

**THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERS IN CREATING A
MOTIVATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHERS: THE CASE OF
UPPER BASIC SCHOOLS IN THE GAMBIA**

Amadou F. Jallow^{1*} Fatoumatta J. Jallow^{2*}

¹ Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia 1, Depok, Indonesia

² University of The Gambia 2, Brikama, The Gambia

*amadou.jallow@uiii.ac.id

Abstract

Students' academic success and failure are often attributed solely to the shoulders of their teachers. This perspective neglects school leaders' critical role in creating an environment that fosters teacher motivation and self-efficacy. Teachers and students operate directly under the guidance of principals, highlighting their significant role in ensuring both teachers and students have access to an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. This study explores the strategies principals in upper-basic schools in the Gambia employ to foster a motivational environment for their teachers. Employing a qualitative research approach and a case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with school principals and analyzed thematically. Guided by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, findings reveal that principals cultivate a motivational environment by maintaining an open-door policy, facilitating professional development, and implementing rewards and awards programs. These strategies portray school leaders' significant role in enhancing teachers' intrinsic, professional growth, and job satisfaction. From these findings, the researcher concludes that fostering such an environment improves teaching quality and has broader implications for other professions with similar structures. These results provide insights into leadership and motivation, contributing to both practical and theoretical understanding for educational administrators and policy-makers in developing effective practices that promote teacher motivation, effective leadership, and performance tailored to local contexts.

Keywords: teachers; school leaders; open-door policy; motivational environment; professional development.

INTRODUCTION

It is the desire and aspiration of every society to ensure its next generation is well equipped with all the needed expertise for growth and development while reducing poverty (Gustafsson, 2021; Kochendörfer-Lucius

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& Pleskovic, 2007; Martel et al., 2021). Given that growth and development cannot be attained in the absence of quality education, which resonates with UNESCO's SDG 4 (Garcia, 2013), education has been a device that has been perpetually helping in the development and growth of humankind since the very first day on earth (Zhao, 2024). Education in every aspect is expected to be transmitted by teachers or a teacher figure making teachers very key players as far as teaching and learning is concern while they also contribute to 30% of children's academic attainment making them second to students themselves (Canales & Maldonado, 2018; Hattie, 2003; Hill et al., 2005). Among the key stakeholders are school leaders, students, parents, and their peers, all have unique roles in ensuring that relevant and quality education is provided for children to attain academic achievement and develop themselves for the challenges that await them. Although the home, principal, and peers all constitute 5-10% of the academic attainment of every child, the role of principals is crucial in creating that atmosphere and the resources needed for children's success (Hattie, 2003).

From the above, it becomes clear that quality education is one of society's most important components, and attaining quality education requires strong leadership. Douglass (2019) and (Tolentino, 2023) stated that educational leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring that students' learning experiences proceed as intended since they have been entrusted with the responsibility to inspire and guide both students and their teachers toward achieving personal growth and academic excellence (Carvalho et al., 2022; Leithwood, 2016). A key feature of effective education leadership is creating an environment that positively influences students' academic achievement while keeping teachers motivated to impart knowledge for students' academic growth and lifelong careers (Ballesteros et al., 2023). Effective school leaders can accomplish these tasks by fostering a positive school culture, developing strategic directions, and implementing best instructional practices (Culduz, 2023). Through these strategies, they can create an environment to nurture, support, and enhance the overall quality of education, which is essential for society to achieve its goals of preparing a younger generation to take charge when the older generation steps back.

A well-tailored description of effective school leadership, according to Deswita and Asmendri (2022), enlists workers and mobilizes resources while motivating others to apply their full capacities in attaining set organizational goals. Through charismatic and transformational leadership capacities,

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prominent in the educational sphere, subjects remain illuminated, persuaded, and influenced to devote their best efforts to accomplish tasks and promote organizational goals (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Kamil, 2023).

However, the study of Bolman and Deal (2017) highlighted that students' academic performance cannot be shouldered by teachers only. However, other stakeholders who create a culture and environment conducive for teachers to deliver to expectations should be pointed out, given the crucial nature of teaching and learning in the present time. Mejia (2016) reiterated that healthy teaching and learning are key in every workforce, with which the school could not be exempted, since it requires stoic leadership to put the school back on track whenever it falls into disorder, frustration, and failure. These situations are handled mainly by effective leaders who have the skills to bring back enthusiasm and an environment full of opportunities for both teachers and students.

