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The effect of teachers' empowerment on government secondary schools' performance in Konso zone, Southern Ethiopia

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This study was conducted in government secondary schools in the Konso zone, southern Ethiopia, to investigate the effect of teachers' professional empowerment on school performance. A correlational explanatory research design and a mixed research approach were used. The participants of this study were 350 including teachers, principals, supervisors, and heads of educational offices. The secondary schools and their respective principals, supervisors and educational office heads were selected purposively where as teachers were selected randomly. The participants provided written informed consent to participate in this study. Both primary and secondary data gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and document reviews were used. Qualitative data were arranged into themes then analyzed and interpreted whereas quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS V.20. Among teachers in the study area, the majority (90.3%) were males and all of the principals, supervisors and education head offices were males indicating gender imbalance in the educational system. Teachers primarily (3.81 ± 1.098) participate in decision-making by consultation, followed by their involvement in setting school goals and objectives (3.78 ± 1.20). In-service trainings were primarily (4.03 ± 1.14) offered to change the attitudes and skills of teachers and strengthen profession (3.78 ± 1.20). The respondents weakly agree (3.65 ± 1.16) that school leaders provide opportunities for teachers to work actively for better school performance. A strong positive correlation ($p < 0.01$; $R^2 > 0.8$) and interdependence was observed between teachers' empowerment and school performance. While there were positive signs regarding teachers' empowerment in the study schools, these measures were not implemented in a way that met teachers' needs. Also, the school performance activities implemented fell short of teachers' expectations, requiring further administrative action. To boost school performance, school leaders should identify teachers' needs and provide them with professional learning. Future works should consider the unstudied secondary, elementary and primary schools to have a clear picture of the issues of teachers' empowerment and its effect on school performance in all the secondary schools of the study area.

KEYWORDS

decision making, empowerment, in-service training, Konso, professional development, school performance

1 Introduction

The concept of empowerment has been widely debated and has different meanings for different audiences. Empowerment has been the subject of widespread and often thoughtful and careful theorizing, study, and application in the fields of social work, community psychology, health promotion, and organizational studies (Perkins, 2010). The term emerged from social and educational psychology as "a strategy for individuals to maintain control over significant aspects of their lives" (Cunningham et al., 1996). However, it has spread into many other areas of social life, especially work, where it has taken on other meanings. Empowerment includes organizational processes and structures that enhance the participation of members and enhance the achievement of organizational goals. In other words, empowerment can be viewed as a process of improving organizational performance and effectiveness (Park, 1998; Svensson, 2020). Today, the concept of empowerment has taken many forms, evolving from the concept of employee participation and participatory decision-making to a modern view of empowerment. It is achieved when employees enjoy freedom at work, communicate well, take ownership and value their work, provide adequate training, reward, and effectively manage their involvement in the process (Copp et al., 2003).

In education, empowerment broadly means the transfer of decision-making power to the "client" in the educational relationship; that is, there is an implicit transfer of power from the government to teachers and from teachers to students, and ultimately a balance of power disparities between them (Park, 1998; Lawson, 2011). An organizational example of this would be the government allocating increasing funds to schools, so that schools can decide how and where to spend their money. Empowerment of teachers can be seen from different perspectives. According to a study by researchers, it is increasingly being approached as a multidimensional construct. Marks and Louis (1997) argue that empowerment can be fairly consistently categorized into technical, operational, and strategic organizational domains after measuring teacher empowerment through the operation and management of teachers, student experience, teacher professional life, and control of classroom instruction (Yunus et al., 2021).

Performance is the result of ability and effort (Armstrong, 2009). As managers use tactics to increase teacher empowerment, teacher morale also increases. It is reported that in schools where teachers are empowered to lead, the focus of control shifts from school leaders to teachers (Copp et al., 2003). School administrators should encourage other teachers to seize the opportunity to share their strengths with other members of staff by providing opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles. In Ethiopia, teacher empowerment became an integral part of education policy and practice after the introduction of the education policy in 1994. This policy highlighted the decentralized education management system in the country. Under this policy, teachers have the right to participate in decisions regarding school matters related to the teaching and learning process. General leadership approaches that allow teachers to participate in school leadership have also been incorporated into policy documents [Ministry of Education (MOE), 2010]. Other interventions, for instance, improving the status of the teacher training scheme, providing in-service training and providing opportunities for professional development, developing a career development structure that caters to the interests of teachers, encouraging and recognizing them have also been introduced in order to boost the image of the teaching profession in the country [Ministry of Education (MOE), 2015].

