

Beyond the Salary: Unveiling the Transformative Power of Recognition on Teacher Job Satisfaction in Rural Tanzania

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Abstract

Teacher job satisfaction is critical for educational quality and retention, particularly in resource-constrained rural settings. Grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this study investigates how recognition influences job satisfaction among primary school teachers in rural Tanzania. A qualitative, descriptive phenomenological design was employed in the Ukerewe District, Mwanza Region, where 29 informants from seven public primary schools, comprising classroom teachers, head teachers, school committee chairpersons, and ward executive officers, were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, and analyzed using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. Findings reveal that both formal and informal recognition, including public praise, peer acknowledgment, and structured awards, significantly enhance teachers' intrinsic motivation and professional commitment. However, the positive effects of recognition are mitigated by resource constraints and inconsistent implementation practices. The results underscore the necessity of integrating equitable recognition programs with improvements in basic hygiene factors such as fair compensation and adequate teaching resources. Recommendations include leveraging existing systems like PEPMIS, fostering community-led initiatives, and enhancing administrative capacity to ensure sustainable, holistic strategies that improve teacher morale and retention.

Keywords

Community; Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory; Job Satisfaction; Non-Monetary Incentives; Rural Education; Teacher Recognition

1. Introduction

Teacher job satisfaction is a cornerstone of educational efficacy and sustainability, directly influencing retention, performance, and student outcomes (Mertler, 2024; Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). In rural Tanzania, where resource constraints, geographic isolation, and systemic challenges exacerbate teacher attrition, understanding the drivers of job satisfaction is potential for fostering stable, motivated educators (Michael, Ndiujye, & Ephraim, 2022; Nyamubi, 2017). Recognition, whether monetary, non-monetary, or social, has emerged as a pivotal factor in shaping teachers' professional commitment and well-being (Movsessian, 2018; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2019). Therefore, grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between hygiene factors (e.g., salary, working conditions) and motivators (e.g., recognition, achievement), this study investigates how recognition influences job satisfaction among primary school teachers in rural Tanzania.

Globally, teacher retention hinges on job satisfaction, with dissatisfied teachers more likely to exit the profession, ending up destabilizing schools and student learning (Shuls & Flores, 2020). In developing countries, teachers in the peripherals face compounded challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited professional development, and delayed promotions (Nyamubi, 2017; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2019). Tanzania exemplifies these struggles, where most schools in the rural grapple with teacher shortages and high turnover (Michael et al., 2022). Recognition, however, offers a potential lever to mitigate dissatisfaction. Studies in Kenya and Sri Lanka highlight its role in enhancing performance and satisfaction, though preferences for financial versus non-monetary rewards vary (Amarasena, Ajward, & Haque, 2015; Odhiambo, Murira, & Ogeno, 2023). For instance, Akafo (2015) found rewards boost motivation but not necessarily satisfaction, suggesting nuanced interactions between recognition types and cultural contexts.

Recognition encompasses formal accolades, community respect, career advancement, and intrinsic validation (Movsessian, 2018; Tirta & Enrika, 2020)). Intrinsic factors like pride in student success or collegial respect often align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, where recognition acts as a motivator rather than a mere hygiene factor (Odhiambo et al., 2023). In Tanzania, Nyamubi (2017) notes teachers value community support and fair remuneration, while Sahito and Vaisanen (2019) emphasize transparent appraisal systems and empowerment. Yet, rural settings may amplify the salience of non-monetary recognition due to limited resources, as seen in Kenyan primary schools (Odhiambo et al., 2023). Conversely, Tirta and Enrika (2020) argue that recognition's impact on retention is mediated by job satisfaction, particularly among younger generations, a consideration for Tanzania's predominantly youthful teaching workforce.

While existing studies underscore recognition's importance, few explore its interplay with rural African contexts. Tanzanian-specific research remains sparse, with Nyamubi (2017) focusing broadly on satisfaction determinants without isolating recognition's role. This study addresses this gap by asking:

1. What forms of recognition (monetary, social, professional) are most valued by primary school teachers in rural Tanzania?
2. How do these forms of recognition influence job satisfaction?

