



Ethical leadership as a predictor of teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined ethical leadership as a predictor of teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted. population comprised 11,011 teachers in public secondary schools across the 25 Local Government Areas of Delta State. A sample of 551 teachers was selected using proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) and Teachers' Task Performance Questionnaire (TTPQ). The instruments were validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation, while reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded an overall coefficient of 0.750. Data were analysed using simple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance with the aid of SPSS version 27. The findings revealed that ethical leadership significantly predicted teachers' task performance. Specifically, dimensions such as integrity, fairness, accountability, effective communication, participatory decision-making, and professional conduct positively influenced teachers' effectiveness in carrying out instructional and school-related responsibilities. The study concluded that ethical leadership is essential for improving teachers' task performance in public secondary schools. It was therefore recommended that principals should uphold ethical standards, encourage participatory leadership practices, and maintain transparent communication to enhance teachers' effectiveness and overall school productivity.

1. Introduction

Education is the fundamental basis for effective development of individuals and nations. It is a means for providing solutions to the problems of the society. The levels of education in Nigeria are primary, secondary and tertiary. Secondary education is a very important level of education. It acts as a bridge between primary education and tertiary institutions of learning. The aim of secondary education is to prepare young learners for admission into tertiary institutions of learning or for acquisition of skills and knowledge that will help them to live harmoniously and contribute positively in the society. The extent of the achievement of the goals of secondary education depends largely on teachers' task performance (Ikegbusi, 2016).

Teachers' task performance refers to all the responsibilities teachers carry out. Hwang et al. (2017) asserted that teachers' task performance are the actions they perform in schools in order to achieve educational goals. It is the extent of teachers' involvement in the realization of academic excellence and all round development of learners. Teachers' task performance is their commitment in the discharge of their duties at any given time in the school directed towards achieving the daily classroom, school and entire goals of education (Ezeugbor et al., 2018). This means that teachers' task performance and the realization of educational goals go hand in hand because teachers' task

performance to a very large extent determines the learning outcome of students. There are various ways of ascertaining teachers' task performance.

Teachers' task performance could be measured through the annual report of their activities in terms of teaching effectiveness, lesson preparation, mastery of subject matter, competence, commitment to duty, supervision, monitoring of students' work, motivation, class control, and disciplinary ability (Udemba, 2021). It can also be assessed through teachers' engagement in instructional and administrative responsibilities such as lesson planning, coverage of scheme of work, classroom delivery, participation in extracurricular activities, punctuality, attendance, staff meetings, and execution of duties assigned by school administrators (Nwanga & Amaikwu, 2020). In support of this view, Ikegbusi et al. (2022) emphasized that administrative effectiveness and the reduction of administrative deficiencies significantly enhance teachers' job achievement in public secondary schools, while Ikegbusi et al. (2025) further established that principals' leadership styles significantly influence school administrative effectiveness, which in turn shapes teachers' performance outcomes. Teachers are therefore expected to perform their tasks effectively to ensure the attainment of educational goals.

There seem to be lapses in teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. This is evidenced in their display of non-challant attitude towards instructional delivery, teaching without adequate instructional materials, absenteeism from school, coming to school late, leaving the school without permission before dismissal, non-covering of the curriculum content, giving students notes that are not updated, lack of interest in students' discipline and so on. The researcher made this observation as a teacher who have worked in different public secondary schools in Delta State. There lapses in teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State could be as a result of absence of ethical leadership and proper conflict management strategies.

Ethical leadership is a type of leadership desired in different organizations including the school. Ethical leaders are role models who set the example for their subordinates to follow. Imran and Akhtar (2023) opined that ethical leadership is the style of leadership that prioritizes ethical principles, values, and behaviours in decision-making and action. Ethical leadership involves leaders making decisions based on the right thing to do for the common good of all in an organization. Almandeel and Dawood (2019) defined ethical leadership as the act where the leader shows trust, dignity, honesty and consideration toward the followers. Ethical leadership has been recognized as an important factor for organizational effectiveness, educational improvement and conflict management in schools (Maha & Igbiniedion, 2017; Maha, 2025).

There are various components of ethical leadership. Mseti et al. (2023) maintained that the components of ethical leadership include ethical guidance, power sharing, integrity, communication, fairness, decision making, role clarification, accountability and people orientation. Shakeel et al. (2020) listed the components of ethical leadership to include power sharing, role clarification, professional development, decision-making, rewards, establishing organizational culture and mentorship. The interest of this study was on decision-making, communication, professional development and rewards. Effective communication and continuous professional development have been identified as important elements for improving educational and workplace performance (Onyiorah, 2021; Okoro et al., 2025).

