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Relationship Between Principals' Recognition Practices and Teacher Job Performance in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was guided by the following research question: How do principal's recognition practices relate to teacher job performance? The study was anchored on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation of 1959. A convergent mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining a cross-sectional survey for the quantitative method and phenomenology for the qualitative method. The study's target population included 32 public secondary schools, 1,757 teachers and 32 principals in Enugu Education zone. Sample size included 10 public schools, selected using stratified sampling, 264 teachers selected by stratified random sampling, 10 deans of studies and 10 Principals selected using criterion sampling. Data collection instruments included questionnaires and interview guides. Research instruments were validated through face and content validity and reliability ensured using Cronbach's Alpha at a threshold of 0.70. Trustworthiness of qualitative instruments was ensured. Quantitative data were analysed using The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate frequencies and percentages, which were summarized and presented in frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis and presented narratively, with relevant direct quotations. The study adhered to ethical considerations. The study found that principals' recognition practices significantly influence teacher job performance by enhancing motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness. It concluded that effective recognition of teachers' efforts contributes to improved performance and positive school outcomes. The study recommends that principals adopt consistent recognition strategies, including appreciation, professional support, and achievement-based rewards, to strengthen teacher morale and productivity in schools.

Key Words: Principals' Recognition Practices; Teacher Job Performance; Relationship; Recognition Practices; Teacher Motivation; Teacher Commitment; and Instructional Effectiveness

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Background to the Study

Principals' recognition practices refer to the deliberate actions undertaken by school leaders to acknowledge, appreciate, and reward teachers' contributions, achievements, and professional commitment. Recognition may include verbal praise, awards, professional growth opportunities, constructive feedback, and supportive leadership behaviours that enhance teachers' motivation and commitment (Ali & Ntu, 2023). Teacher job performance refers to the effectiveness and efficiency with which teachers execute instructional and professional responsibilities, including lesson preparation, classroom management, assessment, punctuality, and participation in school activities (Igoni, 2020). In this study, principals' recognition practices represent the independent variable, while teacher job performance represents the dependent variable. Effective recognition creates a supportive environment that encourages teachers to improve their professional practices.

Educational stakeholders increasingly recognize the importance of principals' recognition practices in improving teacher effectiveness and achieving educational goals. According to Leithwood (2020), principals influence teachers' commitment, capacity, and working conditions through leadership practices that support professional growth and motivation. Teachers who feel valued and supported are more likely to demonstrate dedication, satisfaction, and improved performance (Freed et al., 2021). Recognition practices such as appreciation, feedback, and professional encouragement can strengthen teachers' morale and willingness to exceed basic expectations. Therefore, stakeholders including education policymakers, school administrators, and teachers emphasize the need for supportive leadership approaches that promote recognition and positive workplace relationships to enhance teaching quality and learner outcomes.

Universally, research demonstrates that recognition and motivational practices by school leaders are associated with improved teacher performance. In international school contexts, Freed et al. (2021) found that principals significantly influence teacher morale and professional engagement through recognition, communication, and professional development opportunities. Similarly, Sitopu et al. (2021) established that motivation, leadership support, and fair compensation significantly determine employee productivity and effectiveness. In education systems worldwide, recognition has become an important component of human resource management because it promotes commitment and reduces workplace dissatisfaction. Effective school leadership is therefore considered essential in creating environments where teachers feel appreciated, supported, and motivated to provide quality instruction and contribute positively to educational achievement.

In developed countries, evidence from the United States highlights the contribution of school leadership recognition practices to teacher motivation and performance. Freed et al. (2021), through a study involving international school principals in Chicago, revealed that principals enhance teacher commitment by recognizing teachers' efforts, providing professional development opportunities, and establishing supportive school climates. Similarly, studies in Canada have shown the importance of feedback and appraisal systems in improving teachers' professional growth. Sokal et al. (2020) found that constructive and timely feedback from school

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leaders helped teachers reflect on their practices, improve competence, and maintain professional commitment, particularly during challenging periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further evidence from developed educational contexts demonstrates the importance of supportive leadership in strengthening teacher effectiveness. Research from Indonesia, although not classified as a developed country, provides organizational evidence that leadership, motivation, and compensation influence employee performance (Sitopu et al., 2021). In countries such as Canada and the United States, school leaders increasingly use recognition systems, professional learning opportunities, and teacher involvement in decision-making to promote workplace satisfaction and effectiveness. These approaches align with Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, which identifies recognition, achievement, and advancement as important motivators that encourage improved work performance (Herzberg et al., 1959). Consequently, recognition practices remain a significant leadership strategy for improving teacher outcomes across different educational settings.

Within Nigeria, studies have demonstrated the relationship between principals' motivational practices and teacher job performance. In Abuja, Adam (2024) found a significant positive relationship between principals' motivational strategies and teachers' job performance among public secondary schools. The study indicated that recognition, incentives, supportive supervision, and professional encouragement improved teachers' commitment and instructional effectiveness. Similarly, Ali and Ntu (2023) reported that motivational factors such as recognition, professional growth opportunities, and supportive leadership influence teachers' performance in junior secondary schools in Abuja. These findings suggest that principals play a central role in shaping teachers' professional experiences through recognition practices that enhance morale, commitment, and effectiveness within Nigerian schools.

