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Original Article

Institutional Support and Teacher Competence in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in South Western Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of institutional support on teacher competence. In particular, the study investigated whether the influence of induction, continuous professional development and rewards had a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools. This quantitative study used correlational research. Data were collected from a sample of 329 teachers from secondary schools in southwestern Uganda. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The findings revealed that induction, continuous professional development, and rewards have a positive and significant influence on teacher competence. Based on the findings, it was concluded that induction, continuous professional development and rewards are important for teacher competence development. Therefore, it was recommended that The Ministry of Education and Sports, head teachers, and other stakeholders such as Boards of Governors should establish institutional support that facilitates the development of teacher competence through induction, continuous professional development, and rewards. The practical contribution of the study is that it identifies institutional factors that can help to promote teacher competence.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is an imperative component to having a blossoming school environment that is basic to sustained school success. Highly effective teachers are instrumental in creating a nurturing and inclusive educational environment, and their professional expertise is a pivotal determinant of academic excellence and student success (Caena & Redecker, 2019). According to Darling-Hammond (2017), teachers possessing high levels of competence are more effective in crafting engaging lesson plans, assessing student progress, and fostering a supportive classroom environment that enhances student achievement and well-being. The concept of teacher competence refers to the ability of educators to effectively impart knowledge, facilitate application, and develop skills in their learners (Sulaiman & Ismail, 2020). Teacher competence encompasses a range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable teachers to plan, deliver and assess students (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Competence is a comprehensive set of organised activities that enable individuals to address specific situations and solve problems within a particular content area, meeting predetermined standards (Poro et al., 2019). Moreover, research has shown that teacher competence is crucial for student academic achievement, teacher job satisfaction, and retention (Krieg, 2020; Locke, 2020). Effective teacher competence involves continuous professional development, self-reflection, and adaptation to changing educational contexts (Nang-Sein, 2022). Teacher competence denotes a cluster of distinct knowledge and technical know-how needed by teachers which are ethical, pedagogical, subject matter and assessment and evaluation competencies (Bakar, 2018; Denbel, 2023).

Since the 1980s, the concept of teacher competence has gained prominence. In the 1980s, the U.S. federal government introduced a requirement for teacher candidates to demonstrate their proficiency by passing a specific test to be admitted into the teaching profession (García et al., 2019). In Europe, the United Kingdom government introduced competence education. The competency-based teacher education seeks to ensure that academics and professionals attain the skills needed for producing a labour force necessary for the modern economy (Valeeva & Gafurov, 2017). In 2005, the European Union established the Common European Principles specifying the competencies and qualifications required for teachers. These included lifelong learning; professional growth anchored on mobility, and collaboration between teachers and institutions (Mikulec & Perčič, 2019). In 2016, the African Union introduced the African Framework of Standards and Competencies for the Teaching Profession (AFSCTP) stipulating competence teachers should be equipped with. However, despite the emphasis on teacher competence, many countries in Africa grapple with low teacher competence.

Consistent with other countries and the African Union, in 2016 in Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports developed the secondary school teachers' competency profile that identifies the main competencies required of the 21st century teacher that are administration, professionalism and personal effectiveness (Ministry of Sports and Education, 2016). However, since the secondary teachers' competence framework is recent, limited studies (e.g. Mutebi, 2019; Namae, 2020; Poro et al., 2019) have explored teachers' competencies in secondary school settings in Uganda. Still, all of them contrary to this study considered it as a determinant variable hence not exploring its determinants in the context of Uganda. A number of studies suggest that institutional factors including induction (Aarts et al., 2020; Frederiksen, 2020), continuous professional development (Bruns et al., 2017; Köybasi & Ugurlu, 2019: Olsen et al., 2020) and rewards (De Ree et al., 2018; Gümüs, 2022; Mustafa & Ali, 2019) relate to teachers' competence. However, a limitation emanating from these studies is that none of these studies focused on the Ugandan teaching context, creating a need for context-specific research to address this gap. Therefore, this study was intended to examine the influence of institutional support on teacher competence. Institutional support in terms of induction, continuous professional development and rewards led to the following hypotheses that were examined by the study;

- Induction has a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools.