Decision-making is an important practice of leaders. Every leader is expected to direct the affairs of the organization effectively through decision-making. Elele (2020) maintained that decision-making is an outcome of mental or cognitive processes which lead to the selection of a course of action among a handful of available alternatives. Ethical leaders need to consider the ethical consequences of their decisions and make principled and fair choices that can be observed and emulated by others (Kaduma, 2024). Decision-making in ethical leadership involves taking the right course of action for value judgments. In secondary schools, principals as leaders are faced with ethical issues in daily school activities and there is need for them to take the right decisions. Such decisions should also take cognizance of the diverse backgrounds and needs of members of the school community (Maha & Morrison, 2017; Onyiorah, 2023).

Decision-making by ethical leaders can be done using different methods. Manolis and Konstantina (2017) maintained that avoidance, intuitive, dependent, rational and spontaneous are

the various ways decisions can be made. Avoidance decision-making is intentionally neglecting or delaying decision-making. The reason for using avoidance method of decision-making could be because the issue is trivial and does not need to be handled immediately. Intuitive decision-making involves ethical leaders relying on their experience, subconscious mind and instincts to make decisions. It is the fast and holistic weighing of alternatives based on recognition of connections from past experiences. Dependent decision-making has to do with relying on ideas of others when choosing the best course of action among alternatives. Rational decision-making involves taking time to study or weigh the consequences of various alternatives before deciding on the best option to make. Spontaneous decision-making involves choosing among alternative courses of action without wasting time. The main objective of making ethical decisions by ethical leaders is for the realization of set goals. Principals as leaders in secondary schools should take their time to make fair decisions for best results (Ohamobi & Onyekazi, 2021). Principals as leaders in public secondary schools should promote teaching and learning effectively.

It is disheartening to note that some principals in public secondary schools in Delta State seem not to involve teachers while making important decisions concerning teaching and learning, yet they are expected to embark on the outcome of such decision. This could make them to feel unsatisfied. When teachers feel neglected and unhappy, they may not put in their best when discharging their duties in the school and this could result in decline in their task performance. Ethical leadership in schools involves making ethical decisions and communicating such to others. Principals as leaders need to make sure that the acceptable norms, values, believe system or the organizational ethics are communicated to all in the school.

Communication is the passing of information from one person to another. Communication is the process of converging information, instruction, advice, feelings, opinions, and facts correctly and accurately from one person to another person or group of people (Okechukwu & Oputa, 2021). Good communication in school could help to stimulate enthusiasm and boost the interest and motivation of those to whom they are directed. Communication is the process of creating and exchanging ideas, feelings, thoughts and information. Sdeeq et al. (2021) stressed that communication is a method of disseminating and receiving information in an organization. Ethical leaders are expected to set the example for the rest of the company and expect their actions and words to be respected and followed with the same convictions from their staff; therefore, there is need for them to make sure that the correct norms are communicated to all. In the context of the school, principals need to ensure that teachers are aware of the expectations of society from the school and the acceptable ways of carrying out teaching and learning activities. The increasing adoption of digital and distance learning approaches has further highlighted the importance of effective communication in educational settings (Onyiorah, 2022). Thus, the achievement of the communicated school goals to teachers could be enhanced in this dynamic and technology-driven environment if teachers are provided opportunities for professional development.

Professional development is the process of improving teachers' knowledge and skills. Obi et al. (2024) defined staff development as an ongoing process which helps teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge to contribute more effectively towards the attainment of school goals. This means that the task performance of teachers could be improved through professional development. Ikegbusi et al. (2018) asserted that professional development is the process through which teachers improve on their learning, how they learn and how they apply their newly acquired knowledge in practice. Professional development is a process of providing support for the growth and development of teachers in the teaching profession. The society where school activities are carried out is dynamic; hence, there is need for teachers to learn new skills in order to keep abreast with current trends in education. Recent studies have shown that continuous skill development enhances employability competencies and job readiness in the contemporary world of work (Onyiorah, 2025; Onyiorah, 2026). Professional development can take place in formal settings such as conferences, courses, seminars, and workshops, but it can also take place in informal settings such as independent research, peer learning, or even just chatting with a colleague in the staff room (Kampen, 2019). Professional development of teachers could take place in activities such as orientation sessions, professional network associations, workshops, seminars, short courses or long upgrading courses related to improving the knowledge and skills of teachers (Ikegbusi, 2018). The researcher observed that many principals do not give enough time and resources for professional development of teachers

in public secondary schools in Delta State. Apart from principals providing opportunities for professional development for teachers, there is need for them to reward all contributions.