Therefore, this paper aims to inform context-specific strategies for educational policymakers and administrators in Tanzania. It builds on Shuls and Flores (2020) advocacy's for implicit retention policies, such as fostering teacher voice and development, while advancing Odhiambo et al. (2023) findings on intrinsic rewards in similar settings. Ultimately, this article seeks to bridge theoretical frameworks like Herzberg's theory with on-the-ground realities, offering targeted and actionable solutions to bolster Tanzania's education system by addressing teacher turnover in public schools, especially in the peripherals.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological design to explore how recognition influences teachers' job satisfaction in public primary schools in rural Tanzania. Descriptive phenomenology as elaborated by Giorgi (2009) is particularly effective for exploring the essence of lived experiences and understanding the meanings that individuals ascribe to these experiences. This approach enabled the investigation of how teachers interpret recognition as a non-monetary incentive and its subsequent impact on their job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness (Creswell, 2014).

The study was conducted in the Ukerewe District, located in Mwanza Region, Tanzania. The district is characterized by over 100 public primary schools distributed across 25 administrative wards and several islands in Lake Victoria. The district was purposively selected due to its active initiatives to enhance teaching performance through NMIs implemented in collaboration with the Agency for the Development of Educational Management (ADEM) and the National Microfinance Bank (NMB). This unique rural context provided an ideal setting to explore how recognition is operationalized and experienced by primary school teachers.

A purposive sample of 29 informants was drawn from seven public primary schools to ensure that all participants possessed direct and relevant experience with recognition as a non-monetary incentive. The sample included 20 classroom teachers (each with a minimum of two years' experience at their current school), 5 head teachers, 2 school committee chairpersons, and 2 ward executive officers. This selection strategy ensured diversity in roles and teaching contexts, thereby enriching the study's exploration of the forms of recognition valued by teachers and their influence on job satisfaction.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes each, were conducted with head teachers, ward executive officers, and school committee chairpersons to gather in-depth insights into the recognition practices and their perceived impact on job satisfaction. Additionally, five FGDs were held with groups of four teachers per session, each lasting about 60 minutes, to foster interactive dialogue and capture a broader range of viewpoints. All interviews and FGDs were conducted in Kiswahili, audio-recorded upon participant consent, and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

The analysis of the transcribed data followed Amedeo Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009). Initially, the researcher engaged in bracketing to set aside preconceptions and fully immerse in the participants' descriptions. The transcripts were then read holistically to capture

an overall sense of the experiences. Subsequently, the data were segmented into meaning units that encapsulated the essential aspects of the participants' experiences with recognition. These meaning units were transformed into psychological language and synthesized into a coherent description of the essential structure of the phenomenon. This systematic process ensured that the analysis remained firmly rooted in the participants' accounts, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of how recognition influences job satisfaction.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional and local authorities. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal and institutional identifiers. All procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines, ensuring the protection of participants' rights throughout the study.

3. Results

The findings of this study reveal that recognition plays a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction in public primary schools in Ukerewe District. Overall, participants, comprising teachers, head teachers, ward executive officers (WEOs), and school committee chairpersons (SCCs), consistently emphasized that various forms of recognition serve as powerful non-monetary incentives that not only boost morale but also foster a sense of professional validation and commitment.

4. Recognition as a Source of Validation and Motivation

Teachers reported that recognition, whether delivered as verbal praise, public acknowledgment, or formal awards, provided them with both personal and professional validation as one teacher narrated, *"In all my 17 years of teaching, a simple thank you or a good job goes a long way in boosting any teacher's spirit"* (Teacher 11, P/S C, July 2023). Similarly, head teachers and WEOs stressed that public acknowledgment during staff meetings or school events significantly increased teachers' enthusiasm and engagement. This finding reinforces Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which positions recognition as an intrinsic motivator that satisfies the psychological need for acknowledgment and achievement (Herzberg, 1959, 1966). In this regard, even modest acts of acknowledgment were reported to have a profound impact on teachers' motivation, particularly in contexts where financial incentives are limited.