The relationship between teacher empowerment and school performance activities was reported to be mutual and teachers' empowerment is considered as an accurate predictor of student achievement (Okioma, 2011). Based on Abebe et al. (2021), low achievement in academic achievement of school students may be related to teachers' empowerment. Previous studies focused on the relationship between teachers' empowerment and students' academic achievements and revealed inconsistency among them. The findings of Imig et al. (2015) and Aliakbari and Amoli (2016) noted a statistically significant relationship between teacher empowerment and student achievement. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) and Kelly (2012) reported no direct relationship between teachers' empowerment and students' academic achievement. These studies focused on teachers' perceived level of empowerment on students' academic achievement only and failed to look at the interdependence between empowerment of teachers and school performance activities. According to the education department of Konso Zone annual report of the year 2020/21, the secondary schools of the zone were performing less. It is necessary to examine the status quo of teachers' professional empowerment in secondary schools in the zone in light of the poor scholastic performance of secondary schools. On the other hand, there was limited information about scientific studies of the empowerment of teachers in the indicated schools. Therefore, this study was intended to identify the status of teachers' professional empowerment; examine the performance activities of government secondary schools and investigate the relationship between teachers' professional empowerment and secondary school performance activities in the study area.

1.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of both independent and dependent variables pertinent to the study was developed and illustrated in Figure 1.

According to the model (Figure 1), the independent variable (teacher empowerment) is conceptualized and assumed to affect the school performance activities (dependent variable) of government secondary schools in Konso Zone. It was also assumed that if teachers were empowered by actively involving in decision making process in their schools, provided with continuous professional development, and participated in ample of in-service trainings, the performance of their schools will be potentially boosted.

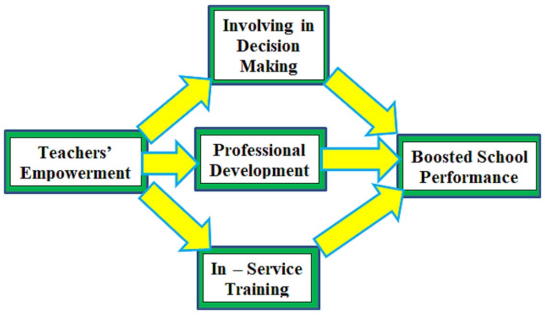

FIGURE 1
Conceptual framework of the study.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Short and Patsy (1994) theoretically conceptualized teacher empowerment as a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems. Extending the theory further by empirically grounding it within education, teachers' empowerment was defined to be manifested in three dimensions including; decision making, professional development, and teacher in service training. The decision-making dimension of teacher empowerment relates to teachers' participation in making critical decisions that directly affects their work concerning teaching learning process. The professional growth dimension refers to teachers' perceptions of the opportunities they are afforded by their institution to grow and develop professionally and enhance their skill set during a continuous learning endeavor and perform their school better. Thus, when secondary schools involve teachers in decision making, develop them professionally through promotions and recommend them for further training and in service programs the school performance will be boosted significantly (Ekpoh et al., 2013).

2 Research methodology

2.1 Description of study area

The research was holistically carried out in the Konso Zone. Konso is located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). It is about 595 km south west of Addis Ababa, 365 km from the regional capital Hawassa. The Zone constitutes four Woredas with 43 Kebeles among which 41 are rural Kebeles. The Konso cultural landscape with its walled villages registered with UNESCO as the ninth World Heritage Site was the peculiar feature of the zone. There are six Kinder Garten (KG), 59 elementary (Grade 1–4), 64 primary (Grade 1–8), and 10 secondary schools in the zone. Geographically, it is located at 5010′0″ to 5040′0″N latitude and 3700′0″ to 37045′0″ E longitude. The total land area of the Zone is 2016.24 Km^2. The altitude of the area is between 501 and 2,000 m above sea level [Konso District Administrative Office (KDAO), 2012].

2.2 Research design

Correlational explanatory research design identifies the correlation statistical test between two or more study variables to the extent they co-vary, that is, changes in one variable are reflected in changes in the other (Creswell, 2012). We used correlational and explanatory research design to measure and describe the degree of relationship between teachers' professional empowerment and secondary school performance activities.

