



Original Article

The effect of principals' leadership styles on teachers' job motivation in public secondary schools of Amhara regional state, Ethiopia

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ARTICLE INFO

Volume IV, Issue II (2026)
<https://doi.org/10.20372/kjmh062>

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 15 Jan, 2026
Accepted: 04 June, 2026
Published Online: 31 Jul, 2026

CITATION

Tsegaye, A., & Lakev, K.A. (2026). The effect of principals' leadership styles on teachers' job motivation in public secondary schools of Amhara regional state, Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of Education Studies*. Volume IV, Issue II (2026), 83-95.
<https://doi.org/10.20372/kjmh062>

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KEYWORDS:

Principals' Leadership Styles;
Educational Leadership;
Teacher Motivation;
Job Motivation

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of principals' leadership styles (directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented) on teachers' job motivation in public secondary schools. A mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was employed. Data for this study was collected from five public secondary schools in Fogera Woreda. To select the participant of study, simple random sampling techniques were employed to get a total of 140 teachers, and comprehensive sampling techniques were employed to select 6 principals. Five-point Likert scale questionnaires were employed to get quantitative data from teachers. Qualitative data were collected from principal and vice principal by using semi-structured interview. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and percentage, followed by inferential statistics including Pearson correlation and regression analysis techniques. Whereas the qualitative data were analyzed thematically using narration technique. Principals in Fogera Woreda demonstrate generally high levels of leadership, which positively correlates with teachers' job motivation. Achievement-oriented leadership shows the strongest link to motivation, while directive leadership has the weakest. A combination of leadership styles significantly predicts teacher motivation, with achievement-oriented and participative styles being the most influential. Consequently, principals' leadership styles have a significant impact on teacher motivation in secondary schools. Education stakeholders should prioritize supporting effective school leadership to enhance educational quality.

1 Introduction

Effective leadership is essential for creating high-performing schools and has become a global education policy priority (Ijaz et al., 2019). Leadership is commonly defined as the intentional influence exerted by individuals to guide group activities and relationships (Riggio, 2006). Among the major leadership theories, the Path-Goal Theory suggests that effective leaders adapt their styles to meet followers' needs, thereby enhancing motivation and performance (Northouse, 2016). This theory identifies four key styles such as directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership styles. Each contributing differently to organizational success (House & Mitchell, 1975).

In education, leadership serves as a social process that significantly shapes school quality and performance (Ijaz et al., 2019). Principals, as instructional leaders, can have a strong impact when granted autonomy to make key decisions (Adel et al., 2019; Eka & Wira, 2018). However, autonomy alone is not sufficient; the effectiveness of leadership depends on whether the style fits the school context (Normandy & Sukhumi, 2019). As schools strive to meet academic goals, principals must adopt leadership styles that inspire and motivate teachers, who are the key drivers of educational success (Akhmad & Wahyu, 2022; Khan & Nawaz, 2016).

Research consistently shows that leadership style influences teacher motivation and school outcomes (Adeyemi, 2015; Agrawal, 2011). Motivated teachers are central to implementing curriculum goals and improving student achievement (Hook, 2006).

In many African contexts, leadership and teacher motivation are shaped by challenges such as limited resources, large classes, and socio-economic constraints. Studies from Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana highlight that participative and supportive leadership styles foster inclusion, resilience, and teacher commitment (Bush & Glover, 2016; Mestry, 2017; Waweru & Orodho, 2014).

2 Research problem

In Ethiopia, recent education reforms have placed teachers at the center of quality improvement efforts (Ministry of Education, 2008). Yet, problems of low motivation persist despite supportive policies and programs (Firdissa, 2006). Principals play a crucial role in addressing issues related to heavy workloads, inadequate facilities, and low salaries (Ministry of Education, 2018). While directive leadership can help clarify expectations, it may also constrain teachers' creativity and autonomy (Teshome, 2020).

National initiatives such as the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I-VI) and the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap emphasize effective, participatory leadership as vital for reducing teacher turnover and improving learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2018).