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- Continuous professional development has a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools.
- Wards have a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The Perceived Organisational Support (POS) Theory advanced by Eisenberger et al. (1986) provided the theoretical framework for examining the relationship between institutional support and teacher competence. POS Theory is a social exchange theory that explains how employees perceive the extent to which their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being. POS proposes that organisational support galvanises employees, fostering a profound sense of reciprocity that yields remarkable outcomes, including a surge in job satisfaction, unshakeable commitment, stellar performance, and exceptional competence, as employees strive to reciprocate the support they receive from their organisation (Abid et al., 2021). POS explains that workers substantially adjust their work practices in alignment with the degree to which their employer acknowledges and appreciates their efforts, and the extent to which organizations prioritize their welfare and well-being, reflecting a powerful influence on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Consequently, when employees feel that their institution is genuinely committed to their growth and development, providing a range of opportunities including comprehensive induction, recognition and rewards, and regular continuous professional development programs, they are more likely to experience a marked improvement in their competence levels. This is because employees feel valued and supported which increases their motivation and engagement which in turn fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement. As a result, employees are empowered to acquire new skills, refine their expertise, and stay up-to-date with best practices, ultimately leading to improved job performance and competence (Maan et al., 2020). Based on POS, this study examined the influence of induction, recognition and rewards, and continuous professional development on teacher competence.

Empirical review

Institutional Support and Teacher Competence

Institutional support denotes the active encouragement and assistance provided by an organisation to its employees through various means, including policies, regulations, and monetary and non-monetary support, aimed at enhancing their performance and productivity (Falola et al., 2020). This support encompasses the organisation's fulfilment of employees' social, emotional, and economic needs, including mentoring activities such as education, guidance, and counselling, employee retention and protection, and the creation of an appropriate work environment (Baranik et al., 2010). Institutional support is rooted in employees' beliefs about the organisation's willingness to provide assistance in challenging situations and forgive honest mistakes (Farooqi et al., 2019). Organisations can foster employee development and creativity by providing institutional support through knowledge and experience sharing, relevant skills training, and hardware equipment (Yang & Zhou, 2022). This support enhances employees' competencies, leading to increased creativity and success in their work (Falola et al., 2020). Organisational support encompasses among others induction, rewards and professional development (Farooqi et al., 2019).

Induction is the ongoing process of learning the social culture of the organisation and how to get along with others in the organisation (Billot & King, 2017). Induction helps new employees to understand the organisation's norms, values, and expectations, and how to interact with colleagues and supervisors effectively (Flores, 2019). Employee induction is a crucial process that enables new employees to acquire knowledge, adjust to new roles, and become familiar with the organisation's culture (Haueter et al., 2003). Therefore, effective induction has lasting and positive effects, such as enhancing person-job fit and employee competence. There are a number of studies (Aarts et al., 2020; Edeh & Dan-jumbo, 2019; Eisenschmidt & Poom-Valickis, 2020: Frederiksen, 2020; Hagos et al., 2019; Jeske &

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Olson, 2022; Olsen et al., 2020; Symeonidis et al.; 2023), that point to a relationship between indication and teacher competence. However, the existing studies have limitations that create a compelling case for the current research. Contextually, previous studies were conducted outside of Uganda, leaving a geographical gap that this study aims to fill. Methodologically, Eisenschmidt and Poom-Valickis (2020), Frederiksen (2020), and Olsen et al. (2020) carried out reviews which highlighted the need for empirical research. This study sought to address the contextual and methodological gaps by conducting an empirical investigation in Uganda, providing valuable insights into this critical aspect of teacher competence development in the context of Uganda.

With respect to continuous professional development, encompassing all planned programmes of learning opportunities undertaken to complement, update and consolidate the professional knowledge and competence of individuals (Peleman et al., 2018). Teacher professional continuous development is carried out to improve the pedagogical and professional competence of teachers. Hence, continuous professional development for teachers is carried out through the assessment of the needs of teachers to achieve professional competency standards and increase their competence above their professional competency standards (Prihidayanti et al., 2019). Several studies (Cirocki & Farrell, 2019; Gore et al., 2017; Hasha & Wadesango, 2020; Mukan et al., 2019; Prihidayanti et al., 2019; Rich et al. 2021) have assessed the relationship between continuous development and teacher competence or related concepts. In spite of these studies, emerged with Prihidayanti et al. (2019) revealed that while continuous development had a significant influence on pedagogical competence it had no influence on professional competence. This made it necessary to examine this relationship in different contexts. Furthermore, a population gap was evident as no studies have targeted secondary schools. This study aimed to address these gaps.