Motivation has been one of the most area studied in the arena of educational psychology thus showing how it contributes to enhancing the development of teaching and learning (Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023), however, much of the studies has not been done in teacher motivation but rather on student motivation (Lamb & Wyatt, 2019; Richardson et al., 2014). This does not signify that teachers are highly motivated; in fact, Han and Yin (2016) highlighted that due to teacher attrition, there has been a teacher shortage in many developed countries, such as the UK, Germany, Norway, the USA, Australia, among others. These studies have suggested that teacher attrition, low prestige, high workload with less remuneration, and limited career opportunities lead to teacher demotivation. All these factors are considered to be issues that circumvent the teaching environment. While this study is based in the context of the Gambia, studies have revealed that inadequate funding for outdoor educational activities by parents and school administrators, workload, insufficient time (Baldeh, 2020), poor working condition, inadequate resources and support system (Drammeh & Samba, 2023) also culminates to adding the frustrations teachers faced in their day to day activities with the school children which does not allow to them teach effectively and efficiently.

This study aims to identify school leaders' strategies to foster a motivational environment for upper-basic school teachers in the Gambia, limiting the context to the West Coast Region. The significance of this current

study does not just add to the body of available literature but also highlight how effective school leader can leverage a supportive and motivating environment for teachers and give suggestions and recommendations to policy-makers and all relevant education stakeholders on some of the strategies to employ to retain and motivate teachers especially those with great potential within the Gambian borders and beyond. Considering the increasing challenges under-resourced school teachers face, particularly in developing countries like the Gambia, this research could influence future teacher retention and well-being initiatives.

The Influence of Leadership Styles and Teacher Motivation on Educational Outcomes

A study by Firman et al. (2021) revealed that principals' leadership style and teacher motivation are crucial for student performance. For this reason, Thoonen et al. (2011) added that one of the best ways to improve teachers' teaching style is by engaging teachers in professional development, enabling them to use experiments and reflections to boost their self-efficacy. Moreover, the study of Mohammed and Abdullahi (2016) supported by Thoonen et al. (2011) and Timah (2015) study reiterated that transformational leadership style stimulates teacher motivation, commitment, enthusiasm, and effectiveness through intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction, recognition and extrinsically through salary, workload, and job security. The emphasis on recognition in this context is crucial as it fosters trust and collaboration, making teachers feel valued and appreciated. Meanwhile, Timah (2015) argued that positive leadership behavior, which opens up empathy, support, and care, and is not limited to academic disciplinary matters, also adds to factors creating a conducive learning environment. In addition, Timah (2015) recommends that factors such as the nation's economic state, the school's physical environment, the nation's political image, the school's location, and the school's financial nature add to the factors influencing staff motivation. The study of Shula (2023) argued that the servant leadership style motivates teachers by providing for their needs and promoting collaboration, teamwork, recognition, and appreciation, all of which lead to teacher retention and altruistic motivation. Unlike Shula (2023), the study of Bugyei and Aidoo (2022) stated that remuneration of teachers and improving their working conditions are not the only means of motivating teachers, but also an autocratic leadership style, which is the most popular leadership style in the context of their study. In contrast, Mbua's (2023) study emphasized that

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participatory decision-making, democratic leadership, and collective leadership styles positively and strongly correlate with teacher effectiveness.