Rewards are ways of compensating behaviour. It is the process of demonstrating acceptance for a good behaviour or contribution or rejecting a bad behaviour or contribution. Francis et al. (2020) defined rewards as anything that extrinsically or intrinsically reinforced, which an individual receives for the service offered or as a result of the work done. Rewards are driving force for action. Odejimi and Mbaegbu (2023) stressed that rewards are the multiple motivation tools employers use to motivate their employees. Principals as managers and leaders in secondary schools can use rewards to encourage teachers by showing recognition of their outstanding task through various means (Ohamobi & Anasiudu, 2025). Rewards can be financial, non-financial, intrinsic or extrinsic. Rewards can also be in form of praise, recognition, little token, recommendations for promotion (Ewim, 2020). Rewards need to be structured to effectively cater for the well-being of teachers. Some teachers would like to leave the teaching profession if another alternative is available. Some are not performing their task zealously as a demonstration of their love for their job as observed by the researcher. This show of poor task performance could probably be due to the poor rewards they receive for the efforts they contribute for the development of young learners through teaching and learning

The important role teachers' play in secondary education cannot be over emphasized. They are important channels for delivering the curriculum content and inculcating the right values and attitude in young adults. Observation by the researcher revealed that teachers task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State seems poor. Some of them come to school late and leave before school dismissal mostly without permission, they teach without instructional materials and care less about students' discipline, some quarrel among themselves at the close watch of student, they do not update their lesson notes and disobey the school rules and regulations. If teachers' task performance is poor, students learning outcome will decline. Poor students' learning outcomes in public secondary school in Delta State will equally affect the school, families and the society negatively. Hence, there is need for the determination of the reason for poor teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. Poor teachers' task performance could be as a result of different factors such as; family influence, stress, poor students' attitude to learning, work overload, the leadership style of the principals and so on. It is based on this background that the researchers examined ethical leadership as a predictor of teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

Despite the central role of teachers in the attainment of educational goals, there are persistent concerns regarding teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Observable lapses include poor instructional delivery, inadequate use of instructional materials, absenteeism, lateness to school, unauthorized absence, failure to cover curriculum content, outdated lesson preparation, and weak classroom discipline practices. These shortcomings suggest a decline in professional commitment and effectiveness in the discharge of teaching responsibilities. The researchers' classroom-based observations across several public secondary schools in Delta State further indicate that these challenges may be associated with multiple factors such as inadequate school facilities, excessive workload, poor study habits among students, family-related influences, and weak administrative or leadership practices, particularly ethical leadership within the school system. The implications of poor teachers' task performance are far-reaching. Ineffective instructional delivery and weak student guidance undermine the quality of learning outcomes, reduce students' preparedness for higher education, and potentially contribute to broader societal challenges due to inadequate skill and value acquisition. Consequently, addressing the determinants of teachers' task performance becomes imperative for improving educational quality and outcomes. Against this background, this study investigated ethical leadership, specifically decision-making, communication, professional development and reward systems as predictors of teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria.

The main purpose of this study was to examine ethical leadership as a predictor of teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. Specifically, the study examined the predictive value of decision-making, communication, professional development, and rewards on teachers' task performance. In line with these objectives, the study was guided by research questions that sought to determine the extent to which decision-making, communication, professional

development, and rewards predict teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. The study also tested the hypotheses that decision-making, communication, professional development, and rewards are not significant predictors of teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State

2. Method

This study adopted a correlational research design, which is appropriate for determining the predictive relationships among variables. Correlational design, according to Ikegbusi (2022:269) examines the extent of association between two or more variables. In this study, it was employed to determine the predictive value of ethical leadership on teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria.

The population comprised 11,011 teachers in public secondary schools across the 25 Local Government Areas of Delta State (Ministry of Secondary Education, Asaba, 2025). Teachers were selected as respondents because they are directly involved in instructional delivery and are best positioned to provide valid information on leadership practices and task performance.

A sample of 551 teachers, representing approximately 5% of the population, was drawn for the study. The sample size was guided by Obi et al. (2022) which recommends 5% for populations in the several thousands. A multistage sampling procedure was employed. Stratified sampling was used to group schools according to the 25 Local Government Areas, while proportionate stratified random sampling ensured fair representation across strata. Simple random sampling was then used to select teachers from the sampled schools.