Regarding rewards, these are provisions to employees for doing certain tasks beneficial to an organisation (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Rewards are given to employees for their good performance to avoid the emergence of an unpleasant environment (Hussain et al., 2019). Rewards are both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Monetary rewards include financial compensation like base pay, performance pay, and other financial incentives such as bonuses. Non-monetary rewards include such benefits as empowerment, competency development, and employee recognition (Mustafa & Ali, 2019). Scholars (De Ree et al., 2018; Gümüs, 2022; Idris et al., 2017; Mukomana, 2021; Mustafa & Ali, 2019) have assessed the relationship between continuous development and employee competence. However, the studies were biased outside Uganda. This geographical bias highlighted the need for a localised investigation. By examining the link between rewards and teacher competence within the Ugandan context, this study filled this knowledge gap and provided valuable insights.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sample

Employing the quantitative research approach which involves testing an identified social phenomenon based on theory, this approach relied on numerical data and statistical analysis to determine whether hypotheses were true (Zyphur & Pierides, 2017). Thus, the study employed the correlational research design with the aim of determining the degree of association between or among variables (Devi et al., 2022). By using correlational design, the researcher was able to identify patterns and associations between variables, providing insights into the strength and direction of relationships. The sample comprised 351 teachers randomly selected using simple random sampling from a population of 3873 determined based on the Table for Sample Determination by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The study population was from the districts of Bushenyi (570), Ibanda (424), Mbarara (624), Kabale (811), Kisoro (494), and Rukungiri (950) (Uganda Education Statistical Abstract, 2022). From each district, the sample was obtained by proportionate sampling. From each school, the sample of males and females was proportionately represented.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument was a self-administered questionnaire due to its ease in

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quantifying data and analysis, making it an ideal instrument for collecting large-scale data (Creswell, 2014). Since the study aimed to explore teachers' opinions, attitudes, feelings, and perceptions, the questionnaire was deemed the most suitable instrument for capturing subjective data (Kumar, 2019). The self-administered nature of the questionnaire allowed teachers to respond at their convenience, reducing the potential for study participant bias and increasing the likelihood of honest responses. The dependent variable of teacher competence was measured in terms of pedagogical, subject matter, ethical competence and assessment and evaluation (Calaguas, 2012). The independent variable of institutional support was measured in terms of induction (Haueter et al., 2003), continuous professional development (Mugizi & Bakkabulindi, 2018) and rewards (Heneman & Schwab, 1985). The responses were obtained using the scale where, 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 = Disagree (D), 3 = Undecided (U), 4 = Agree (A) and 5 = Strongly Agree (SA).

Data Quality Control

Data quality involves establishing validity and reliability. Validity involved establishing content validity by calculating convergent and discriminant validity using SmartPLS4. Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. The validity results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio Correlations for Discriminant Validity

Measures	AVE	TC	AE	EC	PC	SMC
TC						
AE	0.573	0.215				
EC	0.781	0.526	0.310			
PC	0.702	0.157	0.083	0.052		
SMC	0.544	0.713	0.567	0.755	0.408	
Measures	AVE	IS	CPD	ID	RW	
IS						
CPD	0.528	0.324				
ID	0.601	0.616	0.474			
RW	0.529	0.716	0.146	0.773		

Key: AE= Assessment and evaluation enhancement, CPD = Continuous Professional Development, EC= Ethical competence, ID = Induction, IS = Institutional support, PC = Pedagogical competence enhancement, RW= Rewards, SMC = Subject matter competence,

The validity of the data collected was confirmed through convergent and discriminant validity tests. Convergent validity, which assesses the agreement between multiple measures of a construct, was established as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.5 (Rasooli et al., 2020; Hair Jr et al., 2021). This indicates that the constructs measuring the different variables converged on them, making them appropriate measures. Discriminant validity, which evaluates the distinctness and independence of a construct from other constructs, was also confirmed as the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was below the maximum threshold of 0.90 (Rasooli et al., 2020). This suggests that the constructs were independent and distinct measures, meeting the conditions for discriminant validity.