2.3 Research method

A mixed approach that combines a quantitative and qualitative approach was used in this study. In this approach, observations are combined with predictions, narratives of events, comparisons, and conclusions are drawn based on information obtained from relatively large and representative samples, as well as the participants. The approach also provides a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself (Creswell, 2012). In a commonly used mixed methods notation system (Morse, 1991), the components are indicated as qual and quan (or QUAL and QUAN to emphasize primacy), respectively, for qualitative and quantitative research. The overall goal of mixed methods research, of combining qualitative and quantitative research components, is to expand and strengthen a study's conclusions and, therefore, contribute to the published literature. In all studies, the use of mixed methods should contribute to answering one's research questions. Ultimately, mixed methods research is about heightened knowledge and validity. The design as a product should be of sufficient quality to achieve multiple validities legitimation (Johnson and Christensen, 2017).

2.4 Participants of the study

There were 330 teachers in eight secondary schools in the study area. All of the teachers, the eight principals of each secondary school, eight supervisors who support these secondary schools, and four heads of educational offices (Kolme cluster, Karat town administration, Karat zuriya and Kena) and therefore a total of 350 individuals were the total participants of this study.

2.5 Data sources and collection methods

Primary data were obtained from structured questionnaires provided for teachers. Semi-structured interview questions were prepared for school principals, supervisors, and heads of education. The question items were prepared by considering the specific objectives of the study and pretested before actual data collection. In this study, the interview was used to triangulate and cross-check the data collected by the questionnaire. Few of the interview questions were: indicate the extent to which you agree with the dimensions of teachers' professional empowerment; do you think school leaders motivate their teachers to perform the school activities better? How? In what way? do school leaders invite the teachers for decisions that are made school concern? When? On what decisions? And so forth. The questions were primarily prepared in English and translated to Amharic language and then administered to the participants. Secondary data were gathered on continuous professional development (CPD) plans, annual performances, and achievements of schools and students and related documents from the reports of the schools, woredas, town, and zonal education department offices. Depending on the official letter from Arba Minch University, the host institution of the research, the documents were reviewed after getting legal permission from the office heads. The confidentiality of the data was seriously maintained by the researchers. The data were collected between December 2021 and January 2022.

2.6 Sample size and sampling procedures

The total sample size of this study was determined using probability proportional to size-sampling indicated by the formula below (Cochran, 1977).

$$n_{\circ} = \frac{Z^2 p.q}{e^2} \rightarrow n1 = \frac{n_{\circ}}{1 + \frac{n_{\circ}}{N}}$$

Where, $n_{\circ}$ = the desired sample size where the population size is >10,000; Z = standard normal deviation (1.96 for 95% confidence level); p = 0.17 (proportion of the population to be included in sample. i.e., 17%); q = 1–0.17 = 0.83; e = degree of accuracy desired (0.5), 5% error term; N = Total participants; n_1 = corrected sample size when the population is <10,000; Therefore,

$$n_{\circ} = \frac{Z^2 p.q}{e^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.17)(0.83)}{(0.05)^2} = 217$$

The total number of population (i.e., N = teachers, principals, and heads of the educational offices of the study area) was estimated to be 350. Therefore, the corrected sample size was:

$$n1 = \frac{217}{1 + \frac{217}{350}} = 133$$

Therefore, the total sample size of this study was 133.

The eight principals were purposively included and eight cluster supervisors and four heads of educational offices censuses were taken hence the comprehensive sampling technique was used. The numbers of teachers to be included in the sample (113) were proportionally taken from each school were determined depending on the total number of teachers in the respective schools and described as follows (Table 1).

2.7 Pilot testing

In order to check the relevance of the instruments to the study, a pilot test was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the instruments. Pre-testing was conducted with 25 randomly selected respondents from the participants of the study. In pilot testing, the acceptable reliability coefficient estimates range according to Burg-Brown (2016), expressed as Cronbach's alpha value for the scale and all its dimensions was expected to be above 0.7. Pilot testing was carried out for all the items included in the questionnaire before actual data collection. The results of the pilot test are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1 Number of teachers selected as sample respondents per school.

S.no.	Name of secondary school	Total no. of teachers	No. of teachers included in sample
1	Konso	107	36
2	Aba Roba	22	8
3	Arfaide	34	12
4	Kolme	39	13
5	Fasha	72	25
6	Debena	16	6
7	Doha	17	5
8	Kemele	23	8
	Total	330	113

2.8 Methods of data analysis

Qualitative data were edited, then arranged into themes and patterns using codes to analyze and interpret whereas quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) V.20. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency distribution tables, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics like correlation coefficient and linear regression to determine the relationship between study variables.