However, little is known about how principals' leadership styles specifically influence teachers' job motivation in secondary schools, particularly in the context of Fogera Woreda. Addressing this gap is critical to aligning leadership practices with national educational goals and enhancing teacher motivation. Therefore, this study sought to examine the effects of principals' leadership styles on teachers' job motivation in public secondary schools of Fogera Woreda and to answer the following research question:

1. How does an achievement-oriented leadership style adopted by principals enhance teachers' motivation to set and meet high performance standards?
2. How do principals' directive leadership styles impact teachers' job motivation in terms of clarity of expectations and goal achievement in Fogera Woreda public secondary schools?
3. How is the influence of principals' participative leadership styles on teachers' sense of inclusion and commitment to organizational goals?
4. In what ways do principals' supportive leadership styles affect teachers' emotional well-being and motivation to perform in their roles?

3 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework was developed based on House and Mitchell (1975) path-goal theory. This framework illustrated the relationships among the study variables, as depicted below in fig. 1. In the framework, the independent variable, leadership styles, was linked to the dependent variable, teacher job motivation. The independent variable was defined by four leadership styles: directive, participative, supportive, and achievement-oriented. The dependent variable encompassed aspects of teachers' motivation related to job performance, recognition for high quality, professional freedom, and job security.

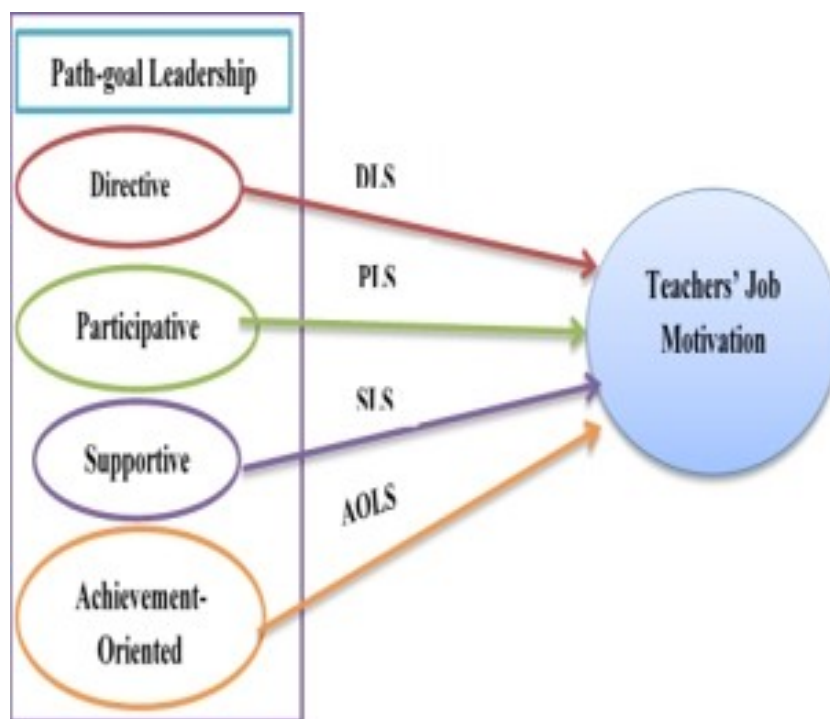


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

Key

- DLS = Directive Leadership Style
- PLS = Participative Leadership Style
- SLS = Supportive Leadership Style
- AOLS = Achievement-Oriented Leadership Style

4 Research methods

4.1 Research design

In this study, mixed research design, particularly explanatory sequential mixed design was employed. It was helpful to provide a clear picture on the relationship between the principal leadership style and the teachers' job motivation in the study area. The design has strong quantitative orientation as the researcher first gathers quantitative

data through questionnaire and analyzes results, and then analyzing the qualitative data obtained through interview (Creswell, 2022). It capitalizes on the strengths and minimizes the limitations of quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Clark et al., 2008). The assumption behind using this design was that the combination of both approaches could help to better understand the issues than using either of the approaches alone.

4.2 Subjects of the study

According to data obtained from Fogera Woreda Education Office (2024), the study area had five government secondary schools with a total of 237 teachers (193 males and 44 females). The schools were led by five principals and one vice principal, making a total of six school leaders who participated in the study.