While school leaders' efforts are complemented by those of the school management committee, cluster monitors, regional educational officers to improve quality teaching and learning, Barrow (2023) reiterated that equipping teachers with the required and relevant pedagogical skills through professional development also helps not just in improving performance but also creating a conducive teaching and learning environment. Moreover, this could be easily attained when an ideal organizational structure addresses structural and cultural problems to effect positive changes. Saine et al. (2023) added that leadership competence, academic supervisor, and job satisfaction influence teacher performance, while work motivation does the opposite. This insinuates that good leadership is required to guide and manage teachers and school properties to effectively teach and learn in schools while ensuring that school leaders attain their objectives and improve their weaknesses and strengths. Interestingly, a study by Sagap (2024) portrayed that professional development, open communication, supportive school culture, and effective rewards and recognition made by the school principal for the teacher are factors that trigger a conducive learning environment. Similar findings were made by Balatero and Bauyot (2024), cautioning that school principals often find it difficult to sustain such motivational strategies given the individual differences of teachers and an inadequate support system. They reiterated further that resource allocation, institutional support, building a community in school, and an inclusive leadership approach help in sustaining teacher motivation. Still, factors such as empathy, consistency, and long-term leadership vision (Balatero & Bauyot, 2024), regular feedback, and support for teachers' mental and emotional well-being (Sagap, 2024) should not be left out when considering sustaining teacher motivation.

The study of Marie and Fon (2020) revealed that issuing certificate to deserving teachers in the form of recognition and awarding prizes which is similar to those of (Balatero & Bauyot, 2024; Sagap, 2024; Shula, 2023), added that assigning teachers to represent school principals, recommending teachers for promotion, and involving teachers in making key decisions affecting them are key in fostering a conducive learning environment since it opens the path for teachers to build trust with the school principal, promote collaboration, giving timely feedback while serving as a role model. On the other hand, Etomes and Molua (2019) argued that school principals' communication patterns, conflict resolution skills, management, supervisory, and motivation

strategies influence teacher productivity. Others, such as Musabwayire and Sikubwabo (2024), argued that principals' leadership practices, such as motivation practices, evaluation, training, and development practices, ensure teacher commitment, which in turn leads to better students' academic outcomes and school success in their study context.

The Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) as a framework enables this research with valuable insights into what influences teacher motivation and well-being through leadership practices. In other words, Pelletier and Rocchi (2016) highlighted that one of the key significances of the SDT is how it can be used to understand key insights in understanding teachers' motivation through their work to continue teaching and enjoy what they do. This theory, developed by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci in 1985, posits that human motivation is influenced by three basic psychological need fulfillments: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Self-determination theory is a psychological framework that posits human motivation to be influenced by fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is when one feels in control of their decisions and actions, while competence is the need to feel effective and gain mastery of their activities. On the other hand, relatedness is when a person feels cared for while maintaining their social connectedness in a relationship (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Using this theory enables this research to identify how leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and distributed, affect teacher motivation through various data collection methods, where teachers' perceptions are gathered on different leadership practices. Also, SDT enables the assessment of basic psychological needs and how school leaders promote and hinder teachers' autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Moreover, using this framework enables this case study to understand how different leadership styles impact motivation in the school environment (Earl, 2019).

The key significance of SDT is that it emphasizes the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which provides the foundation for engagement and efficacy essential for teachers. The practical implications of this theory suggest how leadership training programs enhance insights on creating school culture, improving school performance (Richardson et al., 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

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Incorporating SDT in this research enables an in-depth analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic factors driving engagement. The relationship between motivation and leadership styles provides valuable insights that foster a supportive educational environment that ultimately improves both good teaching practices, which boost and improve student achievement academically and beyond.

METHOD

Given that this study aimed to navigate the roles school leaders employ to foster a motivational environment for upper-basic school teachers in the Western Region of the Gambia, a qualitative method is ideal since it is focused on small samples of individuals, specific events, and contexts where data is analyzed in an ideographic style (Gerring, 2017). In a nutshell, this type of research allows the researcher to collect non-numerical data. Among the qualitative research designs, the case study research design was chosen because it is best suited for describing one or more cases in depth to achieve the research aim and objective (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Yin, 2006).

This paper collected data through interviews, the most common way to gather data in most case study research (Peters & Halcom, 2015). Out of the three types of interviews, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to probe further into the research participants. However, the researcher had redefined the questions of the topics chosen, but also considering the flexibility of this type of interview, thus making way to gather rich and detailed data (Kallio et al., 2016; Peters & Halcom, 2015).

The participants in this study were school leaders; therefore, a purposive sampling method was used. One of the benefits of this non-parametric sampling method is to ensure that the collected data is rich and relevant for addressing the research needs and objectives while limiting biases and generalizability to the broader population (Etikan, 2017).