Reliability was carried out by evaluating the internal consistency of the measurement tool, using Cronbach Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). Cronbach Alpha is a statistical tool that measures the inter-item correlations, estimating the systematic variance in a set of survey responses (Taber, 2018). However, it has limitations, as it assumes equal weights for all indicator traits in the study population, potentially leading to underestimated reliability values and the loss of valuable indicators. In contrast, Composite Reliability (CR) is a more comprehensive measure of internal consistency, considering the external characteristics of the indicator variables (Hair Jr et

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al., 2021). CR was preferred over Cronbach Alpha in testing reliability because it is a more liberal and accurate measure. The reliability results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliabilities

Measures	A	CR
AE	0.884	0.912
EC	0.933	0.953
PC	0.914	0.934
SMC	0.832	0.877
CPD	0.842	0.883
ID	0.864	0.899
RW	0.840	0.882

The reliability results presented in Table 2 demonstrate that the internal consistency of the measures was satisfactory, with both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 for all constructs (Purwanto & Sudargini, 2021). This suggests that the indicators for each construct were highly correlated and reliably measured the intended concepts. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.832 to 0.933, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the indicators. Similarly, the composite reliability values ranged from 0.877 to 0.953, further supporting the reliability of the measures.

Data Analysis

Data analysis employed inferential analysis using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. This was due to its ability to generate intuitive functions for higher-order constructs and interaction terms, as well as estimate complex models with multiple latent variables. SmartPLS reveals predictive relationships between variables with strong theoretical support, indicating causal relationships. Using SmartPLS, the study displayed relationships between constructs and measurement models, showing the connections between constructs and indicator variables (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The PLS-SEM technique, applied through SmartPLS, was suitable for this study as it tested causal-effect relationships. Consequently, SmartPLS effectively demonstrated the relationship between institutional and teacher competence.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analysed, including gender, age group (in years), and highest level of education, working experience, and responsibility in the school. These characteristics served as the foundation for evaluating the variations in perceived competence among teachers. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3, which provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic distribution of the respondents.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	135	41.0
	Female	194	59.0
	Total	329	100.0
Age Groups	Up to 30 years	69	21.0
	31- 40 years	191	58.1
	41-50 years	62	18.8
	51 and above years	7	2.1
	Total	329	100.0
Education Level	Diploma	82	24.9
	Bachelors	170	51.7
	Postgraduate	77	23.4
	Total	329	100.0

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Variables	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
Working Experience	less than 5 years	91	27.7
	5 - 10 years	153	46.5
	10 years and above	85	25.8
	Total	329	100.0
Responsibility	Subject teacher	84	25.5
	Class teacher	108	32.8
	Head of the department	114	34.7
	Senior Administrator	23	7.0
	Total	329	100.0

The gender distribution of the respondents revealed that females comprised the majority (59.0%), while males accounted for 41.0%. Although females made up the larger percentage, the sample included a significant number of males, making the data representative of both gender groups. The majority of the respondents (58.1%) fell within the 30-40 years age range, followed by 21.0% who were 30 years or younger, 19.8% who were between 40-50 years old, and 2.1% who were 50 years or older. An analysis of the respondents' education level revealed that the majority (51.7%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by 23.4% with postgraduate qualifications, and 24.9% with diplomas. Regarding working experience, the majority (46.5%) had taught for 5-10 years, while 27.7% had less than five years of experience, and 25.8% had taught for 10 years or more. This distribution suggests that the data represents the views of teachers with diverse teaching experiences. Furthermore, the respondents held various responsibilities, with the majority (34.7%) serving as heads of departments, followed by class teachers (32.8%), subject teachers (32.5%), and senior administrators (7.0%). This distribution indicates that teachers with various responsibilities participated in the study, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives on teacher competence.

Structural Model for Institutional Support and Organisational Teacher Competence

To establish the influence of institutional support has a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools PLS-SEM was carried out. This involved testing the hypotheses (H1-H3) to the effect that induction has a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools, continuous professional development has a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools, and rewards has a significant influence on teacher competence in government-aided secondary schools. The structural equation model (Figure 1) illustrates the causal relationships between institutional support and teacher competence, providing a visual representation of the complex interconnections between these variables.

