

Perceived Meritocracy and Teachers' Willingness Toward Professional Growth in Educational Organizations

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Publication history: Received: April 5, 2026; Revised: May 17, 2026; Accepted: May 19, 2026

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Abstract

This study examined teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth at Camarines Sur National High School. Anchored on the concept of meritocracy and Maslow's theory of esteem needs, the study investigated meritocracy in terms of promotion, recognition, and incentives, and professional growth through schooling, professional learning, and acceptance of additional workloads. The research employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design involving 436 regular permanent teachers categorized as novice and tenured teachers. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 36 indicators measured the variables using a 5-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using weighted mean, average weighted mean, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Spearman Rank Correlation. Findings revealed that teachers generally perceived meritocracy as moderately evident, particularly in promotion and recognition, while incentives were perceived as least evident. Teachers demonstrated willingness for professional growth through schooling and professional learning but were less willing to accept additional workloads due to workload stress, insufficient recognition, and inadequate compensation. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference between teachers' perception of meritocracy and willingness for professional growth; however, a significant positive association existed between these variables, indicating that perceptions of fairness and merit-based practices influence teachers' motivation and professional development. The study further proposed an alternative promotional scheme emphasizing fairness, transparency, teaching performance, and professional contributions. The study recommends strengthening transparent promotion, recognition, and incentive systems while improving workload management and professional support programs. The research aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting teacher development, fair organizational practices, and institutional transparency. The study contributes to educational, institutional, and socio-economic sustainability by supporting teacher motivation, professional competence, organizational trust, and long-term educational effectiveness.

Keywords: Additional Workloads; Meritocracy; Professional Growth; Professional Learning; Promotion; Recognition; Teacher Motivation; Teacher Professional Development; Workload Management; Willingness for Professional Growth

1. Introduction

Meritocracy and professional growth are essential components of effective educational organizations because they influence teacher motivation, job satisfaction, productivity, and retention. A meritocratic system promotes fairness by rewarding employees based on abilities, achievements, and performance rather than personal connections or status (Castillo, 2021). In educational institutions, systems of promotion, recognition, and incentives can encourage teachers to pursue professional advancement and contribute positively to organizational development. Conversely, the absence of meritocracy may result in demotivation, disengagement, and decreased organizational performance (Akafo & Boateng, 2015). Studies emphasize that organizations fostering meritocracy and professional growth develop cultures of trust, innovation, and collaboration (Kostova & Roth, 2002). However, teacher attrition remains a major concern, particularly following the implementation of the K-12 curriculum, where more teachers have left the profession despite increasing demand (Sarvi et al., 2015). Data from the (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2018) reported an annual net loss of 132 teachers, indicating that more teachers leave the profession than enter it. Such conditions negatively affect educational quality, teacher development, and organizational stability (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). Teacher motivation, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth are strongly associated with educational success and organizational effectiveness (Badubi, 2017; Oloolube, 2006). Existing literature highlights the importance of incentives, recognition, and supportive organizational systems in sustaining teachers' willingness to pursue graduate education, professional learning, and additional responsibilities. Despite this, limited research examines teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and its relationship with willingness for professional growth within educational organizations.

1.1 Meritocracy in Educational Organizations and Teachers' Professional Growth

Meritocracy refers to a system that rewards individuals according to their skills, achievements, effort, and abilities rather than social status or personal connections (Bektas, 2019). In educational organizations, meritocratic practices such as promotion, recognition, and incentives are considered important factors influencing teacher motivation and professional growth. Research indicates that rewards and incentives positively affect employee motivation and job satisfaction (Akafo & Boateng, 2015). Similarly, organizations that support meritocracy and professional development cultivate trust, collaboration, innovation, and productivity among employees (Kostova & Roth, 2002). Teacher motivation significantly affects instructional quality and professional commitment. Studies show that enthusiastic and motivated teachers positively influence teaching practices and organizational outcomes (Panda, 2019). Conversely, demotivation and dissatisfaction reduce teachers' willingness to remain in the profession or pursue further professional advancement. Job satisfaction and motivation are therefore essential to sustaining educational systems and improving educational performance worldwide (Ololube, 2006). The implementation of the K–12 curriculum in the Philippines intensified concerns regarding teacher attrition. Instead of attracting more educators, studies revealed increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession (Sarvi et al., 2015). According to the (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2018), teacher attrition resulted in an annual net loss of teachers, weakening schools' ability to maintain coherent systems for recruitment, training, and professional development (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). These issues highlight the need to examine organizational systems that influence teachers' motivation and willingness for professional growth.