After conducting semi-structured interviews through WhatsApp audio calls, the interviews were transcribed word for word and coded. After coding, the interview was categorized into patterns, and themes emerged. These themes and patterns were used to help us understand school leaders' strategies in creating a motivational environment for teachers. Braun and Clarke (2019) stated that thematic analysis is the most widely used analytical method in analyzing data in qualitative research and has a grounded and narrative analytical approach.

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As a requirement in every research, all participants' consent was sought before participating in the research process. This was done through a phone call, and they were informed that their identity would remain confidential and anonymous, and the data would only be used for the purpose for which it was generated. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw any time they wished and would not be coerced to stay, making participation voluntary. The researcher endeavoured to comply with all ethical guidelines set forth by relevant institutions and review boards. As Marquis and Daku (2021) stated, researchers ought to be mindful of misrepresenting their participants' informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality for their projects.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following a deep dive into the data, three themes emerged. These themes aligned with the theoretical framework, ensuring the findings were not derived from a vacuum. Although the researcher initially intended to interview three school leaders, they could not do so due to the time difference and the availability of the respondents. However, the researcher successfully interviewed two principals with at least five years of leadership experience, gaining valuable insights. Aiming to understand how upper basic school principals create a motivating environment for their teachers, the data revealed that key themes such as open door policy, professional development, and rewards and recognition are strategies school leaders in the West Coast Region use to motivate their teachers.

Open-Door Policy

Creating an open-door policy with teachers is crucial because it allows them to share issues that affect them both in and outside school. However, responses from participants have shown that trust must be fully established for the teaching staff to share sensitive information with the school principals. To earn their trust, the school principal does not remain in the office to focus on administrative work but instead joins the teachers in the staff room for informal discussions. During these gatherings, tea, coffee, or sometimes breakfast is shared, fostering a bond that encourages teachers to discuss issues impacting them or those around them. This approach makes the principal's work easier, as he does not solely rely on teachers to act as insiders, which can lead to distrust and disunity among the staff. In environments where such situations prevail, trust and harmony are compromised, causing teachers to

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focus on avoiding trouble, which results in a lack of concern for the students' academic success and the overall school performance. Furthermore, these environments make teachers feel undervalued and lack the confidence to express their true thoughts due to a lack of trust. To prevent this from happening, a respondent stated that:

Yes, there are many ways, but first, you must be a fair leader and head. What I mean by being a fair leader is that you must do your work justice. If I am posted to a school, I first look at the profile of the staff I work with. Because the profile will clearly explain to you who should be given responsibility. Otherwise, you go to some schools and find out that a particular teacher completes college before another. Nevertheless, the responsibility is given to the other one. When you create that condition, you usually create problems among your staff. (Interview, 19/12/2024).

As we learn from the statement above, part of the measures to allow an open-door policy to prevail is to treat teachers equally and fairly. If a teacher is given a responsibility they do not deserve, it does not help in getting the best out of that individual, since they feel detached from those on good terms with the one who deserves the role. However, when it is the other way around, it appears that the best is obtained from all the teachers, as this enables them to bond and treat each other as close allies, ultimately fostering a sense of extended family at work. Once the roles and responsibilities are shared fairly, every teacher understands their duties, creating a conscious or unconscious hierarchy and ensuring they know their terms of reference within the school. This contributes to minimizing conflict and grievances among teachers, thereby facilitating the work of the school principal and senior management staff. Furthermore, this allows them to identify teachers who might be at fault when issues arise, whether related to work or personal matters, enabling them to engage in sincere discussions with the concerned teacher, thus building trust. Such a mechanism allows the school and its staff to reach amicable solutions rather than conflict.