Hence, sample size of each selected school was determined using Pandey and Verma (2008) formula, as given below in table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the population and samples

No.	School	Population	Sample	%		
1	Alem	221	97	0.80		
2	Addi	111	46	0.29		
3	Menguzer	...	...	...		
4	Guranba	...	...	...		
5	Kedist Hana	...	...	...		
6	Total	6	237	149	62.1	86

4.3 Data collection tools

Questionnaires and interview were used as instruments of data collection for this study. The standardized questionnaire developed by Indvik's Path-Goal Leadership (PGTQ) as cited by Saleem et al. (2020) was used. It contained 16 items, four per each of the four leadership styles such as directive, participative, supportive, and achievement oriented. The third part was used to measure teachers' job motivation. It was adopted from the established tools developed by Ololube (2006) and Sylvia and Hutchison (1985). It similarly contained 16 items, four per each of the four aspects of job motivation such as job performance achievement, recognition for high-quality performance, professional freedom, and job security. The instruments were utilized due to their established validity and reliability, which were confirmed through rigorous quantitative and qualitative procedures.

For this study, interview was held with the principals. It is an approach that facilitates data collection from participants who provide responses directly (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Kerlinger (1973) noted that individuals are often more willing to communicate orally than in writing, thereby provide more detailed information during interviews.

4.4 Data analysis

Given the 5-point Likert scale, in the analysis, mean scores and standard deviations were mainly used. The mean values were interpreted following a guideline suggested by Zaidatol and Bagheri (2009) where, the mean values from 1.00-1.80 (very low), 1.81-2.60

(low), 2.61-3.40 (moderate), 3.41-4.20 (high), and 4.21-5.00 (very high). Moreover, standard deviations were used in the analysis which indicates the distance where the mean scores are, on average, located or dispersed from their total mean.

Then, inferential statistics were performed to make generalizations about the population. Accordingly, the relationship between principals' leadership styles and teachers' job motivation were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Through this, the relationship between principals' leadership styles (participative, supportive, achievement-oriented, and directive) and teachers' job motivation were analyzed. The analysis was conducted at a $p < 0.05$ significance level with a 95% confidence interval. Correlation coefficients were interpreted based on Cohen (1988) guidelines, where $r = 0.10$ to 0.29 indicates a small correlation, $r = 0.30$ to 0.49 represents a moderate correlation, and $r = 0.50$ to 1.0 suggests a large correlation. These interpretations apply to both positive and negative correlation values. Following this, the effects of principal leadership styles on teachers' job motivation were analyzed using multiple regression analysis technique. In this analysis, Beta values obtained from the regression analysis were used to describe the findings. Finally, data collected through semi-structured interview were qualitatively analyzed using narration analysis technique.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Three ethical issues were considered in this study such as informed consent, confidentiality and consequences. First and most, each respondent was kept informed about objectives of the study and aware that his/her participation was entirely voluntary.

5 Result

5.1 The principals' leadership style

On principal leadership style, the information requested from 140 respondents was summarized as given below in table 2.

Table 2: The descriptive statistics of principals' leadership style

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Directive leadership style (DLS1)	3.31	.958
Participative leadership style (PLS2)	3.46	.882
Supportive leadership style (SLS3)	3.43	.903
Achievement oriented style (AOLS4)	3.58	.785
Total	3.59	.786

Source: Output from SPSS, 2025

Table 2 shows that principal leadership (involving the four styles) received a total mean score = 3.59 and SD = 0.786 while suggesting an overall high level of teachers' agreement. Given this finding, however, it does not mean that all the styles have a similar level as each of the styles were observed with mean scores varied from 3.31 (lowest) to 3.58 (highest).

As table 2, achievement-oriented leadership style seemed the first having received the highest mean score followed by participative compared to supportive and directive lead-

ership styles in secondary schools of Fogera Woreda. As can be observed from the table, a mean score = 3.58 and SD = .785 > the critical mean (CM) = 3.00 were observed while indicating that achievement-oriented leadership style received the highest rating from teachers. It seems that teachers feel motivated when their principal values them, provides them with constructive feedback, supports their professional growth and with good academic achievement of their students respectively,

With a mean score = 3.46 and SD = .882 > CM, participative leadership style seemed to have received the second highest agreement of teachers. In regard to this, the mean scores as observed 3.51, 3.51, 3.43, and 3.40 > CM, the teachers felt that their principal consults them when facing problem, listen attentively to their ideas and suggestions, asks them for suggestions on what assignments should be made and encourages co-operation among them during the decision-making process respectively.

