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Influence of Psychological Motivational Mechanism on Teacher Professional Performance in Public Senior Schools in Kajiado County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined how psychological motivational mechanisms influence teacher professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya. The study was guided by the following research question: To what extent do psychological motivational mechanisms influence teacher professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya? The study was guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The study used a concurrent mixed-methods design: a cross-sectional design for the quantitative component and a phenomenological design for the qualitative component. The target population were one county director, Ministry of Education, Kajiado County; one TSC county director, Kajiado County; 71 principals, 1104 teachers; and 71 PA chairpersons, with 59 principals sampled using purposive sampling, 285 teachers using the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970), 59 PA chairpersons sampled using purposive critical sampling, and 1 TSC and 1 MOE county director sampled using purposive critical sampling. The study used a t-test to analyse the hypothesis. The findings established that psychological motivational mechanisms significantly influenced teachers' professional performance in public senior schools. The null hypothesis was tested using a t-test; the results indicated $p=0.001 < \alpha=0.05$. The null hypothesis was rejected. The study concluded that psychological motivational mechanisms are fundamental determinants of teachers' professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya. The study recommended that the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), the Ministry of Education (MOE), and school principals should develop and implement comprehensive psychological motivational policies that are likely to enhance teachers' professional performance, increase job satisfaction and commitment, and improve the overall quality of education in public senior schools.

Key Words: Psychological Motivational Mechanism; Teacher Professional Performance

1. Introduction

Psychological motivational mechanism refers to the intrinsic factors that enhance teachers' self-esteem, professional identity, personal fulfilment, and internal satisfaction derived from their work. Unlike financial incentives, these mechanisms address higher-order psychological needs associated with recognition, achievement, autonomy, competence, professional growth, and self-actualization, which are critical in sustaining long-term motivation and professional commitment (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg et al., 1959). Psychological motivation is particularly important in the teaching profession because it fosters intrinsic commitment, encourages continuous professional learning, and promotes the pursuit of excellence in instructional practice.

In the present study, psychological motivational mechanisms were operationalized through teachers' perceptions of opportunities for professional growth and career advancement, recognition and appreciation of their contributions, respect and professional dignity, autonomy in instructional and decision-making processes, trust by school leadership, empowerment, and personal achievement derived from successful teaching. These dimensions are consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which identifies achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth as key motivators that enhance job satisfaction and performance (Herzberg et al., 1959). They also reflect Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which posits that once lower-order needs are reasonably satisfied, individuals become increasingly motivated by esteem and self-actualization needs that foster professional fulfilment and optimal performance (Maslow, 1943).



Imran, Ghazwan and Firmansyan (2024) examined the effects of recognition and appreciation on employee motivation and performance in Manila using a qualitative systematic literature review. Guided by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Self-Determination Theory, the study found that recognition enhanced extrinsic motivation, while appreciation strengthened intrinsic motivation, resulting in improved performance, organizational commitment, and employee engagement.

However, the study relied on secondary literature rather than field-based empirical data and focused on employees generally rather than teachers. The current study addressed these gaps by using a mixed-methods approach to examine the influence of psychological motivational mechanisms, including recognition, appreciation, professional growth, autonomy, and achievement satisfaction, on teacher professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya, guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory.

Enore and Idahosa-Erhabor (2025) examined teacher motivation and job effectiveness in public senior schools in Edo State, Nigeria, using a quantitative research approach and stratified sampling. The study found that democratic participation in school decision-making enhanced teachers' involvement, ownership, respect, recognition, and self-worth, thereby improving job effectiveness. However, the study focused broadly on teacher motivation and job effectiveness rather than specifically on psychological motivational mechanisms. The current study therefore extends this area by examining how professional growth and advancement, respect and self-worth, autonomy, and achievement satisfaction influence teachers' professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya.

Munga (2020) investigated the relationship between non-financial rewards and teacher retention in private schools in Kirinyaga South District, Kenya, using a concurrent mixed-methods design and purposive sampling. The study found that recognition, appreciation, and support for personal and professional development enhanced teacher retention and commitment. However, it focused on private schools and teacher retention, whereas the current study examines the influence of psychological motivational mechanisms on teachers' professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya.

