Career Development and Job Satisfaction among Public and Private Day Primary School Teachers in Mbeere North Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Career development is often presented as a general route to employee satisfaction, yet its value may depend on whether workers can realistically access training, promotion, added responsibility, and support for further study. This study examined the relationship between career development and job satisfaction among public and private day primary school teachers in Mbeere North Subcounty, Embu County, Kenya. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted within a target population of 869 teachers. Stratified proportionate sampling produced an intended sample of 142 teachers, and 126 usable questionnaires were returned, comprising 68 public school teachers and 58 private school teachers. Career development was measured with seven five-point Likert items, while job satisfaction was measured with six items. The career development scale showed good internal consistency in the pilot study, with Cronbach's alpha of .851. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, an independent-samples test, Pearson correlation, and separate simple linear regressions for the two school sectors. Public school teachers reported markedly lower career development scores than private school teachers, with means of 1.94 and 3.41, respectively. The unequal-variance test confirmed a large sector difference, $t(95.60) = -10.46$, $p < .001$. Career development was weakly and nonsignificantly related to job satisfaction in public schools, $r = -.114$, $p = .355$, and explained 1.3 percent of its variance. In private schools, the relationship was positive and significant, $r = .503$, $p < .001$, and career development explained 25.3 percent of the variance in job satisfaction. The findings show that career development does not operate as a uniform motivator across school systems. Its contribution appears strongest where opportunities are visible, accessible, and linked to meaningful advancement. Public education policy should therefore move beyond offering isolated training activities and create credible pathways connecting professional learning, fair promotion, responsibility, and career mobility.

Keywords: career development, job satisfaction, primary school teachers, public schools, private schools

INTRODUCTION

Teachers carry the daily responsibility of translating education policy into learning, care, and social development. Their willingness to remain engaged in that work is shaped not only by pay and physical conditions but also by whether teaching offers a credible future. Career development gives that future practical form through training, promotion, wider responsibility, professional recognition, and opportunities for further learning. When those opportunities are visible and fairly allocated, teachers can connect present effort with future growth. When they are scarce, irregular, or detached from advancement, the language of development may have little influence on how teachers experience their work. Career development should therefore be examined as an institutional practice rather than assumed to be a benefit merely because a policy or programme exists.

The Kenyan primary school setting makes this question especially important because public and private schools organize employment in different ways. Public school teachers generally work within nationally structured appointment and promotion arrangements, while private schools often make staffing and development decisions closer to the school level. These differences may change the speed, accessibility, and perceived value of career opportunities. The same training workshop, new responsibility, or qualification may therefore carry different meaning across sectors. A comparative design is useful because it reveals whether

career development is associated with job satisfaction in the same way when the employment system changes, rather than treating all primary school teachers as one homogeneous workforce.

Career development is a continuing process through which employees plan, acquire skills, assume responsibilities, and prepare for future roles. It links personal aspirations with organizational capability and can support retention, engagement, and performance when employees see a realistic route from learning to progress (Dizaho et al., 2016; Kakui & Gachunga, 2016; Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020; Opadeyi & Akpa, 2021). In teaching, the process may include in-service courses, workshops, seminars, scholarships, professional certification, expanded duties, and promotion. The Teachers Service Commission has linked professional development with appraisal and promotion policy, and later Kenyan evidence has continued to connect implementation of national agreements with teacher development and satisfaction (Matiang'i et al., 2024; Teachers Service Commission, 2015). These practices make career development relevant to both the quality of teaching and the teacher's evaluation of the job.

Existing evidence usually reports a positive relationship between growth opportunities and favourable work outcomes. Career development has been associated with employee performance, engagement, retention, and job satisfaction in banking, public agencies, universities, and education (Ayodo, 2022; Muchibi et al., 2022; Muthumbi & Kamau, 2021; Ndiritu, 2022; Ratemo et al., 2021). Studies of teachers also associate promotion and career advancement with satisfaction (Garba & Idris, 2021; Musambi & Juma, 2020; Mwiti et al., 2021). However, a positive average relationship across settings does not establish that career development has the same meaning in public and private primary schools. It is possible for the opportunity level, the opportunity-to-reward link, and the resulting association with satisfaction to differ substantially by sector.

The practical problem is not simply a shortage of training. Professional development may fail to improve satisfaction when teachers cannot see how it affects promotion, responsibility, income, recognition, or mobility. Samuel (2016) found that inadequate training weakened career development, while Kiima (2015) linked training to better promotion prospects and career goals. Kinyanjui (2017) further associated career opportunities and internal promotion with lower turnover. These findings suggest a chain of value in which development becomes motivating when learning is connected to attainable outcomes. If the chain breaks, training can remain an activity without becoming a career pathway.