Other Nigerian studies further support the importance of principals' recognition and administrative practices in improving teacher performance. In Calabar, Egbai et al. (2024) found that salary, working conditions, and training opportunities significantly influenced teacher effectiveness in Catholic secondary schools. In Delta State, Oduma and Ossai (2024) reported that welfare management, teacher participation in decision-making, and effective communication were associated with improved teacher performance. Additionally, Igoni (2020) established that administrative practices of principals influence teachers' attitudes, dedication, and commitment to professional duties. These findings indicate that teachers' performance is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the leadership environment created by school principals.

In Enugu Education Zone, existing evidence suggests that principals' motivational approaches may influence teacher effectiveness, although limited research has focused specifically on recognition practices. Anachuna and Obilor (2023) investigated principals' motivational techniques in public and private secondary schools in Enugu State and found that principals commonly used strategies such as rewarding teachers and recognizing outstanding performance to encourage commitment. However, the study primarily examined motivational strategies broadly and did not specifically establish how recognition practices relate to teacher job performance within Enugu Education Zone. This creates a need to investigate recognition practices as a distinct leadership strategy affecting teachers' professional outcomes in the zone.

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At the Enugu State level, studies indicate that supportive administrative practices contribute to improved teacher performance. Anachuna and Obilor (2023) reported that principals' motivational strategies enhanced school effectiveness by encouraging teachers' efforts and commitment. Furthermore, evidence from Nigerian studies shows that inadequate recognition, limited professional growth opportunities, and poor working conditions may negatively affect teacher morale and performance (Idoko, 2023). Despite these findings, limited empirical attention has been given to understanding the specific contribution of principals' recognition practices to teacher job performance in Enugu State. Therefore, examining this relationship is important for generating context-specific evidence for school leaders and education stakeholders.

The current study seeks to fill contextual and empirical gaps identified in previous research. Although earlier studies have established links between principals' motivation, leadership practices, and teacher performance, many have examined motivation as a broad concept rather than focusing specifically on recognition practices. Existing studies have also concentrated on locations such as Abuja, Ogun, Delta, Anambra, and other Nigerian contexts, leaving limited evidence from Enugu Education Zone. Therefore, this study addresses the gap by examining the relationship between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. The findings may provide useful insights for improving school leadership practices, teacher motivation, and educational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers are expected to provide effective instruction, demonstrate commitment and support the achievement of secondary education objectives. However, findings from studies in Enugu State indicate fears about the job performance of teachers. Researchers report these concerns based on evidence from teachers, principals and stakeholders in the education system, not unverified allegations. Problems such as late completion of schemes of work, tardiness, poor attitudes toward teaching, problems related to students were identified by Ezeugbor and Victor (2018), while Obi et al. reported public discontent with challenges such as absenteeism and lack of commitment. The challenges suggest that the effectiveness of teachers is still a challenge in education that requires effective leadership interventions, particularly the use of principal motivational strategies.

Despite the available evidence, little or no research has been done to specifically investigate the effects of principal motivational strategies on teachers' job performance in Enugu Education Zone. Previous studies have mainly focused on general management practices and administrative behaviors, but little is known about the role of specific motivational practices such as recognition, professional development opportunities, constructive criticism, and welfare support. Schools that fail to tackle these issues can face low teacher morale, reduced instructional effectiveness, absenteeism and declining commitment, all of which can adversely affect students' academic outcomes and the overall quality of education. Hence, the objective of this study was to examine the relationship between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria.

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Research Question

How do principals' recognition practices relate with teacher job performance in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu state Nigeria?

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation, which was developed by Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara Snyderman in 1959. The theory emerged from their investigation of factors influencing employee job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Herzberg et al. (1959) proposed that workplace factors are divided into two categories: hygiene factors and motivator factors. Hygiene factors include salary, working conditions, organizational policies, supervision, and job security, which help prevent dissatisfaction but may not create long-term motivation. Motivator factors include achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and opportunities for growth, which encourage satisfaction and improved performance. In this study, principals' recognition practices represent a key motivator factor because teachers who receive appreciation and acknowledgement are more likely to demonstrate commitment, enthusiasm, and improved job performance (Herzberg et al., 1959; Robbins & Judge, 2021).

One major strength of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory is that it emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation in improving employee performance. Unlike traditional approaches that focus mainly on financial rewards, the theory highlights that recognition, achievement, responsibility, and professional growth are powerful factors that encourage employees to perform effectively (Robbins & Judge, 2021). The theory also provides practical guidance for school administrators by demonstrating that principals can improve teacher performance through job enrichment, supportive leadership, and recognition of teachers' contributions. Furthermore, the distinction between factors that prevent dissatisfaction and those that create satisfaction provides a useful framework for understanding teachers' workplace experiences. According to Nickerson (2025), the theory has influenced organizational practices by encouraging leaders to focus on meaningful work, employee development, and recognition as strategies for improving commitment and productivity.