The reviewed literature revealed that, although several studies have examined motivation and its effects on teacher and employee outcomes, there remains a significant empirical gap regarding the influence of psychological motivational mechanisms on teachers' professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya. Previous studies largely focused on teacher motivation, job satisfaction, retention, professional development, and organizational performance in diverse contexts. Therefore, the current study addresses this gap by specifically examining psychological motivational mechanisms and their influence on teacher professional performance within public senior schools in Kajiado County.

2. Methodology

The study used a concurrent mixed-methods research design. A concurrent mixed-methods design involves collecting both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time or in parallel. In a concurrent design, the collection of qualitative and quantitative data is independent, and neither type of data informs the collection of the other. A cross-sectional research design was used in the quantitative component of the study.

Phenomenological research design was used in the qualitative component. This is because the study sought to explore teachers lived experiences regarding motivational mechanisms and how these experiences influence their professional performance (Sharma, 2022). The study sample comprised 59 principals using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, 285 teachers, 1 TSC County Director, 1 Ministry of Education County Director, and 59 Parent Association Chairpersons, drawn from 59 sampled public senior schools in Kajiado County. The study employed questionnaires, interview guides, document analysis schedules, and observation schedules to collect comprehensive data. Content validity of the research instruments was established by having the instruments appraised by three (3) experts. To test the reliability of the instrument, a split-half reliability test was used. The correlation between the two parts was 0.954, indicating a strong relationship.

3. Findings

This section presented frequency distribution and percentages on the influence of psychological motivational mechanisms on teachers' professional performance from public senior schools in Kajiado County.

Frequency distribution and percentages on the influence of Psychological Motivational Mechanisms and teacher professional performance.



Statement	Very large extent <i>n</i> (%)	Large extent <i>n</i> (%)	No extent <i>n</i> (%)	Small extent <i>n</i> (%)	Very small extent <i>n</i> (%)
1. I receive verbal praise from the school administration for being committed to my duties like teaching and extracurricular activities	47 (22.8%)	87 (42.2%)	38 (18.4%)	20 (9.7%)	14 (6.8%)
2. My school publicly recognizes high-performing teachers during staff meetings and in the school's newsletter	40 (19.4%)	73 (35.4%)	27 (13.1%)	38 (18.4%)	28 (13.6%)
3. I feel my professional skills and capabilities are valued at this school by the school's administration, parents and students	48 (23.3%)	99 (48.1%)	33 (16.0%)	20 (9.7%)	6 (2.9%)
4. I consider my various accomplishments in the subjects that I teach and sports as a key source of my professional self-esteem.	55 (26.7%)	109 (52.9%)	13 (6.3%)	26 (12.6%)	3 (1.5%)
5. I have the freedom to choose the teaching methods and strategies to use in my classroom.	83 (40.3%)	101 (49.0%)	9 (4.4%)	7 (3.35%)	6 (2.75%)
6. I am encouraged by my fellow staff mates and the principal to try innovative teaching methods	55 (26.7%)	89 (43.2%)	35 (17.0%)	22 (10.7%)	5 (2.4%)
7. I am proud of the mean scores that I obtain in the subjects that I teach on a yearly basis	79 (38.3%)	86 (41.7%)	23 (11.2%)	14 (6.8%)	4 (1.9%)
8. I am satisfied with the recognition I receive from administration for my achievements	26 (12.6%)	104 (50.5%)	27 (13.1%)	19 (9.2%)	30 (14.6%)
<i>N</i>	433(26.26%)	747(45.37%)	205(12.37%)	166(10.05%)	96(5.80%)

The findings indicated that 14 (6.8%) teachers perceived verbal praise to a very small extent, 20 (9.7%) to a small extent, while 38 (18.4%) indicated no extent at all. These responses suggest that a notable proportion of teachers either rarely receive verbal appreciation or do not perceive praise as a common practice within their schools. The absence of recognition may reduce employees' sense of value and belonging within the organization. However, 87 (42.2%) teachers indicated that they receive verbal praise to a large extent, while 47 (22.8%) reported a very large extent. The majority of respondents therefore acknowledged that administrators appreciate their commitment and efforts. Verbal praise may reinforce positive behavior, enhance self-confidence, and encourage teachers to sustain high levels of performance. This finding supports Rudrigos (2024), who argues that employee recognition increases motivation, confidence, and productivity. The findings therefore suggest that while verbal praise is widely practised in many schools, its implementation may not be consistent across all institutions.