1.2 Promotion, Recognition, Incentives, and Teachers' Willingness for Professional Growth

Literature on meritocracy emphasizes that fair promotion systems and performance-based rewards improve employee productivity and motivation. Deserranno et al. (2021) found that meritocratic promotion systems combined with pay progression increase worker productivity, whereas non-meritocratic systems demotivate employees. Wong (2009) further explained that promotion systems influence teachers' perceptions of status, prestige, and career advancement, making promotion an important motivational factor in educational institutions. Recognition also plays a significant role in sustaining teacher motivation. According to Andrews (2011), recognition programs improve teacher motivation, strengthen respect for the teaching profession, and encourage teacher retention. Recognition can include public appreciation, professional opportunities, and institutional support. Similarly, Movsessian (2018) and Dinham & Scott (2002) emphasized that recognition strengthens school culture and employee morale. In terms of incentives, Jacob & Lefgren (2006) highlighted that teacher promotion and merit-based compensation remain major motivators in educational systems. However, studies revealed that teachers' salaries in many countries remain comparatively low (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Siniscalco, 2002). Tagupa (2018) noted that many public-school teachers in the Philippines consider themselves low-wage earners, while Casingal & Ancho (2022) emphasized the need to improve teachers' salaries and compensation considering their workload and responsibilities. Professional growth is also associated with lifelong learning, graduate education, and in-service training. Greene et al. (2020) emphasized that teachers pursue lifelong learning for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Graduate education and continuous professional development improve teacher effectiveness and contribute to educational quality (Harris & Sass, 2011; Sahlberg, 2015). In-service training enhances pedagogical knowledge, teaching effectiveness, and student achievement (Asiyai, 2016; Oluka et al., 2021). Workload also influences teacher motivation and productivity. Gul et al., (2021) found that excessive workloads negatively affect teachers' attitudes toward additional work and time management. Similarly, the (Alliance of the Concerned Teachers [ACT], 2020) reported that many public-school teachers work beyond regular working hours, contributing to stress and demotivation. Nonetheless, Sunday & Babalola (2020) argued that manageable workloads supported by institutional assistance can positively contribute to educational productivity.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Meritocracy and Teacher Professional Development

Globally, meritocracy is regarded as a framework for distributing opportunities and rewards according to merit, effort, and competence. Educational systems in different countries increasingly recognize the importance of fair promotion systems, incentives, and teacher development programs in improving educational quality and organizational effectiveness (Deserranno et al., 2021). At the national level, the Philippine educational system faces challenges related to teacher attrition, workload, compensation, and professional development. The implementation of the K–12 curriculum intensified teacher shortages despite increasing educational demands (Sarvi et al., 2015). According to the (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2018), more teachers leave the profession annually than enter it. Financial difficulties, excessive workloads, and limited advancement opportunities contribute to declining teacher motivation (Tagupa, 2018; Casingal & Ancho, 2022). Locally, the study focuses on teachers at Camarines Sur National High School. The research examines teachers' perceptions of meritocracy in terms of promotion, recognition, and incentives, as well as their willingness for professional growth through schooling, professional learning, and additional workloads. Understanding these factors is important for evaluating organizational systems and identifying strategies that support teacher motivation and professional advancement.

1.4 Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of Meritocracy and Professional Growth Among Teachers

The study is anchored on the concept of meritocracy, which values individuals according to their abilities, achievements, and performance rather than personal connections or status. Meritocratic systems are generally perceived as fair and legitimate, contributing to trust and job satisfaction within organizations (Chen & Li, 2019). Cabigas (2019) identified detrimental school systems, negative self-perceptions, and personal-environmental concerns as major factors contributing to teacher attrition. The study recommended stronger collaboration between teachers and administrators, consistent professional development, and improved workload management to sustain teacher motivation and retention. The study also draws from Maslow's theory of esteem needs, as discussed by Hopper (2020). Maslow emphasized that individuals seek self-confidence, recognition, and appreciation from others. When esteem needs are fulfilled, employees develop confidence and recognize the value of their contributions. Failure to satisfy these needs may lead to feelings of inferiority and reduced motivation. The conceptual framework of the study proposes that meritocracy in terms of promotion, recognition, and incentives influences teachers' willingness for professional growth through schooling, professional learning, and acceptance of additional workloads. The framework also considers organizational factors such as workload demands, school systems, and professional opportunities as determinants of teacher motivation and development.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale on Meritocracy and Teachers' Willingness for Professional Growth