Diverse Forms of Recognition and Their Impact

The study identified several sub-themes regarding the ways in which recognition influences job satisfaction. The sub-themes along with key findings and representative testimonials are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Recognition and Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Theme (Specific Objective 2)	Sub-Themes (Key Findings)	Codes	Personal Testimonials
Impact of recognition as	Recognition fosters personal	- Appreciation - Motivation	"To me, in all my 17 years of teaching... recognition, be it a simple thank you or a good

a non-monetary incentive, on enhancing job satisfaction	and professional validation	• Public Acknowledgement	job, goes a long way to boost... any teacher's spirit. It makes you feel that your hard work is being noticed..." (Teacher 11, P/S C, July 2023)
	Recognition drives teachers' motivation and engagement	• Verbal Praise • Public Acknowledgment • Awards	"I really appreciate when the head teacher calls me out in front of the school during a meeting and says... thank you for your hard work... It gives me a sense of pride and makes me want to do even better." (Teacher 15, P/S A, June 2023)
	Recognition sustains teachers' morale and commitment	• Acknowledgement, • Validation • Professional Pride	"I've seen teachers... stay and work hard... because they feel appreciated. Acknowledgement isn't just about offering money. When teachers are recognized during community events... it's like a little boost... that's what keeps them motivated." (WEO 2, July 2023)
	Perceived challenges in recognition practices	• Challenges • Resources • Equity • Fairness	"The biggest challenge my school is facing is the limited budget for recognition programs... The most we can do is to give a few words of appreciation during staff meetings... but it's not enough." (Head Teacher 1, P/S A, June 2023)
	Peer recognition facilitates fellowship and companionship	• Peer Recognition • Camaraderie • Collaboration • Team	"When my colleagues recognize my efforts, whether it's through a compliment or a thank-you, it means a lot... It feels like we're a team." (Teacher 20, P/S E, August 2023)

Source: Field Data (2023)

The findings reveal that teachers valued both public forms of recognition and more personalized forms of acknowledgment. For instance, while many teachers appreciated being publicly acknowledged for their hard work, others preferred a private word of thanks that affirmed their individual contributions. To illustrate this, one head teacher said the following, *"I really appreciate*

when I call a teacher out in front of the school—it gives them a sense of pride and makes them want to do even better” (Teacher 15, P/S A, June 2023). Such responses suggest that tailoring recognition to individual preferences can further enhance its motivational impact.

5. Challenges in Recognition Practices

Despite the generally positive impact of recognition, several challenges were identified. Participants highlighted issues such as limited budgets for recognition programs, lack of formalized systems, and perceptions of favoritism. One head teacher was heard saying, *“The biggest challenge my school faces is the limited budget for recognition programs... We can only offer a few words of appreciation, which is not enough”* (Head Teacher 1, P/S A, June 2023). These challenges suggest that while recognition is valued, its effectiveness may be undermined by resource constraints and inconsistent implementation practices.

6. Peer Recognition and Community Fellowship

In addition to formal recognition from administrators, peer recognition emerged as an important factor in fostering fellowship and a sense of community among teachers. Participants described how informal expressions of appreciation from colleagues helped build camaraderie and provided intrinsic motivation. One teacher explained that *“When my colleagues recognize my efforts, it feels like we’re a team, and that simple compliment really lifts my spirit”* (Teacher 20, P/S E, August 2023). Such informal acknowledgment not only enhances individual morale but also contributes to a positive school culture, as supported by previous research (Movsessian, 2018; Odhiambo et al., 2023).

7. Discussion

This study highlights the critical role of recognition as a non-monetary incentive in enhancing teacher job satisfaction in public primary schools, especially in the peripherals where teacher turnover is usually high (Michael et al., 2022). Grounded in Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959), the findings demonstrate that recognition serves as a powerful motivator, fulfilling teachers’ psychological needs for acknowledgment, validation, and achievement. Teachers consistently reported that even modest forms of recognition, such as verbal praise, public acknowledgment, and peer appreciation, significantly boosted their morale and sense of professional worth. These findings align with Movsessian (2018) assertion that recognition fosters a positive school culture, while extending the literature by contextualizing these dynamics within resource-constrained rural settings.