3 Results

3.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were depicted in Table 3. Among secondary school teachers in the study area, the majority (90.3%) were males. Age distribution of the respondents shows that, majority of the teachers 41(36.3%) and principals 3(37.5%) were in the age group of 26–30 years whereas many of the supervisors 4(50%) were in the age group of 31–35 years where the remaining categories share the least percentages. A majority of 50(44.2%) of teachers have 1–5 years of experience, while the overwhelming majority of 6(62.5%) of principals, 3(37.5%) of supervisors, and 2(50%) of education office heads have 6–10 years of experience. Teachers, supervisors, and heads of the educational system in the Konso zone with more than 10 years of experience were a small fraction of the respondents. In the study area, the majority of 85(75.2%) teachers, 5(62.5%) principals, 6(75%) supervisors, and 3(75%) heads of education offices were first degree holders. On the other hand, 3(37.5%) of principals, 2(25%) of supervisors, and one education office head possess a Master's Degree. The value of the likert scale cut point are depicted in Table 4.

3.2 Empowerment of teachers in government secondary schools Konso zone

3.2.1 Involvement of teachers in decision making

The pattern of teachers' involvement in decision making in government secondary schools of Konso Zone was indicated in Table 5. In terms of encouragement, the highest rating (3.81 ± 1.098) was observed in consultation with stakeholders in decision making, followed by teachers' involvement in setting school goals and objectives (3.78 ± 1.20) and leaders summoning frequent staff meetings (3.65 ± 1.16).

According to the findings of this study, of all areas of teachers' involvement in decision making assessed in this study, the least response was the respect of school leaders to teachers' opinion (2.65 ± 1.15) followed by teachers' autonomy to solve problems

TABLE 2 Pilot testing output of the study.

Study area	School	Variables	No of items before pilot study	No of items after pilot study	Deleted items	α value
Konso zone	Secondary schools	Decision making	11	11	—	0.926
		Professional development	9	9	—	0.878
		In-service training	10	10	—	0.756
		School performance	10	8	2	0.703
		Total	40	38	2	0.933

TABLE 3 Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

No	Items	Category	Respondents category							
			Teachers		Principals		Supervisors		Education officers	
1	Gender	Male	102	90.3	8	100	8	100	4	100
		Female	11	9.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	113	100	8	100	8	100	4	100
2	Age (Years)	20–25	26	23.0	-	-	-	-	-	-
		26–30	41	36.3	3	37.5	1	12.5	-	-
		31–35	27	23.9	1	12.5	4	50	1	25
		36–40	12	10.6	2	25	1	12.5	1	25
		41–50	6	5.3	2	25	2	25	2	50
		> 50	1	0.9	-		-	-	-	100
		Total	113	100.0			8	100	4	
3	Work experience (Years)	<1 year	8	7.1		-	-	-		
		1–5 years	50	44.2	-	-	1	12.5	1	25
		6–10 years	27	23.9	5	62.5	3	37.5	2	50
		11–15 years	15	13.3	3	37.5	3	37.5	1	25
		>15 years	13	11.5	-	-	1	12.5	-	-
		Total	113	100.0	8	100	8	100	4	100
4	Educational level	MA/MSC	9	8.0	3	37.5	2	25	1	25
		BA/BED/BSC	85	75.2	5	62.5	6	75	3	75
		Diploma	19	16.8	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	113	100.0	8	100	8	100	4	100

without consultation (2.95 ± 1.26). It is evident that in order for a teacher's idea to be realized, it should be shared with his/her colleagues and the school administration. This had a positive effect on building team spirit among teachers. Overall, the respondents were poorly satisfied (3.35 ± 1.20) that they were encouraged and allowed to participate in decision making processes in their respective schools, according to the grand mean of involvement of teachers in school affairs.

3.2.2 Teachers professional development

A table showing professional development in government secondary schools in Konso Zone was shown in Table 6. The respondents' agreement that school leaders empower teachers to work harder ranked first (4.07 ± 1.14), followed by the belief that professional development can increase teachers' morale in their work (3.75 ± 1.24), and that professional development can enhance teachers' effectiveness (3.37 ± 1.29).

Teachers in the study area disagreed that school leaders identify teachers' needs and provide them with professional learning (2.92 ± 1.31). The teachers also disagreed (2.78 ± 1.25) that district workshops and seminars were organized by the school administration. The overall results of this study with regard to teachers' professional development (3.33 ± 1.23) indicate a slight agreement about continuous opportunities for teachers to improve and advance in their profession.