Once trust is built between the teachers and their school principals, the notion of collaboration and teamwork is constructed in the minds of everyone, irrespective of their role and position, because everyone shares their troubles and happiness without having a second thought. This could not be possible if, from the very inception, the school principal had taken the boss position. This could have hampered the trust and built fear and intimidation for others with

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weak emotions and radicalism from those with high confidence. All the same, now that a school environment has been created where work and the mental well-being of teachers become equally important, the principal made an open-door policy where they made themselves available to the teachers when necessary, and also took all possible means not to be seen as an authoritarian. This allows the school teachers to have the confidence to confide in the principal professionally. To some extent, one of our respondents giving some administrative responsibilities to junior staff also helps in building this trust and confidence because it shows them how tedious some administrative work could be, and at the same time, trains them to be acquainted with some administrative work. To bring this into evidence, here is what one of the respondents stated:

Then the other one is that you have to have an open-door policy. You do not have to be an authoritarian. You need an open-door policy where every staff member will be confident to talk to you professionally. For example, if they are confronted with a problem, they have to have that free mind to come to you anytime. (Interview, 19/12/2024).

Although some principals feel insecure due to maladministration or closing themselves off, the administration has shown that some school principals travel with their office. In other words, when they are not around, they often close their office, denying their staff access to the office when they need certain information. This adds to the issues that bring distrust between the staff and the school principal because it makes the minds of the teachers sound an alarm that they want to find out what precisely the principal is trying to hide from them. This does not bring the teachers closer to trusting the school principal because they are not motivated. However, having an open-door policy and communicating with the teacher makes it feel like a family with a common goal of ensuring the children's academic performance improves. To achieve this, the principal needs to talk to the teachers and explain how they are constrained as an administration. This allows teachers to come up with coping mechanisms and understand the situation at hand. This helps a lot compared to those who do not reveal their constraints to their teachers. Once the room for open communication is opened, teachers feel comfortable sharing their issues and school matters, hoping for better solutions, and the school principal can do the same. Through this forum, teachers can build a sense of autonomy, hence they are comfortable doing so and contribute to the school's progress with whatever resources they have for

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children to attain positive academic success, bringing a good image to the school within the locality and beyond.

Professional Development

While it is important to create an open-door policy for conducive teaching and learning to prevail, our data has also shown that enhancing teachers' skills is crucial in building their capacity and confidence in the classroom and beyond. This strategy helps motivate teachers by boosting their confidence and school performance because it allows teachers to learn from each other and the senior management team, who, upon monitoring teachers in the classroom, can identify some challenges teachers face during their lesson delivery. After the monitoring, the teacher is seated by the person who monitored them to discuss their strengths and weaknesses. This allows the teacher to learn from an expert in the area and understand certain concepts or topics that they did not master, thus helping to boost their confidence. Moreover, in schools with no experts in a particular subject area, teachers serve as facilitators, declaring their expertise in specific areas while openly stating areas where they are uncomfortable. This is typically done at a subject department level. In this case, the teachers are engaged in peer tutorial professional development where they share best practices for their professional growth. This could be attested in the statement of one of our respondents, stating that:

Typically, when teachers in the same subject area form a departmental (WhatsApp) group, the math teachers meet every four weeks to share experiences and support each other. If there is an issue with a teacher, it is addressed at the department level first before escalating it further. External intervention may be necessary if they cannot resolve it internally. It is important to encourage these departmental meetings so that any problem can be addressed within the group. Even when assessments must be conducted again, they will ensure they sit together and prepare in advance. (Interview, 1/01/25).

Imagine that, with such cooperation among staff, there is absolute harmony and unity for growth, development, and confidence between teachers and administrators. Most of this could produce an environment for teachers to develop their pedagogical skills and encourage students to embark on similar avenues. In some bigger schools where such an environment does not prevail due to the number of teachers, some teach the morning shift and others teach the afternoon shift, a specific group of individuals is selected to

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serve as the internal monitoring team. These individuals comprise either the senior management team or department heads. These individuals usually monitor teachers in the classroom and not only give feedback to the school administrations on issues affecting their teachers' lesson delivery method or subject content expertise, but also identify some key areas that need intervention. They usually write feedback using the classroom observation tool, give their report, and inform the school principals of crucial areas needing intervention. To support this claim, one of our respondents stated thus:

We encourage developing our team internally. We have an internal training team to train teachers, so we do not rely on resource personnel. The administration will train our internal team to lead the development workshops and teach us in the professional areas where they may not have expertise.