Evidence specific to rural public and private day primary schools remains limited. Much of the cited Kenyan work concerns public secondary schools, universities, health institutions, corporate organizations, or a single employment sector. Such evidence offers useful direction but leaves unanswered whether career development relates to satisfaction among primary school teachers working under contrasting governance arrangements in the same locality. The present study addresses that gap in Mbeere North Subcounty, a rural setting with five educational zones and both public and private day primary schools. Holding the broad locality constant makes the sector contrast more interpretable because teachers face a shared regional environment while experiencing different employment systems.

This paper is based on the third objective of the thesis, which was to explore the relationship between career development and job satisfaction among public and private day primary school teachers in Mbeere North Subcounty, Embu County, Kenya. The associated null hypothesis stated that no statistically significant relationship existed between the two constructs in either sector. The paper goes beyond a single significance decision by examining the level and pattern of career development, the size of the public-private difference, the sector-specific correlations, and the explanatory power of separate regression models. This sequence keeps the substantive question in view because statistical association is best understood after showing what teachers actually reported about promotion, training, fairness, and scholarships.

The paper contributes a contextual argument. Career development appears to motivate when teachers perceive it as an accessible and consequential pathway, not when it is only a formal promise. The public-private comparison tests this argument by asking whether sectors with very different reported opportunity levels also show different links between career development and satisfaction. The findings are relevant to the Teachers Service Commission, the Ministry of Education, school owners, boards of management, teacher unions, and

leaders responsible for professional learning. They also refine theory by showing that an intrinsic motivator can have limited observed value when institutional arrangements weaken expectancy and instrumentality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Meaning and Dimensions of Career Development

Career development combines individual agency and organizational support. Employees identify goals and build capability, while organizations create roles, learning opportunities, guidance, and promotion systems that allow capability to be used. Bett (2015) describes development as deliberate preparation for future positions, and Anekwe et al. (2020) emphasize training for skill and capacity growth. Xu and Thomas (2011) add the importance of realistic goals and the abilities required for target roles. Taken together, these views show that career development is not equivalent to attending training. It is a structured progression from aspiration, through learning and experience, to an attainable change in work or status.

Three dimensions were central in the thesis framework. The first was responsibility, which allows teachers to exercise wider judgment, lead activities, mentor colleagues, and demonstrate readiness for advanced roles. The second was promotion, which represents formal movement to a higher position and normally brings increased responsibility and improved rewards (Heary & Noon, 2001). The third was training, which provides knowledge and skills needed for present and future work. These dimensions reinforce one another when a teacher can use training in meaningful assignments and when demonstrated capability informs fair promotion. They become fragmented when teachers repeatedly train without expanded responsibility or advancement.

Access and fairness determine whether these dimensions are motivational. Regular promotion can signal that effort and competence are recognized, while opaque or delayed decisions can produce stagnation. Training can build confidence and instructional skill, yet participation may depend on school resources, release time, information, and selection procedures. Scholarships can widen access to advanced qualifications but may be rare, particularly for teachers with limited personal resources. Career development therefore has both a supply side, which concerns whether opportunities exist, and a credibility side, which concerns whether teachers believe those opportunities lead to valued outcomes.

Career Development and Job Satisfaction

At the broad organizational level, career development is linked to outcomes that support job satisfaction. Kakui and Gachunga (2016) associate development with employee performance in the public sector, while Opadeyi and Akpa (2021) connect it with engagement in banking. Muthumbi and Kamau (2021) report a positive relationship with performance, and Ratemo et al. (2021) emphasize skill enhancement. Ndiritu (2022) identifies career planning as an important factor in retention. These studies move from different outcomes toward a common proposition. Employees respond favourably when an organization invests in their growth and makes a future within the organization believable.

Research in higher education and training provides more direct evidence on satisfaction. Ayodo (2022) found that career support and career development predicted job satisfaction among academic staff in Kenyan public universities. Noor et al. (2022) similarly reported that training and development were positively related to job satisfaction among academics in Malaysian higher education institutions. Arokiasamy et al. (2018) linked promotion and reward arrangements with job satisfaction in the Malaysian education industry. Although these studies involve educational employees, universities and secondary-level systems have more differentiated roles and qualification pathways than many primary schools. Their findings should therefore inform, but not predetermine, the primary school relationship.