Despite its contribution to understanding workplace motivation, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory has several limitations. A major criticism is that the theory does not sufficiently consider individual differences among employees. Workers have different personal goals, expectations, values, and circumstances; therefore, factors that motivate one teacher may not necessarily motivate another (Vroom, 1964). For example, while some teachers may value recognition and professional growth, others may place greater importance on financial rewards, job security, or work-life balance. Additionally, critics argue that Herzberg's research was based on specific occupational groups and may not fully represent diverse workplaces, including educational institutions. However, despite these weaknesses, the theory remains useful because studies continue to show that recognition, supportive leadership, and opportunities for growth influence teacher motivation and job performance (Marieta, 2022).

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory is applicable to this study because it provides a framework for examining how principals' recognition practices relate to teacher job performance in Enugu

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Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Recognition is categorized as a motivator factor that enhances teachers' satisfaction, commitment, and willingness to perform beyond basic expectations. When principals acknowledge teachers' efforts through praise, awards, professional development opportunities, and constructive feedback, teachers are more likely to demonstrate improved instructional effectiveness and commitment (Ali & Ntu, 2023). The theory also emphasizes the importance of addressing hygiene factors such as working conditions, school policies, and administrative support because their absence may create dissatisfaction among teachers (Andala & Esdras, 2021). Therefore, the theory helps explain how balanced leadership practices involving recognition and supportive working environments can enhance teacher job performance.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

Recognition is a strategy that employs a variety of rewards to motivate employees and encourage excellent behavior within an organization. Recognition can take various forms, including public, private, monetary, and promotional. Its main purpose is to celebrate the unique strengths, contributions, and accomplishments of individual teachers in ways that encourage them, boost their morale, and bring out the best in them so they can perform even better.

Research demonstrates that recognition plays a vital role in satisfying individuals' ego and esteem needs, thereby enhancing their motivation and performance. A study by Reese (2020) in United State examined the role of recognition as a motivational strategy in enhancing employee outcomes. The study adopted a quantitative research design, utilizing a survey method to collect data from employees across various organizational sectors. Structured questionnaires were used to assess employees' perceptions of recognition practices, including verbal praise, awards, and personal acknowledgment, as well as their levels of motivation and job performance. The data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as correlation and regression analysis to determine the relationship between recognition and employee performance.

The findings of the study revealed that recognition significantly influences employee motivation by satisfying their esteem and ego needs, which in turn enhances their willingness to perform better. Employees who reported receiving regular and meaningful recognition demonstrated higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity compared to those who received little or no acknowledgment. The study further established that recognition, as an intrinsic motivational factor, plays a critical role in fostering positive work attitudes and encouraging continuous improvement in performance. Based on these findings, the study concluded that organizations should prioritize recognition as a strategic motivational tool to enhance employee effectiveness. In the context of education, this implies that principals who consistently recognize and appreciate teachers' efforts are more likely to promote higher levels of teacher motivation and improved job performance.

A critical review of the study by Reese (2020) reveals both its relevance and limitations. The findings strongly support the argument that recognition is a powerful intrinsic motivator that satisfies employees' esteem needs and encourages improved work behavior. This aligns well with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which identifies recognition as a key motivator that leads to job satisfaction and enhanced performance. However, despite its strengths, the study has notable

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limitations. First, its use of a single organizational case limits the generalizability of the findings to other sectors, particularly education. The workplace context differs significantly from school environments, where motivation is influenced not only by organizational goals but also by pedagogical demands, student outcomes, and public accountability.

Second, the study relied largely on quantitative insights and descriptive analysis, without employing a mixed-method approach that could provide deeper empirical validation through both quantitative and qualitative data. This creates a methodological gap when compared to the current study, which adopts a mixed-method design to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how motivational strategies influence teacher job performance.

Furthermore, Reese (2020) primarily focuses on recognition as an isolated motivational strategy, without adequately examining how it interacts with other strategies such as professional development, feedback, and leadership support. In contrast, the current study takes a broader perspective by examining multiple principal motivational strategies and how they collectively relate with teacher performance. The current study addressed the contextual and methodological gap of Reese 2020 by situating recognition within a wider framework, applying mix methods approach and anchoring the analysis on Herzberg two factor Theory.

In Indonesia, a study by Imran et al. (2024) explored the dual effects of recognition and appreciation on employee motivation and performance. It examines how these variables influence workplace dynamics and explores practical ways to build sustainable recognition and appreciation systems across various organizational contexts. Using a qualitative systematic literature analysis, the research combined findings from current studies to assess the roles of recognition and appreciation.

The study blends theoretical frameworks like Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Self-Determination Theory to analyze the impact on both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Recognition boosts employee motivation by acknowledging contributions, creating a sense of accomplishment, and promoting task completion. Appreciation boosts intrinsic motivation by meeting psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy, leading to greater emotional engagement and long-term commitment. Combining reward and appreciation improves employee performance, engagement, turnover, and promotes organizational citizenship.