3.2.3 In-serve training activities

In-service training activities being carried out in government secondary schools of Konso zone were depicted in Table 7. In the secondary schools of Konso zone, in-service trainings were primarily

(4.03 ± 1.14) offered to change the attitudes and skills of teachers and to strengthen the teaching profession (3.78 ± 1.20). The respondents to this study showed slight agreement (3.65 ± 1.16) that school leaders invite teachers to professional empowerment trainings. Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that teachers disagree with the active implementation of subject symposiums (2.65 ± 1.25) and panels (2.64 ± 1.26) in their respective schools or at woreda and zonal levels. Observed generalized response mean and standard deviation of the teachers for in-service training was 3.29 ± 1.23.

TABLE 4 The value of the Likert scale cut point.

No.	Likert scale range	Value
1.	1–0.80	Strongly disagree
2.	1.80–2.60	Disagree
3.	2.61–3.40	Undecided
4.	3.41–4.20	Agree
5.	4.21–5	Strongly agree

Rate value 1 as lowest and 5 as the highest point of the mean value, the mean test value of an average given number was 3.4 and the above confidence interval of the difference percentage value was 95% to interpreting this data (McLeod, 2019).

3.3 School performance activities in government secondary schools of Konso zone

School performance activities in action among the government secondary schools of Konso zone were indicated in Table 8.

According to this study, the respondents weakly agree (3.78 ± 1.20) that school leadership provides opportunities for teachers to work actively toward improving school performance and teachers were motivated to improve school performance (3.65 ± 1.16). There was also a low level of follow up of school performance activities by some principals in the study area. The overall slight agreement of the respondents (3.26 ± 1.24) may indicate that school performance activities in the secondary schools of the study area were carried out and implemented below the expectations of the teachers.

3.4 Relationship between teachers' professional empowerment and performance of secondary schools in Konso zone

The interdependence pattern of teachers' professional empowerment and performance activity in secondary schools in Konso zone was

TABLE 5 Involvement of teachers in decision making in government secondary schools Konso zone.

Items	Mean	SD
School leaders convene frequent staff meeting	3.65	1.16
Teachers contribute freely and their contribution were valued	3.50	1.20
School leaders respect teachers opinions	2.65	1.15
Autonomy to solve problems without consultation was granted	2.96	1.26
Involvement in decision making brings commitment	3.01	1.29
School leaders allow teachers to set goal/objective of the school	3.78	1.20
Teachers' involvement in decision making was highly supported	3.37	1.25
The school leaders engage teachers in addressing administrative	3.16	1.32
School leaders use consultation in decision making	3.81	1.09
School leaders delegate power of responsibility to teachers	3.57	1.12
School leaders encourage free expression of feeling including criticisms	3.42	1.26
Grand Mean	3.35	1.20

N = 113; SD, Standard deviation. Mean scale: 1–1.80 = strongly disagree; 1.81–2.60 = disagree; 2.61–3.40 = undecided; 3.41–4.20 = agree; and 4.21–5.00 = strongly agree.

TABLE 6 Teachers professional development in government secondary schools Konso zone.

Items	Mean	SD
The school offers opportunities for further study	3.28	1.24
The school offer opportunities for career development	3.33	1.25
Teachers were satisfied by their authority to carry out the job specified	3.31	1.17
District workshops and seminars were organized	2.78	1.25
Leaders offer professional development to increases teachers' morale	3.75	1.24
School leaders support teacher to become empowered and work harder	4.07	1.15
School leader identify teachers need and offers professional learning for teachers	2.92	1.31
Administrators enhance teachers' effectiveness by supporting their professional development	3.37	1.29
School leaders provides facilities that increases teacher's professional	3.17	1.20
Grand Mean	3.33	1.23

N = 113; SD, Standard deviation; Mean scale: 1–1.80 = strongly disagree; 1.81–2.60 = disagree; 2.61–3.40 = undecided; 3.41–4.20 = agree; and 4.21–5.00 = strongly agree.

indicated in Table 9. The findings of the present study showed that there exists a very strong positive correlation ($p < 0.01$; $R^2 > 0.8$) between the considerable variables in this study. The findings of this study also revealed a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between school performance and involvement in decision making, in-service training and professional development ($p < 0.01$; $R^2 > 0.8$).

TABLE 7 In-serve training activities being carried in government secondary schools of Konso zone.