5.2 The teacher job motivation

The second variable of this study was teachers' job motivation and it was examined as a dependent variable. On this variable, the respondents were given 16 statements upon which data collected were analyzed first using descriptive statistics. Related to this, summarized scores of all the items were shown below in table 3.

Table 3: The descriptive statistics of teachers' job motivation

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job performance	3.58	.894
High quality performance	3.43	.983
Professional freedom	3.21	1.026
Job security	3.75	.864
Total	3.62	.681

Overall, job motivation was rated with a total mean = 3.62 and SD = 0.681 > CM showing a high level of the teachers' agreement on their motivation in secondary schools of Fogera Woreda. There were, indeed, mean variations ranging from the lowest = 3.31 to the highest = 3.58 (as observed from table 3) showing that the four dimensions of motivation have not been felt similarly by the teachers.

As shown in table 3, the mean scores and standard deviations for each dimension are presented along with the total mean all which are observed > CM. The results indicate that the dimension of job security received the highest rating, with a mean score of 3.75 and SD = .864 while demonstrating that teachers place significant importance on job stability. This was followed by job performance, which had a mean score of 3.58 and SD = .894. In comparison, recognition for high-quality performance and professional freedom received relatively lower mean scores = 3.43 and 3.21 and SD = .983 and 1.026 respectively. This may imply that while job security and performance are key motivating factors, teachers perceive less motivation from the dimensions of professional freedom and recognition for high-quality work in secondary schools of Fogera Woreda.

The quantitative results seemed to be substantiated by the information from the interview. In this study, a total of 6 of whom 5 were main principals and 1 was vice principal were interviewed. The principals pointed out that teachers understand what might be expected of them when they are provided with structured guidance and most of their teachers aware what are required of them if they are directed even though there are

some teachers who are reluctant. The principals reveal that exercising directive leadership style sometimes influences the teachers' job motivation since it involves face-to-face interactions and collegial supervision which helps teachers to consider and focus on their teaching activities and improve their classroom performance. For example, principal-3 stated

"I believe teachers clearly understand my expectations and the school's goals through regular staff meetings, clear communication, and well-defined performance standards." He further explained that such leadership helps inform teachers about what needs to be done and how to do it, although at times, expectations may be communicated vaguely. Similarly, Principal-1 emphasized: "I ensure that some teachers understand my expectations and the school's goals through regular meetings, clear communication, and ongoing support."

Principal-2 added that additional efforts, such as maintaining peer collaboration and community involvement, are necessary due to limited resources and training opportunities. He suggested that implementing structured lesson planning and mentoring sessions could help address these challenges. Besides, principal-6 stated:

"When teachers are involved in decision-making, they feel a sense of ownership over school activities, viewing them as their own responsibilities, so that this sense of ownership can influence other teachers to feel the same way." He further explained that when trust exists in these shared responsibilities, it enhances teachers' job motivation.

The above ideas indicate that the leadership styles being practiced by principals in secondary schools of Fogera woreda have a strong impact on teachers' job motivation. In regard to this, it is observed from the quantitative finding that the teachers showed a high level of agreement on achievement-oriented leadership style. This has been corroborated with the qualitative finding. In the interview, principals commonly forwarded that achievement-oriented leadership style positively impacts teachers' motivation as the style focuses on providing clear goals, high expectations, and consistent support, which fosters a sense of direction and purpose. The principals also appreciated providing regular feedback, recognition of achievements, and development opportunities which enhance teachers' commitment.

Generally, the interviews indicate that all the leadership styles examined in this study have almost been exercised by secondary school principals in the study area. From the interviews, it could be understood that achievement-oriented, participative, supportive, and directive leadership styles are exercised by principals. So, the results obtained from the interviews were quite complementing with the findings obtained through questionnaire.