The work has theoretical integration, distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and shows that recognition improves motivation. However, the study has several limitations. First, its reliance on a qualitative systematic literature review means that it is based on secondary data rather than primary empirical evidence, limiting its ability to establish context-specific or causal relationships. Second, the study is broad and generalized across multiple organizational settings, which reduces its applicability to specific sectors such as education, where motivational dynamics may differ significantly. Third, although it provides strong theoretical integration, it does not empirically test these theories within a single, defined population, thereby limiting the practical validation of its conclusions. Additionally, the study focuses mainly on recognition and appreciation, without examining how these interact with other leadership-driven motivational strategies such as professional development, supervision, and working conditions.

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The current study addressed these gaps by employing a mixed-method research design that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate both statistical evidence and in-depth insights from teachers and principals. The present study collected primary data within the educational sector, providing context-specific findings on teacher motivation. Furthermore, while the reviewed study focused mainly on recognition and appreciation, the current study expanded the scope and `included a range of principal motivational strategies and examines their combined relationship on teacher job performance. Anchored on Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study also empirically tested how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors operate within school settings. The current study also integrated Vroom theory and Maslow theory to mitigate the weaknesses of Herzberg theory. In doing so, it provided a more comprehensive, context-specific, and methodologically robust understanding of the relationship between principal motivational strategies and teacher job performance.

Mahmud's (2021) study in Kurdistan, Iraq, provides additional proof that acknowledgment improves teacher job performance worldwide. This study focuses on the Erbil Administrative Technical Institute. A questionnaire survey of 157 respondents revealed a significant positive association (r = 0.832) between recognition and organizational success. The study recommended that management use both monetary and non-monetary incentives, such as recognition, to inspire staff. The overall methodological strength of the study lies in the use of random sampling, attempts to establish validity and reliability, and a clear separation of the construct into two instruments. While the weakness lies in an extremely small principal sample (N=10), limited construct validity, a lack of theoretical grounding, insufficient reporting of ethical safeguards, and the use of only a questionnaire for data collection. By increasing the sample size, strengthening the theoretical grounding, improving construct validity, adopting a mixed-methods approach, ensuring ethical transparency, and broadening the scope of motivational strategies, the current study significantly addressed the methodological and conceptual gaps identified.

Regional studies also demonstrate the critical role of recognition on teacher job performance, for instance, Okwatsa (2021) performed research in Mombasa County, Kenya, on principal motivational tactics and their consequences for teacher job performance in public secondary schools. The study employed a cross-sectional research design with a population of 228 respondents, comprising principals and teachers from the county's public secondary schools. The study's results indicated that consistent recognition of teachers' efforts and performance positively influences their job performance. This suggests that when teachers receive recognition, they feel confident and assured in their job performance, leading them to strive towards achieving their goals. The study contributes valuable insight into the relationship between principals' motivational strategies, particularly recognition, and teachers' job performance. The cross-sectional design and reasonable population size are strengths.

However, the study has the following gaps: the study relied predominantly on quantitative method, lack of clarity on sampling and instrumentation, an absence of theoretical grounding, and limited methodological transparency. The current study sought to address these gaps by adopting a mixed-method research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In addition, it expands the scope beyond recognition to include multiple principal motivational

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practices and examines their combined relationship on teacher performance. Anchored on Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this study provided a more holistic and theoretically grounded analysis, thereby contributing deeper and more context-relevant insights into how motivational strategies relate with teacher effectiveness.

Another study in Kenya by Fafila (2024) examined the principals' strategies for recognizing teachers' hard work and their impact on job performance in Langata sub-county, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study adopted Herzberg's motivational hygiene theory. It employed a mixed-methods research approach and a convergent mixed-methods design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Purposive sampling was used to select Langata sub-county, while the Census method was used to select all public secondary schools in the sub-county and their principals. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was applied to select the teachers, while proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were used to select Form Four students.

The target population was drawn from three public secondary schools within Langata Sub-County, comprising three principals, 80 teachers, and 163 Form four students, for a total of 246 respondents. Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from teachers and students, and interview guides to collect qualitative data from school principals. Content and face validity were used to validate the research tools. Piloting of instruments was conducted in a public secondary school with similar characteristics in a nearby sub-county. The reliability of the instruments was tested using Spearman's Correlation coefficient, and a score of 8.0 was obtained. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 24) and reported in frequency tables, graphs, and charts.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis and grouped through content analysis. Data were presented in themes supported by direct quotes. The findings revealed that, to some extent, school principals implemented measures to recognize teachers' hard work and enhance effective job performance and motivation. The study demonstrated an effort to apply a mixed-methods design and to ground the research in Herzberg's theory. However, methodological weaknesses, particularly the questionable reliability coefficient and reliance on descriptive statistics, reduced its analytical strength. The narrow focus on recognition limits theoretical comprehensiveness, and the small sample size restricts generalizability. The current study built on the foundation laid by Fafila et al. (2024) by enhancing measurement reliability, employing advanced statistical analyses, and improving sample representativeness, expanding the scope beyond recognition alone to include other key motivational practices and examines how these collectively relate to teacher job performance.

In Kenya, Oyolla (2021) examined the relationship between support staff recognition efforts and learners' academic performance in public secondary schools. The Concurrent Triangulation design was used. The study population consisted of 544 participants: 68 principals, 68 head of security officers, 68 laboratory assistants, 68 Board of management chairpersons, 68 Director of Studies, 68 head of secretaries, 68 head of kitchen departments, and 68 bursars. The primary data collection instruments for this study included questionnaires and interview

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schedules. Quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaire sections were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson's Correlation.