Items	Mean	SD
School leaders encourage and assist teachers to participate in in-service courses and seminars	3.06	1.26
School leaders invite teachers on professional empowerment trainings	3.65	1.16
The principals were willing to assist teachers acquire study leave	3.50	1.20
Subject's symposia were held	2.65	1.25
Subject panels were active	2.64	1.26
Workshops and seminars were supported by school leaders	3.01	1.29
In-service courses and seminars were held to strengthen teaches profession	3.78	1.20
In-service trainings were encouraged to improve academic performance	3.37	1.26
In-service training of principals motivate teaches and help to perform better	3.16	1.32
In-service trainings were offered to change attitudes and skills of teachers	4.03	1.15
Grand mean	3.29	1.23

N = 113; SD, Standard deviation; Mean scale: 1–1.80 = strongly disagree; 1.81–2.60 = disagree; 2.61–3.40 = undecided; 3.41–4.20 = agree; and 4.21–5.00 = strongly agree.

TABLE 8 School performance activities in government secondary schools of Konso zone.

Items	Mean	SD
Motivation of teachers improves school performance	3.65	1.16
School performance was improved if teachers were allowed to participate in decision making	3.50	1.20
Accountability of teachers affect school performance	2.65	1.27
New knowledge and skills lead to improved performance	2.96	1.26
School leaders encourage teacher to perform better	3.01	1.29
School leaders providing opportunities for teachers to work actively for better school performance	3.78	1.20
School principals articulate a vision for better performance of school	3.37	1.26
School leaders were part of school improvement team committed to allow teachers and staff to gain new experience on a daily basis	3.16	1.32
Grand mean	3.26	1.24

N = 113; SD, Standard deviation; Mean scale: 1–1.80 = strongly disagree; 1.81–2.60 = disagree; 2.61–3.40 = undecided; 3.41–4.20 = agree; and 4.21–5.00 = strongly agree.

TABLE 9 Relationship between teachers' professional empowerment and performance of secondary schools in Konso zone.

		Decision making	Professional development	In-service training	School performance
Decision making	Pearson correlation	1			
	Sig. (two-tailed)				
	N	113			
Professional development	Pearson correlation	0.836**	1		
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000			
	N	113	113		
In-service training	Pearson correlation	0.966**	0.829**	1	
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000		
	N	113	113	113	
School performance	Pearson correlation	0.970**	0.810**	0.988**	1
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	113	113	113	113

**Correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

3.5 Predicting the effect of teachers' professional empowerment on school performance

Regression analysis model summary in Table 10 showed that the model was statistically significant in predicting school performance, $F(3.377) = 0.001$, $p < 0.05$. The adjusted R^2 was 0.980 in this model, indicating that 98% of the variance in school performance activities was explained by the model. That means that 98% of the variance in school performance activities can be explained by teachers' empowerment.

From the Table 11, the unstandardized coefficient for decision making was observed to be 0.042.

4 Discussion

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

All of the principals, supervisors and education head offices were male. Male dominance in the teaching profession and leadership positions within the study area is indicative of the poor exposure of females to education in the recent past. The distribution of ages of respondents in the study area indicates that the educational system is dominated by young and potential human resources. This presents a golden opportunity for the transformation of the educational system. The majority of teachers, principals, supervisors, and heads of the education office in the study area were first-degree holders. This implies that stakeholders in the educational system have fewer opportunities for post-graduate study.

4.2 Empowerment of teachers in government secondary schools Konso zone

4.2.1 Involvement of teachers in decision making

The results of this study indicated that teachers were being encouraged in a number of ways to participate in decision making on the issues of their respective schools. Teachers in the secondary schools of Konso zone were expected to demonstrate significant satisfaction and productivity as a result of their involvement in school affairs to this extent. Because, previous researchers (Imber, 2010) and (Rice and Schneider, 1994), hypothesized that, as the level of involvement of teachers in decision making on their school affairs increases, the job satisfaction and productivity of the teachers increase simultaneously.