The study also examined whether schools publicly recognize high-performing teachers during staff meetings and through school newsletters. The findings show that 28 teachers (13.6%) indicated a very small extent, 38 (18.4%) a small extent, and 27 (13.1%) no extent at all. These responses indicate that public recognition is either limited or absent in some schools. Teachers who do not receive public acknowledgement may feel that their efforts are not sufficiently visible to colleagues and other stakeholders. In contrast, 73 (35.4%) teachers reported a large extent, while 40 (19.4%) indicated a very large extent. These findings show that a majority of respondents perceived public recognition as a common practice in their schools. Public acknowledgement may strengthen professional identity, encourage healthy competition, and motivate teachers to maintain high-performance standards. This observation is supported by Muga (2021), who found that open recognition of excellent performance strengthens motivation and commitment among employees.

The findings further revealed teachers' perceptions regarding the extent to which their professional skills and capabilities are valued by administrators, parents, and students. A minority of respondents, comprising 6 (2.9%) teachers, 20 (9.7%), and 33 (16.0%), indicated very small extent, small extent, and no extent, respectively. These responses suggest that some teachers feel their expertise and professional contributions are not adequately appreciated by key stakeholders in the education process. Conversely, 99 (48.1%) teachers reported a large extent, while 48 (23.3%) indicated a very large extent. The majority therefore perceived that their professional competencies are recognized and valued. Feeling valued may enhance teachers' confidence, commitment, and willingness to invest additional effort in their work. This finding is consistent with Mutua (2023), who argues that employees who feel valued demonstrate greater job satisfaction, creativity, and organizational commitment. The results therefore suggest that professional recognition contributes positively to teachers' psychological well-being and professional performance.

Teachers were also asked whether accomplishments in academic subjects and sports serve as sources of professional self-esteem. The findings indicated that 3 (1.5%) teachers reported a very small extent, 26 (12.6%) a small extent, and 13 (6.3%) no extent at all. These responses suggest that some teachers derive their self-worth from factors other than measurable achievements in academics or co-curricular activities. Nevertheless, 109 (52.9%) teachers indicated a large extent, while 55 (26.7%) reported a very large extent. The majority therefore viewed professional accomplishments as important sources of self-esteem. Success in teaching and co-curricular activities may reinforce feelings of competence and professional fulfilment, which in turn motivate teachers to maintain or improve their performance. These findings are consistent with the Self-Worth Theory advanced by Covington and Beery (1976), which proposes that individuals derive a sense of value from achievement and recognition of their abilities. The findings suggest that professional accomplishments remain an important psychological motivator for teachers.

The study further sought teachers' views on the freedom to choose teaching methods and instructional strategies. The findings showed that 13 (6.3%) teachers indicated a small extent, while 9 (4.4%) reported no extent at all. These responses suggest that a small proportion of teachers may perceive limitations in their professional autonomy, possibly due to institutional regulations or administrative control over instructional practices. In contrast, 101 (49.0%) teachers indicated a large extent and 83 (40.3%) a very large extent. The overwhelming majority therefore perceived that they have considerable freedom in selecting teaching approaches suitable for their learners. Professional autonomy enables teachers to adapt instructional strategies to classroom needs and encourages innovation in teaching practice. This finding supports Juyumaya, Ochoa and Rojas (2024), who observed that autonomy positively influences employee motivation and job performance. The results therefore indicate that autonomy is a significant psychological factor influencing teachers' professional effectiveness.