Qualitative data collected through open-ended questionnaire sections and interviews were analyzed on an ongoing basis as themes and sub-themes emerged. Although there was a positive relationship between support staff effort recognition and learners' academic performance, it was not statistically significant ($r = .181$, $n = 88$, $p = .092$). Oyalla's study specifically examined the relationship between support staff recognition efforts and learners' academic performance in public secondary schools. The study contributes to understanding recognition practices among support staff in secondary schools. However, its strength is limited by inconsistent methodology and mediocre statistical results. The non-significant association suggests that other mediating factors may be at play, or that learners' academic performance may not be directly affected by support staff recognition. By improving methodological techniques, bolstering statistical analyses, anchoring on Herzberg theory, adding mediating mechanisms, and ensuring theoretical and analytical alignment, the current work addressed the shortcomings of earlier research and close the gaps. This study recognizes the complexity of educational systems and evaluates more, theory-driven paths to produce clearer, more reliable results rather than assuming a straight relationship between recognition and learners' academic performance.

In Nigeria, Amaefule (2023) investigated how principals' motivational tactics affect teacher job performance in public Senior Secondary Schools in Abuja Municipal Area Council. The research was guided by three research questions and three hypotheses. A survey research design was used for the study. The total population of the study consisted of 1888 (23 principals and 1865 teachers) obtained from all the 23 public senior secondary schools in the Abuja Municipal Area Council. The sample comprised 300 respondents from seven senior secondary schools in the Abuja Municipal Area Council, selected using simple random sampling. A self-developed instrument called 'Impact of Principals' Motivational Strategies on Teacher Job Performance Questionnaire (IPMSTJPQ) was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The study found that teachers' recognition by principals, teachers' welfare, and principals' effective communication significantly impacted teachers' job performance in public Secondary Schools in the Abuja Municipal Area Council. Based on the result of the findings, it was recommended among others that the FCT Secondary Education Board should organize seminars, symposia, workshops, and conferences for the principals to enable them to acquire the various basic skills and knowledge required for the application of different motivational strategies for the improvement of teacher job performance in Nigerian secondary schools.

The study provides useful insights into principals' motivational strategies and their association with teachers' job performance in the Abuja Municipal Area Council. However, methodological limitations, particularly the absence of reported validity and reliability measures, unclear statistical justification, reliance on a purely quantitative survey design, reduce the strength of the conclusions. Additionally, the study is geographically limited to the Abuja Municipal Area

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Council, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different educational and socio-economic conditions.

The current study addressed these gaps by adopting a mixed-method research design. Furthermore, it expanded the scope by examining multiple principal motivational strategies collectively rather than in isolation, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of their combined relationships on teacher job performance. In doing so, it offers a more holistic, context-sensitive, and methodologically robust contribution to understanding the relationship between principal motivational strategies and teacher job performance.

Adesina and Egbuta's (2025) study in Nigeria examined the impact of strategic reward and recognition systems on employee engagement and retention. The study examined resource-constrained recognition and reward systems in emerging economies, namely in Nigeria. The authors used a qualitative research approach, drawing on a literature review and thematic analysis, to examine the influence of both monetary and non-monetary recognition on employee motivation. The study indicated that effective reward and recognition systems boost employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. Non-monetary recognition, such as public acknowledgment, professional development possibilities, and formal appreciation programs, was found to be a potent motivation. The study found that limited resources in emerging economies make implementation challenging. A balanced approach combining financial and non-financial incentives is recommended for maximum effectiveness.

Despite these contributions, the study has several drawbacks. The study's reliance on secondary data limited its ability to demonstrate causal links between recognition and performance results. The research lacked a sector-specific focus, such as education, which has unique motivating characteristics. The study focused on engagement and retention results rather than leaders' participation in adopting recognition strategies or their direct impact on job performance.

The current study addressed these gaps by collecting primary data from public secondary school principals and teachers, enabling a direct assessment of how principals' motivational strategies, including recognition, relate to teachers' job performance. This study, unlike Adesina and Egbuta's (2025) broad organizational perspective, focused on the motivational and professional dynamics of teachers within a given sector. It evaluated the role of principals in motivating staff and offered evidence-based recommendations for implementing leadership-driven recognition systems in public education.

Research Design and Methodology

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design to examine the relationship between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance in public secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), research design provides the overall plan and procedures that guide the collection, analysis, and interpretation of research data. The convergent design enabled the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, analyze each data strand independently, and integrate the findings during interpretation. The quantitative approach examined patterns and relationships between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance, while the qualitative approach explored experiences and perceptions of principals and teachers regarding

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recognition practices. This design was appropriate because it provided statistical evidence and deeper contextual understanding of the study phenomenon (Fetters & Molina-Azorin, 2023).