Existing studies have explored meritocracy, teacher motivation, job satisfaction, compensation, and professional development independently. However, there remains limited research examining the relationship between teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth within educational organizations. There is also insufficient data regarding how promotion, recognition, and incentives influence teachers' motivation to pursue graduate studies, professional learning, and additional responsibilities. The study addresses these gaps by examining the level of meritocracy perceived by teachers and determining its relationship with willingness for professional growth. It further seeks to provide an alternative tool that may strengthen meritocracy and professional development within educational organizations.

1.6 Alignment of Meritocracy and Teachers' Professional Growth with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It supports SDG 4 – Quality Education by promoting teacher development, professional learning, and educational effectiveness through meritocratic organizational systems. Enhancing teacher motivation and professional growth contributes to improved instructional quality and student learning outcomes. The study also relates to SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth because it addresses fair promotion systems, recognition, incentives, and adequate compensation for teachers. Meritocratic practices contribute to decent working conditions, employee motivation, and organizational productivity. Additionally, the research supports SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions through the promotion of fairness, transparency, and equitable organizational practices within educational institutions. Merit-based systems strengthen trust and institutional integrity by ensuring opportunities are based on competence and achievement.

1.7 Importance of Meritocracy and Professional Growth to Multidisciplinary Sustainability in Education

The study contributes to socio-economic sustainability by addressing teacher motivation, retention, and professional advancement. Fair organizational systems and adequate recognition can improve teachers' financial well-being, job satisfaction, and long-term commitment to the profession. It also contributes to educational sustainability by supporting continuous teacher learning, professional development, and instructional effectiveness. Sustainable educational systems depend on motivated and professionally competent teachers capable of adapting to evolving educational demands. Moreover, the study contributes to institutional sustainability by encouraging educational organizations to develop transparent and merit-based systems for promotion, recognition, and incentives. Such systems may improve organizational trust, employee engagement, and institutional productivity while reducing teacher attrition and workplace dissatisfaction.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative research design to determine teachers' perceptions of the degree of meritocracy in Camarines Sur National High School and its relationship to their willingness for professional growth. Specifically, the study employed a descriptive-correlational design. Descriptive research was used to describe the characteristics of the population and determine the extent of meritocracy in terms of promotion, recognition, and incentives, as well as teachers' willingness for professional growth through schooling, professional learning, and additional workloads. According to Bhat (2019), descriptive research focuses on describing the nature of a phenomenon rather than explaining its causes. The correlational design was used to determine whether significant differences and relationships existed between teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth. The findings served as the basis for recommending an alternative tool to promote meritocracy and professional growth among teachers.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Camarines Sur National High School located in the City of Naga, Province of Camarines Sur. The school is a public secondary institution with a Principal-IV position subsidized by the National Government. The research focused on teachers holding regular permanent teaching positions within the institution.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 436 regular permanent teachers from Camarines Sur National High School. They were categorized into two groups: novice teachers and tenured or seasoned teachers. Novice teachers referred to teachers who had not yet experienced promotion, while tenured or seasoned teachers referred to those who had already been promoted. The respondents represented the teaching population of the institution and provided data regarding their perceptions of meritocracy and willingness for professional growth.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed distributive sampling in selecting the respondents. The total population included 436 regular permanent teachers composed of novice and tenured or seasoned teachers. The grouping enabled the researcher to compare teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and willingness for professional growth according to their professional status and experience within the organization.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-made questionnaire based on the definitions and meanings of the variables included in the research. The instrument measured respondents' perceptions of the degree of meritocracy in their organization and their willingness for professional growth. The questionnaire contained 36 indicators distributed across the variables of promotion, recognition, incentives, schooling, professional learning, and additional workloads. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument underwent content validation by experts and reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha. Reliability coefficients were interpreted from unacceptable to excellent depending on the obtained value. The interpretation of responses was based on the work of Utah (2021) regarding effective survey design and AlSaif et al. (2020) concerning willingness measures. For meritocracy, responses ranged from "Not Evident" to "Evident," while willingness for professional growth ranged from "Not Willing" to "Willing." The instrument also provided interpretations for each scale point in assessing meritocracy. "Evident" described a system strongly promoting fairness and equal opportunity, while "Not Evident" referred to a flawed system that fails to reward true merit and perpetuates inequality.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