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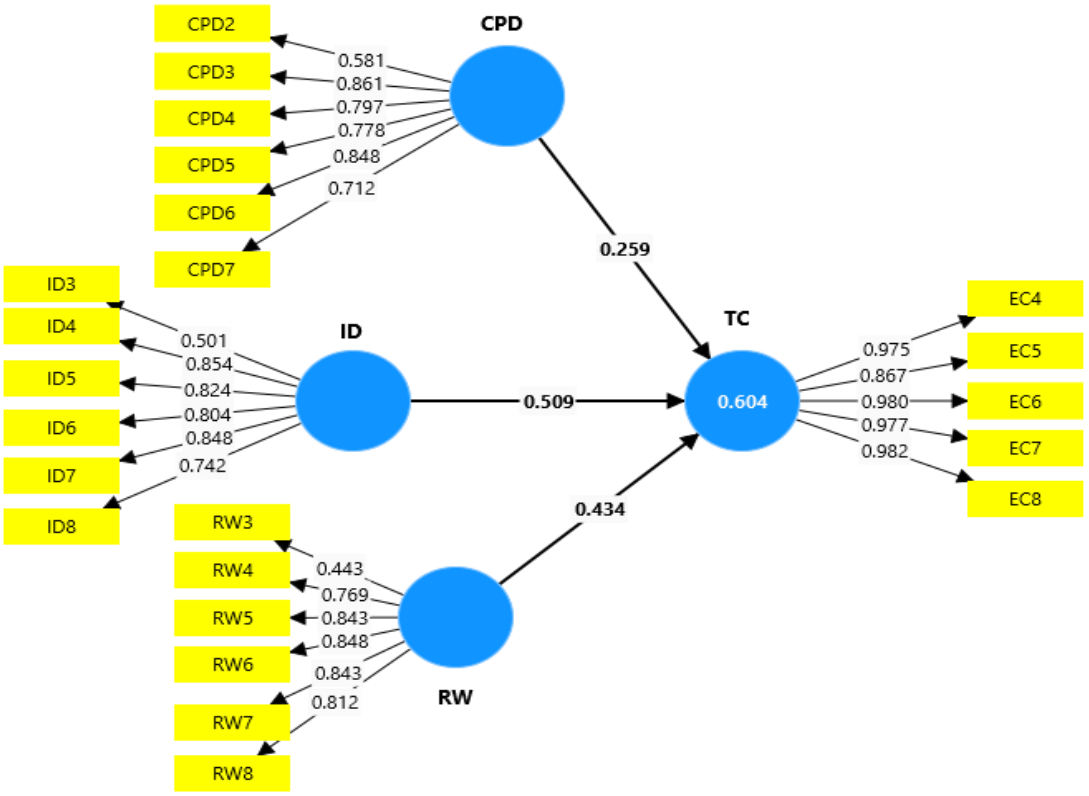
Figure 1: Institutional Support and Teacher Competence



The structural equation model (Figure 1) for institutional support and teacher competence reveals that teaching competence comprised only ethical competence with pedagogical, subject matter and assessment and evaluation competencies dropped. However, institutional support comprised induction, continuous professional development, and rewards. The model results (Table 4) include beta coefficients (βs), coefficients of determination (R2 and adjusted R2), t statistics and the p-values. The coefficients of the determination indicate the predictive power of institutional support on teacher competence. Three sub-hypotheses to the effect that induction, continuous professional development, and rewards have a significant influence on teacher competence were examined. Table 4.14 presents structural equation estimates.

Table 4: Institutional Support and Teachers' Competences

	β	Mean	STD	T	P
Induction →Teacher competence	0.509	0.510	0.044	11.688	0.000
Continuous professional development →Teacher competence	0.259	0.259	0.042	6.178	0.000
Rewards →Teacher competence	0.434	0.433	0.047	9.306	0.000
R^2 = 0.604					
R^2 Adjusted = 0.601					

The structural equation estimates presented in Table 4.14 reveal that all three aspects of institutional support, namely induction (β = 0.509, t = 11.688, p = 0.000 < 0.05), continuous professional development (β = 0.256, t = 6.178, p = 0.000 < 0.05), and rewards (β = 0.434, t = 9.306, p = 0.000 < 0.05) have a positive and significant influence on teacher competence. The adjusted R-squared value (Adjusted R^2 = 0.60) indicates that these three institutional support elements collectively explain 60.1% of the variation in teacher competence. Furthermore, the beta coefficients (β) show that

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induction has the most significant influence on teacher competence, followed by rewards and continuous professional development, respectively.