The study was conducted in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria, located in the South-East geopolitical region of Nigeria. The zone comprises three Local Government Areas: Enugu North, Enugu East, and Isi-Uzo, with 32 public secondary schools managed by the Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB). The study area consists of both urban and rural schools with differences in teacher numbers, student populations, available resources, and access to professional development opportunities. Enugu North and Enugu East benefit from urban advantages such as greater exposure to training programmes and institutional support, while Isi-Uzo schools experience challenges associated with rural educational environments. The zone was selected because its diverse school contexts provide an appropriate setting for examining how principals' recognition practices influence teacher job performance.

The target population comprised 1,789 participants, including 32 principals, 1,757 teachers, and Deans of Studies from 32 public secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone. Sampling involved both probability and non-probability techniques to ensure adequate representation of participants. Proportionate stratified sampling and simple random sampling were used to select schools and teachers, while purposive sampling was applied to select principals and Deans of Studies because of their leadership responsibilities and direct knowledge of recognition practices. A sample of 10 schools was selected, representing different Local Government Areas within the zone. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis tools. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and meanings from participants' experiences.

The study instruments were subjected to validity, reliability, and trustworthiness procedures to ensure the accuracy and consistency of collected data. Validity was established through expert evaluation of the research instruments to determine their relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives (Creswell, 2023). Pilot testing was conducted in schools that were not included in the final study sample to identify weaknesses and improve the instruments. Reliability of quantitative instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, where coefficients above 0.70 were considered acceptable. The study also enhanced qualitative trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability procedures. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and protection of participants' rights, were observed throughout the research process to ensure responsible and ethical conduct.

Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings

The first research question sought to determine the relationship of school principals' teacher motivation practices and teacher job performance. Teachers were requested to indicate how principal's recognition practices relate with teacher job performance in public secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone using a five-point Likert scale where 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree and 1 = Strongly Disagree. The responses were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean scores and standard deviations. A criterion Mean of 2.50 was

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adopted for decision-making, whereby any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as agreed, while any item with a mean score below 2.50 was regarded as disagreed. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Teachers' Responses on Principal Recognition and Teacher Job Performance (n = 262)

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
My principal recognizes my teaching efforts regularly	50 (19.1%)	41 (15.6%)	54 (20.6%)	60 (22.9%)	57 (21.8%)	2.20	1.095
Recognition from my principal motivates me to perform better	126 (48.1%)	83 (31.7%)	15 (5.7%)	25 (9.5%)	12 (4.6%)	4.10	1.155
Awards and praise from the principal improve my commitment to work	103 (39.3%)	82 (31.3%)	26 (9.9%)	38 (14.5%)	13 (5.0%)	3.85	1.225
Lack of recognition reduces my job performance	104 (39.7%)	98 (37.4%)	31 (11.8%)	18 (6.9%)	11 (4.2%)	3.21	1.403
Fair recognition practices enhance teachers' productivity	83 (31.7%)	98 (37.4%)	16 (6.1%)	40 (15.3%)	25 (9.5%)	3.56	1.299

Source: Field Data (2026

The findings in Table 1 reveal varying perceptions regarding the relationship between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance. The first item sought to determine whether principals regularly recognize teachers' efforts. The results indicate that 50 respondents (19.1%) strongly agreed while 41 respondents (15.6%) agreed, representing a combined agreement of 34.7%. Conversely, 60 respondents (22.9%) disagreed, and 57 respondents (21.8%) strongly

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disagreed, giving a combined disagreement of 44.7%, while 54 respondents (20.6%) remained neutral. The item recorded a mean score of 2.20 with a standard deviation of 1.095, which is below the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicates that most teachers perceived that principals do not consistently recognize their teaching efforts. The relatively low standard deviation further suggests that respondents held similar opinions regarding this issue. The findings corroborate those of Fafila (2024), who found that principals' recognition practices enhance teacher motivation and job performance, although many teachers perceived that recognition was inconsistently applied. The present study arrived at a similar conclusion. While respondents acknowledged the motivational value of recognition, the first questionnaire item revealed that principals do not consistently recognize teachers' efforts. Likewise, interview participants reported that although principals appreciate teachers informally, structured recognition programs are not implemented in many schools because of financial constraints and lack of institutional policies. This similarity strengthens the credibility of the present findings by demonstrating that inconsistent recognition remains a challenge in many public secondary schools.

The second item examined whether recognition from principals motivates teachers to perform better. The findings revealed that 126 respondents (48.1%) strongly agreed, and 83 respondents (31.7%) agreed, representing an overwhelming 79.8% agreement. Only 25 respondents (9.5%) disagreed, 12 respondents (4.6%) strongly disagreed, while 15 respondents (5.7%) remained neutral. The item recorded a mean score of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 1.155, indicating that respondents generally agreed that recognition serves as an effective motivational strategy capable of improving teacher job performance. This finding suggests that teachers derive encouragement whenever their professional contributions are acknowledged by their principals. Recognition creates a sense of value and professional fulfilment, thereby motivating teachers to exert greater effort in lesson preparation, classroom instruction, learner assessment and participation in school activities. The relatively low dispersion of responses further demonstrates consensus among respondents that recognition positively influences teacher performance.