After the approval of the title proposal by the thesis panel, the researcher secured permission from the Office of the Graduate School Dean and the principal of Camarines Sur National High School to conduct the study. A memorandum of agreement was also established to ensure the confidentiality of respondents' identities and responses. Online questionnaires through Google Forms, together with consent forms, were distributed during the data collection process. Upon retrieval of the accomplished questionnaires, the responses were inspected, scored, classified, and subjected to statistical treatment based on the research objectives. Weighted mean, average weighted mean, and overall average mean were computed to interpret the respondents' perceptions regarding meritocracy and willingness for professional growth.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used average mean and ranking to determine respondents' perceptions of the degree of meritocracy and teachers' willingness for professional growth. Weighted mean and average weighted mean were utilized to measure central tendency and summarize responses. To determine whether significant differences existed between teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and willingness for professional growth, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was employed at a .05 level of significance. Furthermore, Spearman correlation was used to determine the significant association between teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth. The statistical procedures were selected to determine relationships and differences among the independent and dependent variables of the study.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed confidentiality and privacy considering that the research dealt with the personal and professional aspects of teachers' careers. Respondents' names were withheld to protect them from inconvenience or discomfort in answering the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent before participation. The nature and purpose of the study were explained, and respondents were assured that all gathered information would remain confidential. Their freedom from coercion and right to self-determination were respected throughout the research process. Respondents were treated as research partners, and their responses were handled in an appreciative and non-judgmental manner to encourage honest and uninhibited participation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Teachers' Perception of Meritocracy in the Organization

3.1.1 Meritocracy in Promotion

The findings showed that teachers generally perceived meritocracy in promotion as “moderately evident” with an overall average weighted mean of 3.36. Schooling, professional training, and seminars received the highest perception, followed by hard work and compliance with promotion policies. Equal opportunity for promotion received the lowest rating. Tenured teachers showed a higher perception of meritocracy in promotion than novice teachers. The results imply that promotion is associated with experience, skills, achievements, and professional development. However, teachers also perceived inconsistencies in equal opportunity and fairness in promotion practices. The findings support Wong (2009), who emphasized that promotion motivates employees and reinforces productivity. Ong’Amo Omanyo (2012) further noted that transparency and merit-based promotion policies improve job satisfaction and performance, while Sharabi (2011) highlighted how organizational politics and personal connections may influence promotions. These findings suggest the need to revisit promotion systems to ensure fairness, equal opportunity, and stronger emphasis on teaching effectiveness rather than organizational politics.

3.1.2 Meritocracy in Recognition

The results revealed that teachers perceived recognition practices as “moderately evident,” with an overall weighted mean of 3.24. Recognition for individual achievements and professional awards ranked highest, while recognition for mentoring colleagues ranked lowest. Novice teachers showed slightly higher perceptions of recognition than tenured teachers. The findings indicate that teachers value recognition for achievements, graduate studies, innovation, and contributions to student development. However, mentoring and collaborative efforts appeared less recognized. Andrews (2011) emphasized that recognition improves teacher motivation and retention. Hopper (2020) also explained that recognition fulfills esteem needs, increasing confidence and motivation. Similarly, Roberts (2005) and Movsessian (2018) noted that recognition positively affects work satisfaction and school culture. The findings suggest that organizations should establish clearer recognition systems to support teachers’ morale, collaboration, and job satisfaction.

3.1.3 Meritocracy in Incentives

Teachers perceived meritocracy in incentives as “least evident,” with an overall weighted mean of 2.54. Intrinsic rewards such as respect and trust ranked highest, while overtime pay ranked lowest and was considered “not evident.” Both novice and tenured teachers expressed dissatisfaction with compensation for additional workloads and overtime tasks. The findings indicate that teachers experience insufficient compensation despite excessive workloads and extended working hours. Teachers valued intrinsic rewards, but financial compensation remained a major concern. The findings support the Alliance of Concerned Teachers survey and studies by Gul et al. (2021), Casingal & Ancho (2022), and Tagupa (2018), which highlighted teacher stress, low wages, and workload burdens. Harvey-Beavis (2003) further emphasized that rewards increase teacher motivation and productivity. The findings underscore the need for fair compensation, workload reduction, and proper implementation of the Magna Carta for Teachers.