DISCUSSION

The results above highlight the significance of induction, continuous professional development, and rewards in fostering teacher competence. Notably, induction emerged as the most influential factor, followed by rewards and continuous professional development, respectively. This finding that induction has a significant influence on teacher competence aligns with previous scholars such as Aarts et al. (2020), Edeh and Dan-jumbo (2019), Eisenschmidt and Poom-Valickis (2020), Frederiksen (2020), Hagos et al. (2019), Jeske and Olson (2022), Olsen et al. (2020), and Symeonidis et al. (2023). This emphasises the crucial role of induction in developing the competencies of teachers. The consistency of this finding with previous research underscores the importance of induction in supporting teachers' professional growth and competence development. This informs evidence-based strategies for teacher training and support.

With respect to continuous professional development having a positive and significant influence on teacher competence, the finding was consistent with existing studies like Cirocki and Farrell (2019), Gore et al. (2017), Hasha and Wadesango (2020), Mukan et al. (2019), Prihidayanti et al. (2019), and Rich et al. (2021). The consistency of this finding with previous research underscores the essential role of continuous professional development in enhancing teachers' competencies. This highlights the importance of ongoing training and development opportunities for teachers to refine their pedagogical skills, stay updated on best practices, and adapt to evolving educational contexts.

Concerning rewards, the finding that rewards had a positive and significant influence on teachers' competence agreed with previous scholars such as Gümüs (2022), Idris et al. (2017), Mukomana (2021), Mustafa and Ali (2019) and Orji and Abolarin (2012). The universality of support for this finding across all previous studies suggests that rewards play a crucial role in enhancing teachers' competence. This consistency of evidence highlights the importance of recognising and rewarding teachers' efforts and achievements to motivate them to improve their competencies. Therefore, rewards play a vital role in enhancing teachers' competencies, and their importance cannot be overstated.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings suggested that induction, continuous professional development and rewards are important for teacher competence development. Induction encompasses making new teachers understand what their supervisors expect from them, familiarizing them with school guidelines, policies, and practices, and briefing them on how to act consistently with the principles and values. Continuous professional development involves providing mentors, performance feedback, opportunities for acting in different responsibilities, supporting further studies, and availing opportunities for seminars, workshops, and training in contemporary technologies. Rewards encompass paying teachers regular allowances, recognising exceptional performance, making teachers feel valued, addressing their needs, and appreciating their successful performance, ultimately fostering a supportive environment that promotes teacher growth, development, and effectiveness.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education and Sports, head teachers, and other stakeholders such as Boards of Governors should establish institutional support that facilitates the development of teacher competence through induction, continuous professional development, and rewards. Induction should include mechanisms for familiarising new teachers with school guidelines, policies, and practices, clarifying supervisors' expectations, and briefing them on aligning with core values. Continuous professional development should provide mentors, performance feedback, diverse responsibilities, further education support, and opportunities for seminars, workshops, and contemporary technology training. Rewards should encompass regular allowances, recognition of exceptional performance, making teachers feel valued, addressing their needs, and appreciating successful performance, ultimately fostering a

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supportive environment that promotes teacher growth, development, and effectiveness.

Limitations

The present study makes a significant contribution by illuminating the influence of institutional support and teacher competence. However, the study solely relied on a quantitative approach limiting the depth of analysis. Therefore, future research should consider employing a mixed-methods approach or a qualitative approach alone to facilitate a more in-depth exploration of the phenomena under investigation, which would provide a richer understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Still, the population of the studies were secondary school teachers. Therefore, future research should consider other institutions such as universities and primary schools.

Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (PA., G.W.K., N.M); Literature review (PA.); methodology (PA.); software (PA); validation (PA., & G.W.K.); formal analysis (PA.); investigation (PA.); data curation (PA); drafting and preparation (PA.); review and editing (PA., G.W.K., & N.M); supervision (G.W.K. & N.M); project administration (PA.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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