Teacher-focused studies generally support the value of growth. Arusei (2023) identified career development among the practices shaping job satisfaction in Kenyan public primary schools, while Mwiti et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between career advancement and job satisfaction among public secondary school teachers. Musambi and Juma (2020) reported a positive relationship between promotion and job satisfaction, and Garba and Idris (2021) reached a similar conclusion in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Training also

improves the capability needed for career movement. Batool and Batool (2012) present training as a source of organizational advantage, while Kiima (2015) reports that it improved employees' chances of promotion and helped them achieve career goals. The accumulated evidence makes a positive association plausible, but the evidence is concentrated in contexts where roles, credentials, and promotion opportunities may be more varied.

Evidence on implementation introduces a necessary qualification. Samuel (2016) found career development ineffective where training was inadequate, and Kinyanjui (2017) showed that development and internal promotion matter for turnover. The Teachers Service Commission (2015) provides policy guidance linking appraisal, professional development, and promotion, but a policy link does not guarantee that individual teachers experience the pathway as timely or fair. A career system can therefore be formally present while remaining weak in everyday perception. This distinction is central to the current paper because a low association with satisfaction may reflect constrained access and low credibility rather than a lack of desire for professional growth.

The literature also reveals a scale problem. Studies often use broad measures labelled career development even though the underlying experiences differ. Some emphasize training, others promotion, career planning, support, engagement, retention, or performance. A programme can improve teaching skill without changing satisfaction, and promotion can increase satisfaction even when formal training is limited. The present measure includes regularity and basis of promotion, perceived fairness, training opportunities, and scholarships. This item-level view helps identify which parts of the development system teachers judge most weakly and avoids treating the construct as a single undifferentiated benefit.

The evidence narrows from international organizations to Kenyan teachers, yet a comparative gap remains. Public and private primary teachers in the same subcounty have received little direct comparison on both opportunity levels and the career development-satisfaction relationship. Separate sector analyses are essential because a pooled estimate could hide opposing patterns. If private teachers report higher access and a positive association while public teachers report low access and no association, the pooled relationship would not describe either institutional process well. The current study therefore treats sector as a substantive context rather than merely a sample characteristic.

Theoretical Foundation

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides the primary lens for the study. It separates hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, from motivators, which create positive satisfaction through achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and growth (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Herzberg, 2015; Olaleke et al., 2017). Career development sits mainly within the motivator group because it gives employees opportunities to build competence, assume responsibility, and progress. The theory predicts that meaningful development should strengthen satisfaction. However, the framework can simplify the way factors operate across settings, and the same practice may carry different meaning in different employment systems (Malik & Naeem, 2013). The opportunity must allow a teacher to experience growth or advancement rather than merely comply with a requirement.

The sector comparison adds an institutional condition to Herzberg's proposition. A motivator can operate only when it is present in a recognizable form. If promotion is rare, criteria are unclear, and training does not change responsibility or mobility, respondents may rate career development low and may not connect it with present job satisfaction. In a more flexible setting, school leaders may assign roles, organize training, and recognize new capability more quickly, making the same construct more salient. Herzberg's theory is therefore used here as a conditional explanation. Career development has motivational potential, but organizations determine whether that potential becomes a credible work experience.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory deepens this explanation by linking effort, performance, and valued outcomes. Motivation is strongest when employees believe that effort can produce performance, performance will lead to a reward, and the reward is valuable (Vroom et al., 2015). Applied to teachers, professional learning should build capability, capability should be recognized through responsibility or promotion, and the resulting outcome should matter to the teacher. A weak or unpredictable link at any stage reduces motivation. This logic

is particularly useful for interpreting a sector in which teachers want advancement but do not believe training, qualifications, or service will lead to it.

Maslow's hierarchy offers a complementary account of why career development matters. Growth, achievement, and realization of potential sit near self-actualization, while recognition and promotion also address esteem needs (Navy, 2020). Development opportunities can therefore satisfy higher-order needs once teachers experience them as real and personally meaningful. The theory does not require that every teacher move through needs in a rigid sequence. In this paper, it clarifies why training, responsibility, and advancement may add value beyond basic employment conditions, while the sector evidence shows that an unmet opportunity cannot fulfil a higher-order need merely because it appears in policy.

The integrated theoretical expectation is straightforward. Career development should relate positively to job satisfaction where opportunities are accessible, selection is fair, and learning connects to advancement. The association should be weaker where opportunities are scarce or institutionally constrained. The study did not manipulate these conditions and cannot establish causal mechanisms, but the pattern of item means and sector-specific relationships can show whether the evidence is consistent with this expectation. This theory-led comparison gives meaning to the statistical contrast and prevents a significant coefficient from being treated as the whole finding.