3.1.4 Overall Perception of Meritocracy

The overall perception of meritocracy among teachers was “moderately evident” with an average weighted mean of 3.05. Promotion ranked highest, followed by recognition, while incentives ranked lowest. The findings suggest that teachers perceive moderate fairness in promotion and recognition but weak implementation of incentives and compensation systems. Mijs (2019) explained that meritocracy reflects beliefs in hard work and effort as bases for advancement. Harvey-Beavis (2003) and Odden (2000a; 2000b) emphasized that performance-based rewards and recognition improve teacher motivation and satisfaction. The results imply that improving meritocratic systems can strengthen teachers’ productivity, morale, and professional commitment.

3.2 Teachers' Willingness for Professional Growth

3.2.1 Willingness for Professional Growth through Schooling

Teachers demonstrated a “willing” level of professional growth through schooling, with an overall weighted mean of 4.39. Improving teaching skills and gaining professional development ranked highest, while pursuing schooling for promotion and salary increase ranked lowest. Tenured teachers showed higher willingness compared to novice teachers. The results indicate that teachers value schooling for professional competence, career development, and global competitiveness. Novice teachers focused more on professional development, while tenured teachers prioritized career advancement opportunities. The findings align with Bayocot (2014), Horn & Jang (2017), and Tucker & Fushell (2013), who emphasized the benefits of graduate studies in improving teaching competence, leadership, and career opportunities. These findings suggest that organizations should support graduate education through study leave, incentives, and professional support systems.

3.2.2 Willingness for Professional Learning

The findings showed that teachers were “willing” to engage in professional learning, with an overall weighted mean of 4.28. Improving teaching performance and enhancing teaching skills through seminars and in-service training ranked highest. Tenured teachers showed greater willingness than novice teachers. The results demonstrate teachers’ recognition of continuous learning as essential to professionalism and effective teaching. Novice teachers prioritized educational advancement, while tenured teachers emphasized sustainable professional learning through training and seminars. Oluka et al. (2021), Asiyai (2016), and Nakpodia (2008) emphasized that in-service training improves competencies, instructional practices, and educational quality. The findings imply that schools should strengthen professional learning opportunities, especially in ICT, instructional innovation, and collaborative learning activities.

3.2.3 Willingness to Accept Additional Workloads

Teachers were “somewhat not willing” to accept additional workloads, with an overall weighted mean of 2.57. Teachers were undecided about accepting workloads despite lack of recognition, while overlapping schedules and lack of compensation received the lowest willingness ratings. The findings indicate that workload stress, lack of compensation, overlapping schedules, and insufficient recognition negatively affect teachers’ willingness to accept additional responsibilities. Geronimo & Campoamor-Olegario (2020), Bongco & Ancho (2019), and Cabigas (2019) noted that excessive workloads contribute to stress, demotivation, and teacher attrition. The findings suggest that organizations should improve workload management, avoid overlapping schedules, and provide appropriate compensation and support for additional tasks.

3.2.4 Overall Willingness for Professional Growth

The overall willingness for professional growth was rated “somewhat willing” with an average weighted mean of 3.75. Schooling ranked highest, followed by professional learning, while additional workloads ranked lowest. The findings reveal that teachers remain motivated to improve professionally through learning and educational advancement despite workplace challenges. Badubi (2017), Tucker & Fushell (2013), Essien (2016), and Jomud et al. (2021) emphasized that motivation, training, and supportive environments positively affect professional growth and teaching performance. The findings imply that organizations should strengthen teacher support systems, incentives, and professional development programs to sustain teacher motivation and effectiveness.