(Interview, 19/12/24)

This shows the importance of feedback and how it serves as a tool for helping identify areas needed for teachers' development, considering the delicate nature of the modern-day classroom, harboring children with diverse learning needs. Through professional development, teachers are fully equipped with the necessary tools to boost their teaching skills and delivery in class. However, if an area has been identified, it goes beyond the scope of the internal training team; most times, experts from the Regional Educational Directorate, such as the cluster monitor, planning officer, or personnel from the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education who is an expert in the area, are hired. Most of the time, this requires much more funding than the identified internal monitors; as a result, most school principals would not want to invite them due to financial constraints, even if the area needed urgent intervention.

Moreover, co-teaching has also been identified as a way of professional development in some schools where a newly qualified teacher is attached to an experienced one for a particular area in which the individual is uncomfortable. This method helps retain the teacher's and students' confidence, allowing them to understand that no teacher knows everything. Furthermore, some school principals would often design the school timetable to fit the needs of teachers attending classes at the University of The Gambia. This strategy ensures that teachers admitted to the University of The Gambia can attend lectures while teaching children. These teachers are often self-funded, which disqualifies them from getting study leave with salary. Although the Gambian education policy does not accept such a thing, some school principals would often risk supporting these teachers because they have

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identified an ideal potential in them. To attest to this claim, here is what one of our respondents stated:

We do that because of our school's location; two teachers are going to the university. What we did was to ensure the classes at the university would not interfere with their school classes. They will deliver their classes in the school, and if they have a class at the university, they will be excused for the day. They are doing these for future development, which is excellent.
(Interview, 1/01/25)

This school principal stressed that it would be better to allow these teachers to go; hence, it would allow both the school and the teacher to be in a win-win situation. Given that both allow the development of the other without hindrance. It is said to be a wise decision as the school principal further reiterated that it is good to allow these young teachers to attend their classes at the university while teaching because, upon completion of their degree program, they come back to serve the same education system. This is unlike those who embark on overseas studies, who often would feel reluctant to return home to serve even after being given study leave with a salary.

Awards and Recognition

Considering the nature of teaching could lead to attrition, school principals in this study highlighted that one of the ways to keep teachers motivated and sustain a conducive learning environment is by issuing awards to deserving teachers and praising them during assembly gatherings with students. This allows other teachers, who have been demotivated along the way, to pick up their lost pieces and emulate so that they can similarly attain rewards and recognition gained by their colleagues. To attest to this claim, here is what one of our respondents has said:

Yes, they are effective because when a teacher is recognized for their good work, it motivates others to strive for the same recognition. Everyone wants to be praised. I think in any workplace. People desire acknowledgment. So, if one person is praised in a school setting, it can inspire others to improve.
(Interview, 01/01/25).

Indeed, it is true human nature for everyone to desire praise and recognition for their efforts. This often reignites their motivation to improve for more rewards and acknowledgment next time. However, considering the envious nature of human beings, especially teachers, one of our respondents warns that caution should be taken when issuing such awards and recognition.

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This ensures that all teachers are invited to a meeting, similar to a family gathering, where they are explained in simple terms what, why, and how a particular teacher is recognized and awarded over others. A clear manifestation of this claim is exemplified by what one of our respondents posits:

Yes. I called them to a family meeting. Because they are different. Well, you call those kinds of teachers to a family meeting. You do not have to leave them; you can call them. Tell them, you see this thing happening to these teachers, they are getting a good name and all these things. No, it is not because of me. It is not my making. (Interview, 19/12/24).

Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of envy among teachers, one must be cautious when awarding teachers in their school, as this could lead to feelings of detachment or perceptions of unfairness among those whose efforts go unrecognized. Approaching this matter thoughtfully can promote unity and collaboration, fostering a conducive teaching and learning environment for teacher development and the school. Moreover, when students or community members express appreciation for certain teachers through tokens of gratitude, whether in cash or kind, some teachers may feel less favored. This situation warrants addressing by convening a meeting to explain the reasons behind Mr. X's accolade:

It is not like that teacher is better than you, academically. Nevertheless, the only difference here is a positive effort. The person is probably giving more effort than you are. So if you want to be at that level, you have to see how the person is doing it the next time it is you. You learn. So this is one of the ways you have to be very moderate, because otherwise, if you want to be very harsh, you want to say it in a different state, in a different language, which might discourage some of them. We have to talk to them in a way that they will understand. (Interview 19/12/24).