Additionally, interview participants in this study confirmed that school leaders invite teachers for decisions on immediate and planned meetings related to teaching and learning processes, and when problems arise about their behavior, time management, school budget, school committee elections, co-curricular activities, or when materials need to be sold. In agreement with this study, Klecker and Loadman (1998) noted that in schools where the active participation of teachers in the decision-making process was positively encouraged, teachers were observed to handle decisions on financial issues, selecting teachers, determining programs, and assessing student achievement. In addition to this, Maeroff (1988) argued that teacher empowerment is a critical issue that is conducive to schools' efficiency. The focus has been on teachers to have more opportunity to participate in school level decision-making and to utilize enhanced professional judgment in curriculum and instructional issues. This study found that teachers are slightly motivated to take part in decision-making processes at their schools. Therefore, one can speculate that teachers may not be completely satisfied with their jobs. In all secondary schools in the Konso zone, despite not being negligible, teachers are not adequately encouraged to participate in the decision-making process.

From the interview responses, school leaders argue that fresh teachers were likewise motivated by providing them with induction courses, inbuilt supervision, and discussion, preparing training programs, and monitoring how they applied them on a daily basis. School leaders and senior teachers prepare orientation for beginner teachers and provide directions on subject matters. This was observed to motivate beginner teachers by familiarizing them with the existing school community and working environment that they are about to join. This was also of substantial value in building teamwork within the school community and creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning that may contribute to strong school performance.

4.2.2 Teachers professional development

School leaders were trying their best to empower teachers by supporting teachers' professional development so that they would become more moral and hardworking. In this regard, National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) (2007) argued

TABLE 10 Regression analysis model summary.

R	*R* Square	Adjusted *R* square	*F*
0.990[a]	0.980	0.980	3.37

[a]Predictors: (Constant), in service training, professional development and decision making.

TABLE 11 Predicting the effect of teachers' professional empowerment on school performance activities in secondary schools of Konso zone.

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient	*F*	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	−1.370	0.406		−3.377	0.001
Decision making	0.214	0.042	0.275	5.127	0.000
Professional Dev't	−0.053	0.022	−0.058	−2.364	0.020
In-service training	0.637	0.043	0.770	14.658	0.000

[a]Dependent variable: school performance.
[b]Predictors: (Constant), in-service training, professional development, and decision making.

that, by empowering teachers to progress through continuous professional development, administrators can create morally and professionally stronger teachers. They can also prevent teachers from feeling stressed, identify their needs and offer them valuable learning experiences as administrators.

It was found that the principals and the administrators in the educational offices of the study area were failing to identify teachers' needs. They were also failing to organize workshops and seminars for teachers that would have a direct influence on school performance. The slight agreement of the respondents on the continuous provision of opportunities for teachers to develop and advance in their respective professions. This could indicate that the opportunities being provided for secondary schools in the study area did not satisfy the actual need of the teachers to develop their profession.

4.2.3 In-serve training activities

Respondents' moderate agreement with their invitations for professional empowerment training indicates that there are weaknesses among principals in inviting teachers to empowerment trainings or that trainings are not sufficiently tailored to the needs of teachers in the study area. In-service training and teachers' performance in school were positively correlated with each other (Jahangir et al., 2012). Studies by Ekpoh et al. (2013) show that teachers who attend in-service training perform effectively in their work concerning knowledge of the subject, classroom management, teaching methods and evaluation of students. So, as a result of the unsatisfactory offering of in-service training for teachers in the secondary schools of the study area, teachers' performance was expected to be affected negatively. According to the interview responses, school leaders worked less on encouraging and assisting teachers to participate in in-service programs by collecting teachers' information, helping them to pass in-service training courses related to their subject matter and action research programs, and participating them in summer education programs and continuous professional development training sessions.

As a result of the absence of subject-related panels and symposiums, the lack of the sharing of experiences by very senior teachers over many years and the lack of discussions regarding the subject matter teaching problems encountered, indicate a loss of a significant chance for improving academic performance of students in particular and school performance in general. As shown by the teachers' generalized response mean, they are also not satisfied with the in-service training opportunities provided to them. They showed only slight agreement in this area.

4.3 School performance activities in government secondary schools of Konso zone

The actions being implemented in the secondary schools of Konso zone toward mobilization of the school community for better school performance were not as strong as they could have been. The poor performance reported in the Konso zone annual report for the year 2020/21 might be due to this. In very few schools, respondents reported that principals tried to motivate their teachers by identifying better performers through a portfolio and by recognizing them as role models at the end of the year. But this trend was not shared by all secondary schools and thus the majority of the teachers reflected weak agreement toward actions related to school performance.