Similarly, the third item investigated whether awards and praise from principals improve teachers' commitment to work. The findings showed that 103 respondents (39.3%) strongly agreed while 82 respondents (31.3%) agreed, giving a combined agreement of 70.6%. In contrast, 38 respondents (14.5%) disagreed, 13 respondents (5.0%) strongly disagreed, whereas 26 respondents (9.9%) were neutral. The item produced a mean score of 3.85 with a standard deviation of 1.225, indicating agreement among the teachers. This implies that awards, letters of commendation, certificates of excellence and public praise contribute significantly to improving teachers' dedication and commitment to their professional responsibilities.

This finding supports the study of Adesina and Egbuta (2025), who concluded that strategic recognition systems, particularly non-monetary forms such as public acknowledgement, awards, appreciation and professional recognition, improve employee engagement, job satisfaction and retention. Teachers reported that recognition through commendation letters, certificates of excellence and public praise increased their confidence, professional fulfilment and willingness to

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contribute to school improvement. Recognition therefore serves as an important psychological reward that encourages sustained high performance among teachers.

The fourth item sought teachers' opinions on whether lack of recognition reduces teacher job performance. The results revealed that 104 respondents (39.7%) strongly agreed, and 98 respondents (37.4%) agreed, representing a combined agreement of 77.1%. Only 18 respondents (6.9%) disagreed, and 11 respondents (4.2%) strongly disagreed, while 31 respondents (11.8%) remained neutral. The item recorded a mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 1.403, indicating agreement among respondents. The findings suggest that inadequate recognition negatively affects teachers' morale, motivation and willingness to perform beyond the minimum expectations of their profession. Teachers who consistently perceive that their efforts are ignored may gradually lose interest in innovation, creativity and active participation in school development programs. Consequently, the absence of recognition may undermine instructional quality and organizational effectiveness.

Finally, the fifth item examined whether fair recognition practices enhance teachers' productivity. The results showed that 83 respondents (31.7%) strongly agreed while 98 respondents (37.4%) agreed, representing 69.1% agreement. On the other hand, 40 respondents (15.3%) disagreed, 25 respondents (9.5%) strongly disagreed, whereas 16 respondents (6.1%) remained neutral. The item recorded a mean score of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 1.299, indicating agreement among respondents. This finding implies that teachers value fairness, transparency and equity in the administration of recognition programs. Recognition systems perceived as objective and merit-based encourage greater trust in school leadership, improve organizational commitment and inspire teachers to maintain high levels of professional performance. Conversely, recognition perceived as biased or selective may weaken staff morale and create dissatisfaction among teachers.

However, the present findings differ slightly from those of some previous studies regarding the consistency of recognition practices. Whereas studies such as Reese (2020), Mahmud (2021) and Okwatsa (2021) generally reported that recognition practices were effectively implemented and positively influenced performance, the present study found that recognition is not consistently practiced in many public secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone, as evidenced by the low mean score (2.20) recorded for the item measuring regular recognition of teachers' efforts. This variation is attributed to contextual differences in educational administration, funding levels and institutional policies.

The interview findings support this explanation, as principals acknowledged that inadequate funding, lack of government support and the absence of formal recognition policies constrain their ability to implement structured recognition programs. Overall, the findings demonstrate that although principals may not consistently recognize teachers' efforts, teachers overwhelmingly agreed that recognition, praise, awards and fair appreciation significantly enhance teachers' motivation, commitment and productivity. These findings underscore the importance of establishing structured and transparent recognition systems within public secondary schools as an effective strategy for improving teacher job performance. These findings support both theory and empirical data

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The analysis of Principals' and Dean of studies' interviews revealed that teachers become highly motivated whenever their efforts are recognized by school administrators. They explained that recognition provides psychological satisfaction, boosts teachers' morale and encourages them to sustain high levels of performance. One of the Principals explained:

> Teachers become happier and more committed whenever they are appreciated for their hard work. Even when financial incentives are not available, simple words of appreciation during staff meetings, school assembly or staff WhatsApp group encourage them to continue giving their best. Recognition makes teachers feel that their efforts are noticed. Whenever teachers receive appreciation, they become more enthusiastic about teaching and willingly participate in school activities. The challenge is that most public schools lack funds for formal reward system. There is usually no budget for staff recognition (EEZPSSP 1, Personal communication, May 20, 2026)

The statement says that teacher recognition is important in enhancing motivation, job satisfaction and commitment. If they are verbally praised and publicly recognized, then teachers may be more engaged and feel more valued, even if there is no financial reward. However, the limited development of formal recognition programs, particularly within public schools, due to lack of school funding, creates a need for low-cost ways to recognize and appreciate others.

Dean of studies 1 noted that "recognition encourages teachers to go beyond the minimum requirements of their job. They become more creative, punctual and committed to improving students' learning outcomes." Similarly, Dean of studies 2 observed:

> Most teachers do not expect expensive rewards. What many of us desire is that our efforts are acknowledged. A simple thank-you from the principal motivates us to work harder though sometimes such recognition does not come. Recognition creates healthy competition among teachers. Everyone wants to perform better when they know that good performance will be acknowledged. Teachers who receive commendation for good performance usually become role models to other teachers. Their commitment to work increases because they feel that the school management appreciates their contributions (EEZPPSSDOS 2, Personal Communication, May 21, 2026)

The statement points out that recognition has a strong influence on teacher motivation rather than only material rewards. Basic appreciation from school leaders boosts commitment, improves performance and promotes positive competition among teachers. Recognized teachers can be role models and motivate others to work harder. However, the motivational benefits in schools may be limited by the lack of consistent recognition from management.