3.3 Relationship Between Meritocracy and Professional Growth

3.3.1 Difference Between Perception of Meritocracy and Willingness for Professional Growth

The ANOVA results revealed no significant difference between teachers’ perception of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth. The computed F-value of 1.17 was lower than the critical value of 7.70, while the p-value of 0.34 was greater than the 0.05 significance level. The findings indicate that teachers’ perceptions of meritocracy and willingness for professional growth move at similar levels. The results suggest that when teachers perceive fairness in promotion, recognition, and incentives, they become more willing to pursue schooling, professional learning, and additional responsibilities. Indeed Editorial Team (2023) emphasized that incentives, recognition, and motivational strategies increase employee engagement and productivity, while Akhram (2010) highlighted the importance of supportive environments in promoting professional growth.

3.3.2 Association Between Meritocracy and Professional Growth

The Spearman Rank Correlation Test revealed a significant positive association between teachers’ perception of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth. Novice teachers showed a strong positive correlation of .576, while tenured teachers showed a positive correlation of .251. The findings imply that higher perceptions of fairness, recognition, and incentives correspond to greater willingness among teachers to improve professionally. Badubi (2017) emphasized that motivation and job satisfaction are essential to organizational success and employee commitment. The results indicate that fair and transparent meritocratic systems positively influence teacher motivation, willingness, and professional development.

3.4 Reliability of the Research Instrument

The Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test showed excellent internal consistency for both variables. Teachers’ perception of meritocracy obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.95, while willingness for professional growth obtained 0.93. The findings indicate that the research instrument was highly reliable in measuring teachers’ perception of meritocracy and willingness for professional growth. The excellent reliability scores demonstrate consistency and accuracy in the gathered responses and support the credibility of the study findings.

3.5 Proposed Alternative Promotional Scheme Tool

The proposed promotional scheme aimed to strengthen meritocracy and professional growth among teachers. The proposal emphasized classroom teaching observations, student achievement data, peer evaluation, professional development, and student feedback as equal components in the ranking system. The proposal was grounded on studies emphasizing fairness, transparency, and merit-based promotion systems. Shih & Lee (2018), Park & Kim (2017), Hammad & Hawamdeh (2021),

and Ahmad et al. (2020) highlighted the positive effects of merit-based promotion on motivation, job satisfaction, and performance. The proposed tool promotes objective evaluation, transparency, continuous improvement, and balanced recognition of teachers' instructional effectiveness and professional contributions.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study found that teachers generally perceived meritocracy in their organization as moderately evident, particularly in promotion and recognition, while incentives were perceived as least evident. Teachers also demonstrated willingness for professional growth, especially in schooling and professional learning, although acceptance of additional workloads was relatively lower. Statistical analysis further revealed no significant difference between teachers' perception of meritocracy and their willingness for professional growth; however, a significant positive association existed between these variables, indicating that perceptions of fairness and merit-based practices influence teachers' motivation and willingness for development. These findings support previous studies emphasizing the importance of organizational justice, fair promotion systems, and supportive professional environments in enhancing employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Lazear, 2000; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000; Guskey, 2002; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Kiazad et al., 2015; Ng et al., 2009; Li et al., 2017).

The study recommends conducting further research to examine the factors influencing teachers' perceptions of meritocracy and professional growth, including organizational culture, leadership style, workload management, and career development opportunities. Future studies may also explore the effectiveness of supportive work environments, flexible work arrangements, professional learning opportunities, and merit-based systems in improving teacher motivation, satisfaction, and performance. Educational institutions are encouraged to strengthen fair and transparent promotion, recognition, and incentive systems while promoting collaborative and supportive professional environments that foster teacher well-being and professional growth (Day, Sammons, Stobart, & Kington, 2006; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Arthur et al., 1995; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Van der Vegt et al., 2013).

The study was limited in scope and may not be fully generalizable to other educational contexts or populations. The findings relied on the respondents' perceptions regarding meritocracy and professional growth, which may vary across institutions and organizational settings. Additionally, the study focused primarily on selected variables and did not extensively examine other possible factors such as leadership practices, organizational support, job characteristics, and work-life balance that may influence teachers' motivation, satisfaction, and professional development. Further research is therefore necessary to provide a broader understanding of the relationship between meritocracy and professional growth in educational institutions.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study observed confidentiality and privacy throughout the research process, considering that it involved the personal and professional aspects of teachers' careers. Respondents' identities were withheld to protect them from inconvenience or discomfort, and all gathered information was treated confidentially. Participants were treated respectfully and their responses were handled in an appreciative and non-judgmental manner to encourage honest and uninhibited participation.

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