Regarding encouragement to adopt innovative teaching methods, 5 (2.4%) teachers indicated a very small extent, 22 (10.7%) a small extent, and 35 (17.0%) no extent at all. These responses suggest that some schools may not sufficiently support experimentation and innovation in classroom practice. However, 89 (43.2%) teachers reported a large extent, while 55 (26.7%) indicated a very large extent. These findings demonstrate that most teachers receive encouragement from colleagues and school leaders to implement innovative instructional approaches. Supportive professional environments may foster creativity, continuous learning, and improved learner outcomes. Kumar (2023) notes that supportive organizational cultures encourage employee innovation and strengthen commitment to organizational goals. The findings therefore suggest that encouragement from school leadership and colleagues plays a critical role in promoting innovative teaching practices.



The study also examined teachers' pride in the mean scores attained in the subjects they teach. The findings indicated that 4 (1.9%) teachers reported a very small extent, 14 (6.8%) a small extent, and 23 (11.2%) no extent at all. These responses suggest that some teachers may not associate their professional identity closely with examination outcomes, possibly due to the influence of factors beyond their control. Conversely, 86 (41.7%) teachers indicated a large extent, while 79 (38.3%) reported a very large extent. The majority therefore expressed pride in their academic results. Such pride may reflect a strong sense of professional accomplishment and accountability for learner achievement. The findings support the argument by Ahmed (2022) that self-worth and professional achievement contribute significantly to employee motivation and performance. These results suggest that academic achievement remains a key source of professional satisfaction among teachers.

Teachers were asked about their level of satisfaction with recognition received from school administrators. The findings show that 30 (14.6%) teachers indicated a very small extent, 19 (9.2%) a small extent, and 27 (13.1%) no extent at all. These responses indicate that a sizeable minority of teachers are dissatisfied with the recognition they receive for their achievements. On the other hand, 104 (50.5%) teachers indicated a large extent, while 26 (12.6%) reported a very large extent. These findings suggest that most teachers are satisfied with the recognition provided by school administrators. Recognition may strengthen morale, reinforce desirable behavior, and enhance commitment to professional responsibilities. Gallup (2024) similarly found that employee recognition contributes significantly to improved performance and organizational engagement. The findings therefore indicate that recognition is generally appreciated by teachers, although schools may differ in the extent to which recognition practices are implemented.

When respondents were asked which psychological motivational mechanism would most influence their professional performance, 28 (13.6%) teachers identified recognition and appreciation, 48 (23.3%) identified respect from parents, learners, and school leadership, 79 (38.3%) identified opportunities for promotion and professional development, while 51 (24.8%) identified autonomy in carrying out their responsibilities. The findings indicated that teachers value a variety of psychological motivational mechanisms. Although recognition and respect were considered important, opportunities for promotion and professional growth emerged as the most preferred motivational factor. This suggests that teachers place considerable value on career advancement and opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills. Autonomy was also highly rated, indicating the importance of professional independence in enhancing performance.

Information obtained from observation schedules indicate that all the schools that were visited had school secretaries; school secretaries help reduce administrative burdens on teachers and school leaders by handling correspondence, record management, communication, filing, scheduling, and other clerical responsibilities. When such support is available, teachers can devote more time and energy to their core professional duties, including lesson preparation, content delivery, assessment, and learner support. The findings support Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which posits that employees perform more effectively when organizations provide adequate support and resources.

Asked how psychological motivational mechanisms influence teacher professional performance, the TSC county director responded that: *Psychological motivational mechanisms such as recognition, self-worth, autonomy, belonging, achievement, trust, safety, and personal growth give teachers peace of mind and therefore create sufficient time for their teaching profession.* (24th April, 2026). Peace of mind is particularly important in the teaching profession because effective teaching requires concentration, creativity, patience, and sustained interaction with learners. Teachers who experience psychological well-being are more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, commitment, and effectiveness in carrying out instructional responsibilities, while those experiencing stress and emotional exhaustion may face difficulties in maintaining high levels of professional performance (Kyriacou, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2022).