Empirical Gap and Analytical Expectation

The literature supports career development in principle but leaves three empirical questions open. First, it does not show whether public and private primary school teachers in a rural Kenyan setting perceive similar opportunity levels. Second, it does not establish whether career development and job satisfaction are associated within each sector. Third, it rarely tests whether the strength of the relationship differs between sectors. The study addresses all three questions using one local sample, a common instrument, and separate analyses. Based on theory and prior evidence, a positive relationship was expected, but the comparative design allowed its direction and size to vary rather than imposing a common effect.

The null hypothesis was that career development had no statistically significant relationship with job satisfaction among public and private day primary school teachers in Mbeere North. Evidence was evaluated at the .05 level. Statistical significance was interpreted together with means, standard deviations, confidence intervals, and explained variance. This approach matters because a nonsignificant relationship can still coexist with a serious practical problem. Very low career development scores may indicate an opportunity deficit even if individual differences within that low range do not predict satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Setting

The study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This design was suitable because the objective was to describe existing teacher perceptions and estimate relationships at one point in time without manipulating career opportunities or job conditions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000; Kothari, 2004). The design supports comparison and association but not causal inference. Data were collected in Mbeere North Subcounty in Embu County, Kenya. The subcounty contains five educational zones, namely Kanyuambora, Kirie, Kamumu, Siakago, and Ishiara, and includes both public and private day primary schools.

Population and Sampling

The target population was 869 teachers, comprising 733 teachers in public day primary schools and 136 teachers in private day primary schools. The study excluded head teachers and deputy head teachers because they held administrative roles. Board of Management teachers in public schools, teachers in public boarding schools, and teachers in special boarding schools were also outside the defined study population. The delimitation produced a focus on regular teachers working in public and private day primary schools under broadly comparable local conditions.

Stratified proportionate random sampling represented school sector and the five educational zones. Following the thesis sampling plan, 10 percent of public school teachers and 50 percent of private school teachers were selected because the private teacher population was much smaller. The intended sample contained 142 teachers, with 74 from public schools and 68 from private schools (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Sixty-eight public and 58 private questionnaires were returned and usable, yielding 126 cases. The corresponding response proportions calculated from the reported counts were 91.9 percent, 85.3 percent, and 88.7 percent overall.

Instrument and Measures

Primary data were collected with a structured questionnaire using closed-ended items. Career development was measured by seven statements rated from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The statements addressed whether promotion leads to satisfaction, whether promotion occurs regularly, whether it is based on service or academic achievement, whether it is fair, whether training opportunities exist, and whether scholarships support career advancement. The construct therefore captured both development opportunities and the perceived operation of promotion. Job satisfaction was measured with six five-point items covering the nature of work, commitment, co-worker relations, rewards, intention to leave for a better option, and employer supervision policy.

The operational framework treated responsibility, promotion, and training as the main indicators of career development, while job involvement, commitment, performance, and retention informed job satisfaction. Expert review by university supervisors and education stakeholders supported content validity. A pilot study was conducted in four public and two private day primary schools that were not included in the main sample (Cooper & Schindler, 2018). Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. The career development scale produced alpha = .851, exceeding the .70 criterion cited for research instruments, and the job satisfaction scale produced alpha = .765 (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021).

One measurement caution is important for interpretation. The career development scale included the statement that promotions lead to job satisfaction. Because this wording names the outcome within a predictor item, it may create conceptual overlap. The sector results do not show a uniformly inflated relationship because the public association was negative and nonsignificant, but future instruments should separate opportunity items from outcome wording. This limitation is reported openly so that the observed private school relationship is interpreted as evidence from the thesis measure rather than as a perfectly isolated construct.

Data Collection and Ethical Safeguards

Institutional clearance was obtained from Chuka University, followed by ethical review, a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, and permission from the County Director of Education. School visits were arranged through head teachers. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the use of responses for research. They were instructed not to place names on the questionnaires. These procedures reduced coercion and protected identity in a relatively small educational setting.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires were checked, coded, and analysed in SPSS version 27. Item means and standard deviations described career development. An independent-samples test compared the public and private composite scores. Levene's test was significant, so the unequal-variance result was used. Pearson correlation estimated the bivariate relationship between career development and job satisfaction within each sector. Separate simple linear regressions then estimated the model Y = beta zero + beta one CD + error, where Y was job satisfaction and CD was career development. The models were evaluated with R squared, the F test, the unstandardized slope, the standardized coefficient, and the t test at a 95 percent confidence level.