The analysis of documents indicated that principals' recognition practices are expressed in various formal and informal ways of recognizing teachers' contributions. Recognition activities including commendation, public appreciation and acknowledgment of outstanding performance were used to encourage teacher commitment. This was evident from school records, staff meeting minutes and administrative documents. However, the documents also revealed that there were limited systematic reward and recognition structures because of poor funding and institutional constraints. Existing evidence pointed to recognition practices contributing to improved teacher morale, increased commitment and better job performance despite these challenges. The results of

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document analysis therefore corroborated the quantitative and qualitative findings and established that recognition is a significant motivational strategy in public secondary schools.

The findings strongly support Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which identifies recognition as one of the principal intrinsic motivators responsible for improving employee satisfaction and performance. Herzberg argued that employees derive greater satisfaction when their achievements are acknowledged by management. The present findings confirm this theoretical proposition, as respondents consistently reported that recognition encourages greater dedication and productivity among teachers. The quantitative findings showed that most of the respondents agreed that recognition motivates teachers to perform better, while the qualitative findings further revealed that teachers become more enthusiastic, confident and dedicated whenever their efforts are acknowledged by their principals. The findings also corroborate previous studies which concluded that recognition contributes significantly to employee morale and productivity because it creates a positive psychological relationship between employees and organizational leadership.

However, one important finding that emerged from the present study differs slightly from some previous studies. While earlier studies reported that recognition programs are widely practiced in many schools, the quantitative findings of this study revealed that principals do not consistently recognize teachers' efforts, as reflected by the relatively low mean score recorded for the item assessing regular recognition. This apparent inconsistency is attributed to contextual differences between the study areas. Public secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone operate under varying administrative and financial conditions, which limits the ability of principals to establish structured recognition programs. During the interviews, several principals acknowledged that financial constraints, limited government support and the absence of clearly defined institutional policies constitute major barriers to the effective implementation of recognition practices.

The qualitative findings further provide deeper insight into this issue. Although formal recognition programs are not consistently available, participants unanimously agreed that even simple, non-financial forms of recognition; including verbal commendation, appreciation during staff meetings, letters of commendation, certificates of excellence and public acknowledgement—produce positive effects on teachers' morale and performance. This finding suggests that effective recognition does not necessarily depend on monetary rewards. Rather, teachers value sincere appreciation, fairness and transparency in recognizing professional achievements. This observation reinforces the argument that school leaders can improve teacher performance through low-cost but meaningful recognition strategies.

Another important contribution of the present study is the integration of both quantitative and qualitative evidence. While the questionnaire data established the statistical relationship between principals' recognition practices and teacher job performance, the interview findings explained the mechanisms through which recognition influences teachers' behavior. Participants consistently reported that recognition enhances self-confidence, strengthens teachers' professional identity, promotes job satisfaction and encourages greater commitment to instructional responsibilities. The convergence of both data sources therefore increases the credibility and

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trustworthiness of the findings and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of recognition on teacher job performance.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that principals' recognition practices constitute an important motivational strategy for enhancing teacher job performance. Although structured recognition programs remain inadequate in many public secondary schools, the overwhelming evidence from both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that teachers respond positively whenever their professional contributions are acknowledged. The findings therefore confirm that recognition promotes teachers' motivation, strengthens organizational commitment, improves instructional effectiveness and contributes significantly to the achievement of educational objectives in public secondary schools within Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State. The findings of this study revealed that principals' recognition practices have a significant positive relationship with teacher job performance in public secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State.

Conclusions

The study concludes that principals' recognition practices play a significant role in enhancing teacher job performance in Enugu Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Effective recognition practices, including appreciation of teachers' efforts, provision of constructive feedback, professional growth opportunities, and acknowledgment of achievements, contribute to increased teacher motivation, commitment, and instructional effectiveness. When teachers feel valued and supported by school leaders, they are more likely to demonstrate dedication, improved classroom practices, and active participation in school activities. Therefore, recognition should be considered an essential component of school leadership and human resource management. Strengthening principals' capacity to implement effective recognition strategies can contribute to improved teacher morale, better educational outcomes, and enhanced school performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that principals in Enugu Education Zone should adopt consistent and transparent recognition practices that acknowledge teachers' contributions and achievements. School administrators should provide both formal and informal recognition, including appreciation programmes, awards, professional development opportunities, and timely feedback to motivate teachers. Education authorities should organize leadership training programmes to equip principals with effective recognition and motivational skills. Schools should also establish supportive working environments where teachers feel respected, encouraged, and involved in decision-making processes. Furthermore, policies should be developed to promote recognition as part of school management practices because sustained teacher motivation and improved job performance are essential for achieving quality teaching and learning outcomes.

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