Data were collected using two researcher-developed instruments: the Ethical Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) and the Teachers' Task Performance Questionnaire (TTPQ). The ELQ consisted of two sections. Section A captured demographic information, while Section B contained 40 items across four clusters measuring decision-making, communication, professional development and rewards. The TTPQ comprised 20 items assessing teachers' task performance. Both instruments were structured on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Face and content validity were established by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation from Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus. Their inputs guided the refinement of the instruments to ensure clarity, relevance and adequacy.

The instruments were trial-tested on 30 teachers in Edo State, selected due to its similarity in secondary school administration to Delta State. The trial data were used to determine internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability coefficients obtained were 0.620 (decision-making), 0.830 (communication), 0.741 (professional development), 0.752 (rewards) and 0.781 (teachers' task performance), with an overall average reliability coefficient of 0.750.

Data collection was carried out with the assistance of five research assistants. They were briefed on ethical data collection procedures, including effective communication and professional conduct. Permission was obtained from school principals prior to questionnaire administration, and respondents were provided with introductory letter explaining the purpose of the study. The on-the-spot completion and retrieval method was adopted to ensure a high response rate, supplemented with follow-up visits. Out of the 551 questionnaires distributed, 534 were successfully retrieved, representing a 96.91% response rate, while 17 (3.09%) were not returned despite follow-up efforts.

Data collected for the study were analysed using simple regression analyses to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses. The strength of prediction was interpreted using the coefficient of correlation (r), in line with Creswell and Creswell (2022), as follows: 0.00–0.30 (weak prediction), 0.31–0.69 (moderate prediction), 0.70–0.89 (strong prediction), and 0.90–1.00 (very strong prediction). All null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. A null hypothesis was rejected when the p -value was less than or equal to 0.05, and retained when the p -value was greater than 0.05. Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

3. Results and Discussion

The predictive value of decision-making on teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was examined using simple regression analysis. As shown in Table 1, the analysis determined the amount of variation in teachers' task performance that could be predicted by decision-making among public secondary school teachers in Delta State.

Table 1. Simple Regression Analysis of the Amount of Variation of Teachers' Task Performance Predicted by Decision-Making in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change R ² Change	Statistics F Change	df ₁	df ₂	Sig. F Change
1	0.111 ^a	0.012	0.010	5.785	0.012	6.583	1	532	0.011

a. Predictor: (constant), decision-making

Table 1 revealed the regression analysis of the amount of variation in teachers' task performance that was predicted by decision-making. The result showed that when the responses of the decision-making were correlated with teachers' task performance, a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.111 with associated coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.012 were obtained. This coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.012 revealed that 1.2% variation of teachers' task performance can be predicted by decision-making.

The predictive value of communication on teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was examined using simple regression analysis. As presented in Table 2, the analysis determined the amount of variation in teachers' task performance that could be predicted by communication among public secondary school teachers in Delta State.

Table 2. Simple Regression Analysis of the Amount of Variation of Teachers' Task Performance Predicted by Communication in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change R ² Change	Statistics F Change	df ₁	df ₂	Sig. F Change
1	0.075 ^a	0.006	0.073	5.784	0.012	6.583	1	532	0.021

a. Predictor: (constant), communication

Result from Table 2 showed the regression analysis of the amount of variation in teachers' task performance that was predicted by communication. The result revealed that, a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.075 with associated coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.006 was obtained. This coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.006 revealed that 0.6% variation in teachers' task performance can be predicted by communication.

The predictive value of professional development on teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was examined using simple regression analysis. As presented in Table 3, the analysis determined the amount of variation in teachers' task performance that could be predicted by professional development among public secondary school teachers in Delta State.

Table 3. Simple Regression Analysis of the Amount of Variation of Teachers' Task Performance Predicted by Professional Development in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change R ² Change	Statistics F Change	df ₁	df ₂	Sig. F Change
1	0.064 ^a	0.004	0.062	5.819	0.004	0.295	1	532	0.042

a. Predictor: (constant), professional development

Table 3 depicted the regression analysis for the amount of variation in teachers' task performance that was predicted professional development. The result revealed that when the responses of respondents on professional development were correlated with teachers' task performance, a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.064 with associated coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.004 were obtained. This coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.004 denoted that 0.4% variation in teachers' task performance can be predicted by professional development.

The predictive value of reward on teachers' task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was examined using simple regression analysis. As presented in Table 4, the analysis

determined the amount of variation in teachers’ task performance that could be predicted by reward among public secondary school teachers in Delta State.