Regression assumptions were examined before hypothesis testing. Career development met the Shapiro-Wilk normality criterion in public schools, W = .973, p = .227, and private schools, W = .967, p = .065 (Mishra et al., 2019). Variance inflation factors for career development were 1.111 and 1.352 in the public and private

multivariable diagnostic models, which did not indicate multicollinearity (Marcoulides & Raykov, 2019). Levene statistics for the career development variance tests were 1.085, p = .395, in public schools and 1.069, p = .409, in private schools, supporting stable variance for subsequent analysis (Tovohery et al., 2020). A standardized mean difference and a Fisher comparison of independent correlations were calculated from the reported group summaries as supplementary effect-size evidence.

RESULTS

Respondent Context

The analysed sample contained 68 public school teachers and 58 private school teachers. Women formed the majority in both groups. Public school teachers also had longer service profiles. In the public group, 46 percent had more than 10 years of teaching experience, compared with 31 percent in private schools. This difference provides useful context because institutional tenure and sector are intertwined in the sample. The objective-three models were deliberately estimated separately by sector, but they did not adjust for all demographic differences. The findings therefore describe sector-specific relationships in this sample rather than an isolated causal effect of school ownership.

Career Development Patterns

Career development ratings were consistently lower in public schools. Table 1 shows that every public item mean was below 2.50, whereas five of the seven private item means exceeded 3.00. Public teachers gave the lowest rating to promotion based on years of service, M = 1.66, followed by scholarships for career advancement, M = 1.71, and fair promotion, M = 1.75. Their highest rating concerned the availability of training, but even that mean was only 2.35. The pattern indicates broad dissatisfaction rather than one isolated weakness.

Table 1

Career Development Item Scores by School Sector

Career development statement	*Public M*	*Public SD*	*Private M*	*Private SD*
Promotions lead to job satisfaction	2.441	1.45	3.638	1.41
Promotions are regularly done	1.809	0.935	3.069	1.4
Promotions are based on years of service	1.662	1.016	3.551	1.216
Promotions are based on academic achievements	1.882	1.166	3.724	1.316
Promotions are fairly done	1.75	0.817	3.259	1.305
There are opportunities for training	2.353	1.169	3.828	1.272
There are scholarships for career advancement	1.706	0.978	2.793	1.436

Note. Public n = 68. Private n = 58. Items were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data are from the 2025 field survey reported in the thesis.

Private school teachers rated training opportunities highest, M = 3.83, followed by promotion based on academic achievement, M = 3.72, and the contribution of promotion to satisfaction, M = 3.64. Scholarships received the lowest private mean, M = 2.79. Thus, scholarships were the weakest development element in both sectors, while private teachers reported much stronger access to training and more favourable promotion practices. The larger private item standard deviations also show that opportunity was not equally experienced within that sector. A stronger average did not mean that all private teachers had the same career prospects.

Public-private difference in career development

The composite comparison confirmed a pronounced sector gap. Public teachers had a mean of 1.9433, SD =

0.5991, while private teachers had a mean of 3.4089, SD = 0.9128. Levene's test was significant, F = 11.848, p = .001, so the unequal-variance estimate was interpreted. The public-minus-private mean difference was -1.4656 points, with a 95 percent confidence interval from -1.7438 to -1.1874. Because the entire interval was far below zero, the result indicates a stable and substantively important difference rather than a marginal significance finding.

Table 2

Composite Career Development Scores and Unequal-Variance Test

School sector	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*SE*
Public day primary schools	68	1.9433	0.5991	0.0727
Private day primary schools	58	3.4089	0.9128	0.1199

Note. Welch t(95.603) = -10.457, p < .001. Mean difference (public minus private) = -1.4656, 95% CI [-1.7438, -1.1874]. Hedges g = 1.92 was calculated from the reported group summaries and indicates a very large difference.

The standardized mean difference was Hedges g = 1.92, calculated from the reported sample sizes, means, and standard deviations. This effect size places the sector contrast well beyond a small difference in response style. It indicates that public and private teachers occupied substantially different career development environments in the observed sample. The result answers the first comparative question. Opportunities related to promotion, training, and study support were not perceived at a similar level across the two school systems.