5.3 Relationship between leadership style and job motivation

Having performed the descriptive statistics, then, a correlational analysis has been conducted to see the relationship between principal leadership styles (participative, supportive, achievement-oriented, and directive) and teachers' job motivation. The findings obtained from this analysis are presented below in table 4.

Table 4: The relationship between principals' leadership styles and teachers' job motivation

	DLS1	PLS2	SLS3	AOLS4
DLS1	1			
PLS2	.022	1		
SLS3	.039	.302	1	
AOLS4	.032	.391	.033	1

Table 5: Regression analysis

Model	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)			
DLS1	.032	.584	.560
PLS2	.391	4.0	.000
SLS3	.044	.637	.525
AOLS4	.459	6.25	.000

a. Dependent variable: TJP

b. Predictors: (Constant), DLS1, PLS2, SLS3, AOLS4

As shown in table 5, consideration is given to the column labelled Beta under Standardized Coefficients in order to compare the variables focused in this study. From the Beta column, it can be seen which beta value is the largest. In this study, AOLS1 had the largest beta coefficient ($\beta = .459$, $P = .000 < 0.05$), indicating that it makes the strongest and statistically significant contribution to predicting TJM followed by PLS2 ($\beta = .391$, $p = .000 < 0.05$) compared to SLS3 ($\beta = .044$, $p = .525 > 0.05$) and DLS1 ($\beta = .032$, $p = .56 > 0.05$) which had lower beta values and were not statistically significant predictors of teacher job motivation.

6 Discussion

Given that leading a school is admittedly exercising power to direct teachers towards goals and being teachers are main persons in a school, Normandy and Sukhumi (2019) confirm that how a principal directs and motivates them can be influenced by the leadership styles he/she exercises. Based on findings from the descriptive statistics, this study showed principals leadership style and teacher job motivation in view of teachers' information. Zaidatol and Bagheri (2009), suggesting that principals' leadership styles are in line with the established benchmarks for effective leadership and are positively associated with teacher motivation (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Yukl, 2010). The study is in line to Said and Serawit (2018) who showed more teachers' motivated feeling by intrinsic than extrinsic rewards whereas disagree with Gemechu (2018) and Sewagegne (2020) who reported low teachers' motivation. In this study, the achievement-oriented leadership style recorded the highest mean score, followed by participative, supportive, and directive styles. The correlation matrix showed a similar pattern: achievement-oriented leadership had the strongest correlations with participative and supportive styles, while directive leadership demonstrated the weakest correlations. According to Cohen (1988), correlations in the range $r = 0.50$ to 1.00 are considered robust. This finding aligns with Wasserman et al. (2016) and Wahid et al. (2024), who reported positive relationships between leadership

styles and aspects of teachers' job motivation such as perception, willingness, and initiative. Northouse (2016) supports the strong link between achievement-oriented leadership and teacher motivation by arguing that expressing confidence in teachers' abilities fosters job satisfaction. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) and Marzano et al. (2005), and Abebe (2021) similarly report significant relationships between achievement-oriented and participative leadership styles and teacher motivation. These results are further corroborated by Day et al. (2016) and Tesfaye (2023), who found that participative leadership contributes to an inclusive environment in which teachers feel valued and demonstrate greater engagement and professional growth. This study aligns with Leithwood et al. (2020) and Heck and Hallinger (2014), who found that participative leadership enhances teacher morale, instructional quality, and professional learning through collaboration and shared goals. However, it differs from studies such as Yukl (2010), which emphasized directive leadership as more effective in hierarchical school systems, and Hallinger and Heck (2011), who reported weaker links between leadership and motivation due to contextual and cultural variations.

Similarly, Bush and Glover (2016) observed that directive leadership often dominates bureaucratic schools for maintaining discipline and efficiency, unlike the present findings. Robinson et al. (2008) also noted that leadership alone cannot sustain teacher motivation without structural supports like autonomy, time, and professional development. This implies that the strong influence of leadership found in this study may overlook key contextual and organizational factors.