The study identified multiple dimensions of recognition, each contributing uniquely to teacher motivation. For instance, formal recognition (e.g., awards, certificates) was valued for its tangible acknowledgment of effort, while informal recognition (e.g., verbal praise, peer feedback) was appreciated for its immediacy and emotional resonance. Notably, peer recognition emerged as a key factor in fostering a collaborative school culture, reinforcing mutual respect and shared responsibility among teachers. This dual effect, individual validation coupled with community-building, underlines the broader social and organizational benefits of recognition, as highlighted by Odhiambo et al. (2023). Such findings suggest that recognition is not merely an individual reward but also a mechanism for strengthening collective morale and resilience in challenging environments.

Despite its positive effects, the study also revealed significant challenges that temper the impact of recognition. Resource constraints and the absence of formalized recognition systems were frequently cited as barriers to consistent and equitable acknowledgment. Teachers expressed concerns about perceived favoritism and inconsistent practices, which undermined trust in recognition programs. These challenges resonate with Akafo (2015) argument that recognition must be supported by transparent criteria and adequate resources to avoid undermining intrinsic motivation. In rural Tanzanian schools, where basic hygiene factors such as fair compensation and adequate teaching materials are often lacking, the motivational potential of recognition is further constrained. This finding extends Herzberg's theory by illustrating that in resource-scarce contexts, the effectiveness of motivators like recognition is contingent on addressing fundamental hygiene factors.

8. Conclusion

This study accentuates the transformative potential of recognition as a non-monetary incentive for enhancing teacher job satisfaction in public primary schools in Ukerewe District. Grounded on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the findings reveal that recognition, whether formal (e.g., awards, promotions) or informal (e.g., peer praise, community gratitude), serves as a crucial motivator that triggers intrinsic job satisfaction and strengthens professional commitment. However, its impact is deeply enmeshed with hygiene factors such as fair compensation, adequate resources, and supportive working conditions. In resource-constrained rural schools, recognition alone cannot compensate for systemic deficiencies, but when strategically integrated with broader improvements, it can amplify teacher morale, collaboration, and retention. The study advances our understanding of how motivational strategies function in low-resource settings, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive, holistic approaches to teacher support.

9. Recommendations

Tanzania has made significant strides in formalizing performance evaluation through the Public Employees Performance Management Information System (PEPMIS). This system provides a structured framework for assessing teachers' contributions and enhancing accountability. However, while PEPMIS offers a standardized approach to performance appraisal, its effectiveness in fostering teacher motivation and satisfaction depends on complementary strategies that go beyond formal evaluations. Ensuring that teachers feel valued requires a holistic approach that integrates institutional recognition, peer and community-led initiatives, and improvements in working conditions.

Beyond formal policies, recognition should also be strengthened through peer and community-led initiatives. Schools should be encouraged to launch peer recognition programs, such as "Educator of the Month" awards, where teachers nominate and celebrate the nominated teachers. Engaging the broader community in recognition efforts can further enhance teachers' sense of value. Annual community-led ceremonies, where parents and students publicly acknowledge educators, can provide meaningful social validation and reinforce the collective appreciation of teachers' roles.

However, recognition alone is insufficient without addressing fundamental hygiene factors that affect teacher motivation. Policymakers should advocate for salary reforms by partnering with teachers'

unions and NGOs to ensure fair compensation. Furthermore, recognition initiatives should be coupled with material support, such as providing high-performing teachers with essential teaching resources like textbooks and chalkboards. These efforts will ensure that recognition complements, rather than substitutes, tangible improvements in teachers' working conditions.

To enhance the effectiveness of recognition programs, building administrative capacity is crucial. Head teachers and school leaders should receive training on equitable recognition practices to ensure consistency and inclusivity. Additionally, leveraging technology, such as mobile platforms that send automated commendation messages for milestones like years of service or student performance improvements, can help sustain recognition efforts, particularly in remote or underserved areas.

Lastly, fostering partnerships with NGOs and the private sector is essential for sustaining recognition initiatives. Collaborating with organizations such as the Agency for the Development of Educational Management (ADEM) or financial institutions like NMB Bank can help fund teacher awards, professional development programs, and resource allocation. Aligning these efforts with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) can also attract international support, positioning teacher recognition as a key driver for improving education quality in Tanzania.

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