Relationship with job satisfaction

Table 3 presents the sector-specific correlations. In public schools, career development had a weak negative correlation with job satisfaction, r = -.114, p = .355. The confidence implied by the significance test did not support rejection of the null hypothesis. In private schools, career development had a moderate positive correlation with job satisfaction, r = .503, p < .001. The private result supported rejection of the null hypothesis and indicated that teachers who perceived stronger development opportunities also tended to report greater satisfaction.

Table 3

Correlations between Career Development and Job Satisfaction

School sector	*n*	*r*	*p*	Decision on H0
Public day primary schools	68	-0.114	0.355	Fail to reject
Private day primary schools	58	0.503	< .001	Reject

Note. Pearson two-tailed correlations are reported. H0 stated that career development had no statistically significant relationship with job satisfaction.

A post hoc Fisher r-to-z comparison, calculated from the two reported correlations and sample sizes, yielded z = 3.65, p < .001. The positive private association was therefore not only significant within that sector. It was also significantly stronger than the public association. This supplementary comparison supports the core interpretation that sector conditions changed the observed relationship between development and satisfaction.

Sector-specific regression models

The public school regression model was not significant, F(1, 66) = 0.869, p = .355. Career development explained only 1.3 percent of the variance in job satisfaction, R^2 = .013, and the adjusted R^2 was slightly negative, -.002. The unstandardized slope was B = -0.146, SE = 0.157, beta = -.114, t = -0.932. A one-point increase in the public career development score was associated with a 0.146-point decrease in predicted

satisfaction, but the estimate was imprecise and indistinguishable from zero. It should not be interpreted as evidence that development reduces satisfaction.

The private school model told a different story. It was statistically significant, $F(1, 56) = 18.936$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .253$ and adjusted $R^2 = .239$. Career development therefore accounted for 25.3 percent of the observed variation in job satisfaction. The slope was $B = 0.455$, $SE = 0.104$, beta = .503, $t = 4.352$, $p < .001$. On the five-point scales, each one-point rise in perceived career development was associated with a 0.455-point increase in predicted job satisfaction. The model remained associative because the data were cross-sectional.

Table 4

Simple Regression of Job Satisfaction on Career Development

Sector	***R***	***R²***	***Adj. R²***	***B (SE)***	***β***	***F***	***p***
Public	0.114	0.013	-0.002	-.146 (.157)	-0.114	0.869	0.355
Private	0.503	0.253	0.239	.455 (.104)	0.503	18.936	< .001

Note. Dependent variable was job satisfaction. Public n = 68 and private n = 58. Public $t(66) = -0.932$. Private $t(56) = 4.352$. The public standard error of estimate was 0.76930 and the private standard error of estimate was 0.71666.

The combined evidence is more informative than any single coefficient. Public teachers reported a low and compressed career development distribution and no meaningful relationship with satisfaction. Private teachers reported higher and more varied opportunities, and those differences were strongly related to satisfaction. The pattern is consistent with a threshold or credibility interpretation. Career development may become motivational when teachers encounter enough real variation in opportunity for it to distinguish their work experiences.

DISCUSSION

The central finding is that career development did not function as a universal source of teacher job satisfaction. It was positively and significantly associated with satisfaction in private schools but not in public schools. This contrast qualifies the common assumption that more development will always improve employee attitudes. The practical value of development depends on how an employment system distributes opportunity and connects it with outcomes. A seminar, qualification, or added duty can motivate when it opens a visible path. It can become neutral when teachers believe the path is blocked, delayed, or unrelated to advancement.

The level difference provides the first explanation. Public teachers rated the seven career development items at an average close to disagreement, while private teachers rated them above the scale midpoint. The 1.47-point mean gap and Hedges g of 1.92 show that the two groups were not describing minor variations in the same system. They were describing markedly different opportunity environments. Low public ratings for service-based promotion, scholarships, fairness, and regular promotion suggest that development was not experienced as an active part of the employment relationship. That context helps explain why within-group differences in public career development accounted for almost none of the variance in satisfaction.

Restricted opportunity may also restrict statistical association. When most public respondents give similarly low ratings, the predictor contains limited meaningful variation. Even teachers who report slightly better access may not have experienced an outcome large enough to affect overall satisfaction. This interpretation does not prove that public teachers do not value development. On the contrary, it suggests that the available measure captured a broadly shared deficit. A nonsignificant slope should therefore not be used to justify inaction. It indicates that the existing pattern of opportunities was not differentiating satisfaction in a reliable way.