The regression analysis revealed that principals' leadership styles collectively explained 63.2% of the variance in teachers' job motivation. Among these, achievement-oriented leadership style had the strongest influence ($\beta = .459$) followed by participative leadership ($\beta = .391$), both showing significant contributions. In contrast, supportive ($\beta = .044$) and directive ($\beta = .032$) styles had negligible effects. These findings align with Sogol and Akoto (2017) and Mark (2015), who emphasized the impact of work conditions, and with Ghaffari et al. (2017) and Mwangi (2022), who found that achievement-oriented leadership style and participative leadership style enhance teacher motivation by fostering involvement and responsibility. Similarly, Robinson (2014) and Northouse (2016) noted that achievement-oriented leadership style builds teachers' self-confidence through setting high performance standards.

Likewise, Bell and Mjoli (2013) and Nkosi (2021) argued that participative leadership adds value to increase teachers' motivation through contributing for more engagement. In line to this, Muluneh (2024) reported a significant contribution of participative leadership to teacher motivation in secondary schools of Awi zone in Amhara region, Ethiopia. The present study, additionally shows an insignificant contribution of directive leadership to teacher motivation while corroborated by Yun et al. (2007) and Okumbe (2001) who argued that directive leadership stifles creativity and reduce motivation.

However, this study contrasts with Martin (2012), who found directive leadership effective in clarifying tasks for inexperienced teachers possibly due to contextual differences, as teachers in this study value autonomy. It also contradicts Mestry (2017), who highlighted supportive leadership as key to improving teacher morale in resource-limited settings; in Fogera Woreda, emotional support alone may not overcome systemic challenges like overcrowded classes and scarce resources.

Hallinger and Heck (2010) meta-analysis further suggests that leadership's impact on teacher motivation is often modest, explaining less than 20% of the variance, compared to 63.2% in this study. Likewise, this finding differs from Endrias (2019), who reported no significant effect of participative leadership in Gambella, and from Muluneh (2024), who found leadership explained only 36.3% of motivation variance in the Amhara region.

In summary, while several studies support the strong relationship between leadership

style and teachers' job motivation (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Wasserman et al., 2016), others caution against overestimating the role of leadership without considering the broader organizational and contextual environment (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). This study explains 63.2% of the variance in teacher motivation underscores its importance while indicating further exploration into the remaining 36.8% which may be influenced by variables not examined in this specific study.

7 Conclusions

The study, generally, disclosed teachers' high level of agreement on the leadership styles being exercised by principals and on the level teachers' motivation currently existed in secondary schools. The leadership styles being exercised by principals in all have been well conceived in motivating secondary school teachers in the study area.

The prevalence of those leadership aspects could mean that they are indispensably crucial for maintaining teachers' job motivation towards enhancing their academic performance. This was what has been reflected in the study being explained by an overall high level of teachers' motivation.

The study has exhibited the highest effect of achievement-oriented leadership style followed by participative leadership style on teachers' job motivation compared to supportive and directive leadership styles. Given this, more importantly, it is concluded that achievement-oriented leadership style has significantly the largest positive and strong contribution to teachers' job motivation.

Supportive leadership style demonstrated a positive but statistically insignificant contribution to teachers' job motivation. This could lead to infer those teachers have felt motivated due to the benevolent consultations they had had in times. Finally, the principals' supportive and directive leadership styles make no significant contribution to teachers' job motivation with the beta values they insignificantly exhibited least.

8 Recommendations

In order deliver a good leadership relevant to maintain a motivating work environment, thus, principals should need to make more focus in demonstrating the required style through putting efforts of setting and maintaining high performance standards, among others in place.

Principals need to pay more formal consideration to foster a sense of inclusion, ownership, and responsibility whereby ensuring a more engaged and motivated teachers dedicated towards achieving the school's academic goals.

Teachers, being professionally in close proximity even in experience to principals, they need to keep them motivated and engaged in schools' activities persistently through taking account of interests of schools and their own.

Woreda Education officials charged with the responsibility of overseeing schools need to get along with principals and teachers.

Supervisors need to work with principals to facilitate collective decisions that help to maintain an environment enhancing teachers' intrinsic motivation and to genuinely empower teachers and develop their emotional well-being.

Finally, it would be good to provide secondary school principals with trainings that help them update their leadership knowledge, skills, and competencies compatible to scaling up teachers' job motivation.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data Availability

Data can be made available on reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no competing interests.

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