This not only shows appreciation to the teachers receiving the award or recognition for the free service they have provided to the school or students, but it also encourages teachers to emulate such positive practices. Additionally, the participant emphasized the importance of communicating with teachers in a way that helps them understand how to improve, rather than fostering jealousy towards those who have been praised. In this manner, a sense of competition develops among teachers, motivating them to work

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harder and exceed expectations. Thus, they can achieve similar accolades as their colleagues instead of feeling envious, which could create an atmosphere of resentment and despair among them, ultimately resulting in an unsuitable environment for effective teaching and learning.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this paper illuminate how school principals created a motivational environment for conducive teaching and learning in Gambian Upper basic schools. First, it has been highlighted that one of the ways to create such an environment is by ensuring that teachers build trust with the school principal. This is crucial in every walk of life since it paves the way forward to creating trust and harmony between employees and employers. Once trust is built, teachers have the confidence to feel the workplace as a second home and not just a place where they just come in to do and act as the principal dictates which is inconsistent with the study of Bugyei and Aidoo (2022) who in their findings reveal that the autocratic leadership style is the most dominant. In this current study, it has been observed that once the door is opened for teachers to share their thoughts and whims without having the fear of being admonished but instead being supported and provided with the needed guidance (Shula, 2023) to solve a particular problem, they feel motivated and help in improving the performance of the school by going the extra-mile of offering extra classes to students on areas that they feel might not be covered during the academic year. This is in line with the study of Firman et al. (2021), but has a unique taste as the previous study has not mentioned that teachers would even volunteer to teach classes or subjects that have not been allocated to them due to an inadequate teachers.

This transcend to the fact that once trust and confidence is built among teachers and their school principal, there is a sense of autonomy instilled in the minds of the teachers in making sure that they are willing to do their best in solving any issue that come along their way without waiting for the school principal or any other individual telling them to do so. Having such attributes makes the teachers feel in control of their decisions without outside influence, thus aligning with one of the dimensions of (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within such an environment, teachers are effective in their work. They would endeavor to ensure that the school leadership does not fail, as they see themselves as active participants in making relevant decisions for their progress and the school as a whole (Mbua, 2023). The unique taste this study offers in this aspect different from the previous ones is the fact that while Mbua

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(2023) study exerted that the positive and strong correlation between collective leadership style and teacher effectiveness, this current study reiterated how such leadership styles leads to the building a collaborative environment where every teacher is treating equally and fairly thus leading to a teamwork. It is understood that where things like teamwork and collaboration prevail, it allows the school principal to feel at ease doing their work; hence, every teacher in their school is working towards attaining the school's objectives. In this case, these teachers feel welcomed in their workplace. They could go the extra mile to ensure the children attain positive academic success, which would lead to boosting the school's name locally and nationally.

Considering the delicacy of today's classroom settings, where children with different learning needs are all packed in the classroom as we advocate for inclusive education, teachers often find it challenging to withstand several challenges needed to serve all these children simultaneously. This makes teaching one of the jobs leading to attrition if specific mechanisms are not implemented. For this reason, school principals deem it fitting and obligatory to perpetually sharpen teachers' knowledge to help deter attrition, leading to a chaotic working environment. Doing this shows how school principals show these vulnerable teachers empathy, support, and care (Timah, 2015).

School principals often collaborate with their senior teachers before embarking on any professional development, as it is cost-effective. These senior teachers who engage with the teachers during their lesson delivery use the classroom monitoring tool (COT) in the classroom, which has some indicators of what areas the teacher has done well and areas that need improvement. After completing the monitoring using the COT, feedback is shared with the teacher immediately after the class, and the tool is also shared with the principal. This feedback identifies areas of training need before training is held in the school. This is commensurate with the findings of Sagap (2024), noting that regular feedback helps engage and support teachers' emotional and mental well-being. Embarking on such development reveals the care and empathy of school principals. It shows how they allow other relevant stakeholders to help improve quality teaching and learning by equipping teachers with the relevant pedagogical skills to improve performance (Barrow, 2023). Once performance is improved, we can conclude that the school principal has ensured the implementation of the school objectives by allowing their efforts to be complemented by all relevant stakeholders (Saine et al., 2023).