As reflected by the respondents, some schools' weak follow-up is due to a lack of principals and vice principals. Most schools in the study area are led by principals without vice principals. This creates a burden on the school principal, weakening the follow-up of critical activities in the school. It is likely that this contributed to the low performance rating of the school observed in the report for the year 2020 academic year. In addition, respondents complained that some principals did not take strong enough measures against some misbehaving teachers, who came to school late, left before time, and did not prepare work sheets. This was also a reflection of weak management of the school system, including those at woreda or zonal offices.

4.4 Relationship between teachers' professional empowerment and performance of secondary schools in Konso zone

In the study conducted by Bhattacherjee (2012), the strength of the relation between the variables is considered very strong when the coefficient range is from 0.8 to 1.00, strong when the range is between 0.61 and 0.8, moderate for the range 0.41–0.60, weak if the coefficient is 0.21–0.40, and from 0.00 to 0.20 there is no relation. Hence, there exists a very significant positive correlation ($p < 0.01$; $R^2 > 0.8$) between the considerable variables in this study. The positive correlation between decision making and professional development suggests that, as teachers are empowered to develop their profession, they will become more critical thinkers and tougher in their decision-making. Based on the correlation status between in-service training and decision making ($p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.966$), it appears that as the teachers were given the opportunity to continue in-service training, they could share experiences on different aspects and become stronger in their decision making. On the other hand, the significant correlation between in-service training and professional development ($p < 0.01$; $R^2 = 0.829$) suggests that, as teachers get access to continuous in-service training, they will potentially improve their professional skills.

According to the correlation analysis results of teachers' empowerment and school performance activities, the results were similar to those of Imig et al. (2015) and Aliakbari and Amoli (2016), which found a significant positive correlation between teachers' empowerment and students' academic achievement. This suggests that teachers who perceive themselves professionally empowered are motivated to do their work, and can positively influence school performance. Furthermore, the relationship between the three dimensions of teacher professional empowerment and secondary school performance activities was also significant. According to the positive correlation between decision making and professional development, as more and more teachers are empowered to develop their profession, they will become more critical thinkers, more creative in their thinking, and more competent at making decisions.

This study also found that as there is a positive opportunity for in-service training, continuous professional development, and empowerment to actively participate in school decision making issues, the performance of schools will positively improve.

4.5 Predicting the effect of teachers' professional empowerment on school performance

The unstandardized coefficient for decision making (0.042) indicates that, as one unit increases in decision making of teachers, school performance increases by 0.042 unit controlling teachers' professional development and in-service training dimensions of teachers' personal empowerment. Similarly, the unstandardized coefficients for professional development and in-service training were 0.022 and 0.043, respectively. That means, for every one unit increase in in-service training, school performance activities rise0.043 units, controlling for professional development and decision making, and for every one unit increase in professional development, school performance activities rise by 0.022 units controlling for in-service training and decision making. This confirms a clear interdependence between the three dimensions of teacher empowerment examined in this study; involvement in decision making, professional development and in-service training opportunities, and school performance.

5 Conclusion

This study examined the effect of teachers' professional empowerment on school performance in government secondary schools in the Konso zone, Southern Ethiopia. In government secondary schools of Konso zone, even though appreciable things were observed with regard to teachers' professional empowerment, the actions were not implemented to the satisfaction of the teachers. Although not negligible, the involvement of teachers in decision-making processes in all secondary schools in Konso is very minimal and not satisfactory. The teachers' professional development opportunities offered for advancement in the skills and knowledge of teachers did not satisfy the actual needs of the teachers. Furthermore, teachers are not satisfied with the in-service training opportunities available to them.

With regard to school performance activities in the secondary schools of the study area the activities implemented were below the expectations of the teachers. This required further actions to be taken by the concerned educational administration including the principals. Findings of this study also revealed that there exists a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between school performance and involvement in decision making, in-service training and professional development. The regression analysis confirmed a clear positive interdependence between the variables considered in this study. A unit increase in teachers' professional empowerment was observed to bring a noticeable increment in school performance.

6 Limitations and future research

Similar to other studies, this study has its own limitations that need to be considered in future research. First, there are 10 secondary schools in the Zone. Due to serious financial limitations and challenging transport accessibility, this study focused only on the eight secondary schools in the study. So, future works should consider the unstudied secondary schools to have a clear picture of the issues of teachers' empowerment and its effect on school performance in all the secondary schools of the study area. Second, the like studies have to be extended to investigate the existing scenario in elementary and primary schools.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Arba Minch University Institutional Review Board. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

AT contributed to the conception and design of the study, performed the analysis, and wrote all drafts. SS contributed to reviewing and supervision. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1130113/full#supplementary-material

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