The general findings demonstrate that psychological motivational mechanisms play a significant role in influencing teachers' professional performance. While a minority of teachers reported limited recognition, appreciation, autonomy, and support, the majority perceived these factors positively. The evidence suggests that recognition, professional respect, autonomy, opportunities for growth, and personal achievement contribute to enhanced motivation, self-esteem, and commitment to professional responsibilities. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of psychological motivation in fostering effective teacher performance within public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya.



The findings agree with Deci and Ryan (2000), whose Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental to intrinsic motivation and sustained employee performance. According to the theory, employees who are trusted, recognized, and given autonomy are more likely to demonstrate commitment, creativity, and persistence in their work. Similarly, the majority of teachers in the present study indicated that recognition, participation in decision-making, and professional autonomy enhanced their dedication and professional performance.

The findings are also consistent with Bandura (1997), who argued that employees with high levels of self-efficacy are more confident in their ability to accomplish professional tasks, persevere in the face of challenges, and achieve superior performance. Recognition, appreciation, and opportunities for professional growth strengthen teachers' confidence in their abilities, thereby encouraging greater commitment and accountability in their instructional and non-instructional responsibilities.

The study further agrees with Beyes and Vermote (2019), who found that satisfying teachers' psychological needs through supportive leadership, recognition, and autonomy promotes personal adjustment, intrinsic motivation, and positive teaching practices. Likewise, Lezarides et al. (2024) established that teacher motivation is a key predictor of instructional behavior, with psychologically motivated teachers demonstrating greater engagement, commitment, and effectiveness in classroom practice. The present findings therefore reinforce previous empirical evidence that psychological motivational mechanisms are critical determinants of teacher motivation and professional performance, underscoring the need for school leaders to cultivate supportive environments characterized by trust, recognition, autonomy, and opportunities for professional growth.

3.1 Hypotheses Testing

Ho1 There is no statistically significant influence of psychological motivational mechanisms on teacher professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County, Kenya. Ho1 was tested using a t-test, and the results indicated $p=0.001 < \alpha=0.05$, a significant level and therefore the Null hypothesis was rejected.

T- Test of significant influence of psychological motivational mechanism on teacher professional performance

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
PSYCHOLOGICAL MOTIVATIONAL MECHANISMS	78.875	205	0.00	3.76578	3.6716	3.8599

The findings demonstrate that teachers' professional performance is strongly influenced by psychological motivational mechanisms that enhance self-worth, confidence, autonomy, competence, achievement, and professional recognition. Teachers who experience positive psychological well-being are more likely to exhibit commitment, creativity, resilience, and effectiveness in their professional responsibilities. Descriptively, teachers reported greater motivation when their work was recognized by school leaders, when they were trusted to participate in decision-making, and when they had autonomy in performing their duties. The findings further indicate that self-worth encourages teachers to go beyond minimum job requirements, highlighting the critical role of psychological motivation in shaping teachers' attitudes, behavior, commitment, and professional performance. The findings are strongly supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943), particularly the esteem and self-actualization levels of the hierarchy. Maslow argued that individuals seek recognition, achievement, confidence, respect, and opportunities to realize their full potential. The results are also consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting intrinsic motivation.



4. Conclusions

- i. Psychological motivational mechanisms significantly affect teacher professional performance. Factors such as self-worth, autonomy, trust, recognition, self-efficacy, and opportunities for personal growth contribute positively to teachers' motivation and effectiveness.
- ii. Teachers who feel valued, empowered, and trusted are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of commitment, innovation, and professional performance.
- iii. The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms that motivation is a critical predictor of teacher professional performance in public senior schools in Kajiado County.

5. Recommendations

- i. Schools should strengthen teamwork and collaboration among teachers through professional learning activities, departmental meetings, mentoring programmes, and team-building activities.
- ii. School management should ensure that teachers work in safe, secure, and conducive environments by improving school infrastructure, security measures, and occupational health and safety standards.

6. Areas for further studies

- i. Similar studies should be conducted in primary schools, private schools, and tertiary institutions to determine whether the findings are consistent across different educational levels.
- ii. Employ longitudinal research designs to examine how psychological motivational mechanism influence teacher professional performance over time.

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