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This shows how the school leaders in my study context can inspire and motivate their subjects to grow and improve both professionally and personally (Mohammed & Abdullahi, 2016) by encouraging innovation, building strong relationships with their team, and creating an environment of shared vision instead of managing all tasks available in their office. Such is what Thoonen et al. (2011) referred to as transformational leadership, where the structure of the school impacts teachers' teacher effectiveness. Indeed, it does influence teacher effectiveness, but previous studies have only mentioned how professional development helps make teachers effective. However, they have failed to explore the different ways of embarking on professional development. That is to say, creating an internal and external monitoring team and, to some extent, taking up the risk of allowing teachers to pursue a degree program which is against the Gambian education policy, as our subjects have claimed. This benevolence makes teachers committed to their work, as highlighted in the study of Musabwayire and Sikubwabo (2024). In addition, this is also in line with one of the dimensions of Deci and Ryan's (2013) SDT, stating that when teachers feel effective and efficient in their specialization, they become competent and confident, thus enhancing student performance.

Every job makes employees feel burned out, which can lead to attrition and, to some extent, quitting due to its demanding nature. As highlighted by this current study and others (Mohammed & Abdullahi, 2016; Sagap, 2024; Shula, 2023; Timah, 2015), one practical approach to transform this situation into a positive outcome is to praise, award, and recognize teachers. This practice positively motivates teachers, fostering competition instead of leading to burnout. What makes this current study stand out is the careful decision-making by school principals regarding how to award teachers. For instance, when there are no clear and established criteria for awarding teachers, it may result in dissatisfaction and misunderstandings between the school principal and the teachers, as some may consider it unfair. This situation can hinder school principals from sustaining teacher motivation over time, as Balatero and Bauyot (2024) indicated.

To prevent awards and recognition from causing chaos and misunderstandings, school principals within this study's context should engage with teachers through an effective communication system, helping teachers understand why one has been awarded over another. Utilizing such skills helps teachers focus on positivity and serves as a means of conflict management and supervision that influences teacher productivity (Etomes &

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Molua, 2019). Furthermore, it has been observed that involving teachers in decisions that affect them facilitates trust-building and collaboration, and, significantly, positions the principal as a role model for both teachers and students (Marie & Fon, 2020).

With this in mind, the spirit of collaboration, teamwork, and unity does not stop at the school boundaries; it extends to the community, which is also a key stakeholder of the school. As the school principal ensures that every teacher contributes to shaping a game plan, the School Management Committee (SMT) also motivates each team member to achieve new heights. This is typically done by voluntarily awarding deserving teachers in cash or kind. The SMT often relies on student feedback and verifies such claims during school visits or by consulting the principal. Moreover, this current study has also shown that students express their appreciation and connection to teachers by presenting awards during graduation ceremonies or school gatherings, such as assemblies (Deci & Ryan, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates school leaders' strategies to create a motivational environment for teachers. By emphasizing school leader and teacher relationships and approaches for promoting teacher motivation, principals and all other relevant stakeholders can positively impact teachers' self-efficacy and well-being. The identified themes of open-door policy, teacher professional development, awards, and recognition provide practical insights for enhancing collaboration, teamwork, recognition, and appreciation between teachers and school principals. Finally, there is a need for further research to delve deeper into the implementation of these practices and to identify additional challenging factors influencing development between teachers and all relevant stakeholders. Since this study focuses on only public schools, further research should focus on a comparative study on how private and public school leaders promote a motivational environment for teachers.

One of the limitations of this study is that the understudied research context is far from the researcher's, and therefore, the researcher was not able to have as many participants as possible, thus limiting the generalizability of the research. In addition to the above is the fact that this current study only had insights from principals and not teachers and students also adding to its lack of in depth insights from others rather than principals, who might be bias we propose. However, the findings can be used to create a motivational environment in other workplaces, especially in the Gambia, where there is a

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high demand for job output, thus showing how the results could be generalized in other contexts.

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