenges requires sustained investment, equitable resource allocation, and stronger institutional support to create environments where teachers can thrive and learners can succeed.

The study emphasizes that equitable access to resources and the promotion of collaborative school cultures are indispensable in sustaining effective teaching and learning. Collegial collaboration, mentorship, and continuous professional development not only enhance teachers' skills but also foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose among staff members. School leaders and policymakers must therefore prioritize creating enabling environments where teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered to perform their roles effectively. Strengthening these supportive structures will ultimately lead to improved student engagement, higher academic achievement, and the realization of Tanzania's broader educational development goals.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Supportive work environments are vital determinants of teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and teaching performance in public primary schools. The presence of adequate physical resources, such as classrooms, teaching aids, and textbooks, combined with effective and empathetic school leadership, greatly contributes to teachers' confidence and overall effectiveness. A supportive environment encourages innovation, enhances teachers' commitment to their duties, and nurtures positive attitudes toward teaching. In contrast, schools characterized by inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and poor

administrative support face numerous challenges, including diminished teacher morale, reduced professional enthusiasm, and compromised instructional quality.

The government, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, should ensure equitable distribution of educational resources such as classrooms, teaching aids, and textbooks across all public primary schools. Currently, disparities in resource allocation between urban and rural areas hinder equal learning opportunities and affect teacher morale. Ensuring that every teacher has access to adequate teaching materials and conducive classroom environments will not only enhance instructional delivery but also motivate teachers to perform effectively. In addition, deliberate efforts should be made to reduce the pupil-to-teacher ratio by recruiting more teachers and constructing additional classrooms. Lower ratios allow teachers to provide individualized attention to learners, improve classroom management, and ensure better learning outcomes.

School leadership and supervision practices should be supportive, participatory, and oriented toward professional growth rather than control or punishment. Headteachers and education officers should adopt constructive and non-punitive supervision approaches that encourage teachers to reflect on their performance and seek improvement collaboratively. Participatory leadership, which involves teachers in decision-making processes, fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to institutional goals. In addition, teacher motivation can be significantly enhanced through recognition and appreciation. Schools and education authorities should recognize teacher efforts through awards, positive feedback, and public acknowledgment of achievements. Celebrating teachers' contributions can strengthen their sense of value and inspire continued dedication to their work.

Collaboration among teachers should be institutionalized as a regular practice within schools. Establishing structured platforms such as lesson-sharing forums, professional learning communities, and peer mentoring programs can facilitate the exchange of ideas and effective teaching practices. Collaborative activities promote teamwork, creativity, and shared responsibility for student success. Moreover, schools should encourage teachers to engage in collective planning and team-based problem-solving to address instructional challenges. This collaborative culture not only improves the quality of teaching but also fosters a sense of unity and belonging among staff, which is vital for maintaining motivation and reducing professional burnout.

To build on the findings of this study, further research is recommended in several areas. First, there is a need to investigate the long-term impact of supportive work environments on student learning outcomes, as improvements in teacher motivation and satisfaction ultimately influence educational achievement. Second, comparative studies between urban and rural school environments should be conducted to better understand context-specific challenges and identify effective strategies for different settings. Such studies would help policymakers design targeted interventions that address the unique needs of each educational context. Finally, future research should examine the role of community and parental involvement in sustaining teacher motivation and performance. The support of parents and the wider community is crucial in creating a positive school climate that values and supports teachers' efforts.

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