The private school result agrees with studies that connect career development, training, promotion, and support with favourable employee outcomes. Ayodo (2022) found career development to predict satisfaction among

academic staff, while Noor et al. (2022) reported a positive relationship between training and satisfaction. Mwiti et al. (2021) linked career advancement with teacher satisfaction, and Musambi and Juma (2020) found a positive promotion relationship. The current study extends that evidence to private day primary school teachers in a rural Kenyan subcounty. It also gives the association a practical scale. Career development alone explained one quarter of the variance in private teacher satisfaction.

The public result contrasts with much of the positive literature, but the contrast is analytically useful. Prior studies show what career development can do when it is available and consequential. The current public sample shows what may happen when opportunity is perceived as limited. Kakui and Gachunga (2016), Muchibi et al. (2022), and Ratemo et al. (2021) associate development with performance, engagement, or skills, while Ndiritu (2022) links planning to retention. These outcomes depend on functioning pathways. The public finding suggests that the existence of national structures does not by itself ensure that teachers experience growth as timely, fair, and connected to satisfaction.

Herzberg's theory explains the private pattern clearly. Promotion, responsibility, achievement, and growth are motivators because they make work meaningful and communicate progress (Herzberg, 2015). Private teachers who reported stronger access also reported greater satisfaction, which is consistent with the presence of those motivators. The public pattern does not disprove the theory. It shows that a factor cannot motivate merely because researchers classify it as a motivator. It must be available in a form employees recognize. The evidence therefore supports a contextual reading of Herzberg rather than a mechanical checklist.

Vroom's expectancy logic helps explain why institutional arrangements matter. Teachers are more likely to invest in development when they expect effort to improve capability, capability to receive recognition, and recognition to produce a valued result (Vroom et al., 2015). Private schools may have shorter decision chains that make responsibility and recognition more immediate. Public systems may offer greater formal stability but slower or more standardized advancement. The study did not directly measure these mechanisms, so this is an inference from the pattern rather than a tested causal claim. It identifies a useful direction for future research on perceived links between training, performance, and promotion.

The item pattern also shows that training alone is not the complete answer. Training was the highest-rated item in both sectors, yet public teachers still had a very low overall development score and no significant satisfaction relationship. This suggests that training can be present without regular, fair promotion or study support. Kiima (2015) found that training supported promotion prospects and career goals, which highlights the importance of connection. Policy should therefore evaluate what happens after training. The relevant question is whether new knowledge changes responsibilities, recognition, eligibility, mobility, or professional influence.

Scholarships were the weakest private item and among the weakest public items. This common limitation matters because further qualifications often require time and financial resources beyond the reach of individual teachers. A system that relies only on self-financed study may reproduce inequality, with development available mainly to those who can afford it. Scholarship or study-support design should therefore be transparent, competitive, and aligned with areas of educational need. Such support is especially important where promotion depends on additional qualifications but teachers receive little assistance to obtain them.

Fairness is equally central. Public teachers rated fair promotion at 1.75, and private teachers showed greater but still varied confidence. Promotion systems influence satisfaction not only through the final decision but through the perceived legitimacy of criteria, communication, and timing. Musambi and Juma (2020) and Garba and Idris (2021) associate promotion with satisfaction. The present evidence adds that regularity and fairness should be examined separately. A promotion can be formally possible but motivationally weak if teachers cannot understand the process or predict when decisions will occur.

The sector contrast should not be read as a simple claim that private schools manage careers better in every respect. Private teachers reported higher average opportunities, but their larger standard deviations show unequal experiences. Private schools may vary widely in resources, ownership priorities, and staff policies. Their greater flexibility can support rapid development, but it can also make access dependent on individual

leadership. The policy lesson is therefore not to copy one sector wholesale. It is to identify the features that make pathways visible and credible while protecting fairness, continuity, and equal access.

The findings also show why pooled analysis can mislead. Combining public and private teachers would mix a low-opportunity group with a higher-opportunity group and could produce a positive overall correlation driven partly by between-sector differences. Such a coefficient might be reported as a general teacher relationship even though the public within-sector relationship is absent. Separate models preserve the institutional story. They show that ownership is not just background information but a context that changes both the level of career development and its relationship with satisfaction.

Finally, the evidence places job satisfaction within a broader human resource system. Career development accounted for substantial variance in private schools but not all of it. Satisfaction also reflects remuneration, working conditions, appraisal, leadership, workload, relationships, and personal circumstances. A career policy will therefore be strongest when it complements, rather than substitutes for, fair basic conditions. This balanced interpretation avoids presenting development as a single solution while still recognizing its sizeable private-sector contribution.

PRACTICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For public schools, the priority is to turn professional development into a visible pathway. The Teachers Service Commission and education leaders should publish clear promotion criteria, expected timelines, evidence requirements, and appeal procedures in language teachers can use. Teachers should be able to see how service, academic achievement, training, classroom contribution, mentoring, and added responsibility are considered. Regular career progress reviews would help identify stagnation before it becomes normalized. Communication is not a cosmetic intervention. It strengthens expectancy by showing how effort can lead to an attainable result.

Training design should begin with career use. Each programme should state the capability being developed, how it will be applied in school, what evidence of application will be gathered, and whether it contributes to eligibility for responsibility or promotion. School leaders can support this pathway by assigning development-linked roles such as mentoring, subject leadership, assessment coordination, or community engagement. These roles should carry recognition and should not become unpaid workload without career value. The purpose is to connect learning, responsibility, evidence, and advancement. Financial access requires deliberate support. Scholarship and study-leave opportunities were weakly rated, so public authorities, private proprietors, unions, and training institutions should develop transparent partial scholarships, fee partnerships, flexible schedules, and competitive study support. Selection should be based on published criteria and monitored across gender, zone, school type, and length of service. A development programme that is technically open but financially unreachable will not produce equitable career mobility.

Private schools should institutionalize the practices associated with their stronger result. Training, promotion, and responsibility should be documented in staff policy rather than depend solely on the discretion of one proprietor or head teacher. Schools should maintain annual development plans, record completed learning, specify promotion requirements, and ensure that opportunity is not reserved for a small favoured group. The larger variation in private responses makes consistency an important goal. Flexibility is most valuable when it is combined with fairness and continuity. Across both sectors, evaluation should move beyond counting workshops. Useful indicators include participation by teacher group, completion, application of new skills, assignment of responsibility, promotion outcomes, time spent waiting for advancement, perceived fairness, and retention. Teacher job satisfaction should be monitored alongside these indicators. The current results provide a baseline proposition for such evaluation. Career development contributes to satisfaction when teachers experience it as a coherent pathway with real consequences.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has several limits. Its cross-sectional design identifies association but cannot determine whether career development increases satisfaction, whether satisfied teachers perceive opportunities more favourably,

or whether both are shaped by another factor. Questionnaire data are vulnerable to common-method and social-desirability bias. The sample came from one rural subcounty and excluded administrators, public Board of Management teachers, boarding schools, and special schools. Generalization should therefore be limited to settings with comparable characteristics. The moderate sector sample sizes also reduce precision, especially for detecting small public relationships.

The measurement structure needs refinement. Career development combined promotion, training, fairness, service, academic achievement, and scholarships, and one predictor item explicitly referred to job satisfaction. Future studies should use separate, validated subscales for opportunity availability, procedural fairness, development support, promotion expectancy, and actual career outcomes. Longitudinal designs could follow teachers from training through assignment, appraisal, promotion, and satisfaction. Qualitative interviews would also clarify why public teachers gave low ratings and why private experiences varied.

Future comparative work should test the mechanisms suggested by the findings. Researchers could measure expectancy, perceived instrumentality, promotion transparency, leadership support, access cost, and the time between qualification and advancement. Multilevel designs could separate teacher, school, proprietor, zone, and national-system influences. Studies should also compare day and boarding schools, primary and secondary schools, and rural and urban settings. Such work would determine whether the sector pattern reflects ownership itself or the specific career systems operating within each school.

CONCLUSION

Career development mattered differently across the two primary school sectors. Public teachers reported very low opportunity levels, and career development neither correlated with nor predicted their job satisfaction. Private teachers reported substantially stronger opportunities, and career development showed a moderate positive relationship that explained 25.3 percent of satisfaction variance. The sector correlations differed significantly. These results show that career development should not be treated as a universal input with an automatic motivational return.

The most meaningful conclusion is institutional. Training, promotion, responsibility, and study support influence satisfaction when teachers can access them, understand the rules, and see a credible link to advancement. Public policy should therefore focus on the pathway connecting professional learning to career movement, while private schools should formalize and equalize the flexibility they already possess. When development becomes visible, fair, and consequential, it can support both teacher fulfilment and the long-term capacity of schools.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study received institutional and ethical clearance through Chuka University. A research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, and permission to collect data was obtained from the County Director of Education. Participation was voluntary, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, questionnaires did not request names, and responses were handled confidentially.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The underlying participant-level data are not publicly available because the consent and confidentiality arrangements did not provide for open release. Aggregated statistics supporting the findings are presented in this paper.

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