Table 4. Simple Regression Analysis of the Amount of Variation of Teachers’ Task Performance Predicted by Reward in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change R ² Change	Statistics F Change	df ₁	df ₂	Sig. F Change
1	0.125 ^a	0.016	0.013	5.820	0.016	6.789	1	532	0.002

a. Predictor: (constant), reward

Table 4 revealed the regression analysis for the amount of variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by reward. The result indicated that when the responses of respondents on reward were correlated with teachers’ task performance, a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.125 with associated coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.016 was obtained. This coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.016 indicated that 1.6% variation in teachers’ task performance can be predicted by reward.

The significance of decision-making as a predictor of teachers’ task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was tested using regression ANOVA. As presented in Table 5, the analysis examined whether the variation in teachers’ task performance predicted by decision-making was statistically significant.

Table 5. Regression ANOVA Test of Significance for the Variation in Teachers’ Task Performance that Can be Predicted by Decision-Making in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	220.258	1	220.258	6.583	0.011	Significant
	Residual	17800.993	532	33.461			
	Total	18021.251	533				

Dependent variable: teachers’ task performance

Predictor: (constant), decision-making

Table 5 showed that the variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by decision-making was significant (F (1,532) = 6.583, p = 0.011). This associated probability value of 0.011 when compared with 0.005 level of significance at which the hypothesis was being tested was found to be significant because 0.011 was less than 0.005. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there was a significant variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by decision-making in public secondary schools in Delta State. In other words, decision making is a significant predictor of teachers’ task performance

The significance of communication as a predictor of teachers’ task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was tested using regression ANOVA. As presented in Table 6, the analysis examined whether the variation in teachers’ task performance predicted by communication was statistically significant.

Table 6. Regression ANOVA Test of Significance for the Variation in Teachers’ Task Performance that Can be Predicted Communication in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	101.572	1	101.572	3.015	0.021	Significant
	Residual	17919.679	532	33.684			
	Total	18021.251	533				

Dependent variable: teachers’ task performance

Predictor: (constant), communication

Findings from Table 6 showed that the variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by communication was significant (F (1,532) = 3.015, p = 0.021). The null hypothesis was rejected because the associated probability value of 0.021 was less than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is a significant variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by communication in public secondary schools in Delta State.

The significance of professional development as a predictor of teachers’ task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was tested using regression ANOVA. As presented in Table 7, the analysis examined whether the variation in teachers’ task performance predicted by professional development was statistically significant.

Table 7. Regression ANOVA Test of Significance for the Variation in Teachers’ Task Performance that Can be Predicted by Professional Development in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	9.977	1	9.977	0.295	0.042	Significant
	Residual	18011.274	532	33.856			
	Total	18021.251	533				

Dependent variable: teachers’ task performance

Predictor: (constant), professional development

Result from Table 7 revealed that the variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by professional development was significant ($F(1, 532) = 0.295, p = 0.042$). This meant that the associated probability value of 0.042 was found to be significant because 0.042 was less than 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, professional development was a significant predictor of teachers’ task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State.

The significance of reward as a predictor of teachers’ task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State was tested using regression ANOVA. As presented in Table 8, the analysis examined whether the variation in teachers’ task performance predicted by reward was statistically significant.

Table 8. Regression ANOVA Test of Significance for the Variation of Teachers’ Task Performance that Can be Predicted by Reward in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	0.069	1	0.069	7.450	0.002	Significant
	Residual	18021.182	532	33.874			
	Total	18021.251	533				

Dependent variable teachers’ task performance

Predictor: (constant), reward

Table 8 revealed that the variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by reward was significant ($F(1, 532) = 7.450, p = 0.002$). This associated probability value of 0.002 when compared with 0.005 level of significance was found to be significant because 0.002 was less than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected and conclusion was that there is a significant variation in teachers’ task performance that was predicted by reward in public secondary schools in Delta State.

3.1. Decision-Making and Teachers’ Task Performance

The findings revealed that decision-making accounted for 1.2% of the variance in teachers’ task performance and significantly predicted teachers’ task performance in public secondary schools in Delta State. Although the explained variance is relatively small, it indicates that participatory decision-making contributes meaningfully to teachers’ effectiveness within a complex set of influencing factors. The significance of this relationship confirms that teachers’ involvement in school-level decision-making enhances ownership, motivation, and professional commitment, which translate into improved task performance. This finding aligns with Offor and Obiekwe (2024), who reported that principals’ decision-making behaviour significantly predicts teachers’ job performance. However, it contrasts with Atta et al. (2021), who found that decision-making styles did not significantly influence employee performance outcomes. The implication is that inclusive decision-making structures remain critical in strengthening teachers’ engagement and instructional effectiveness.

3.2. Communication and Teachers’ Task Performance

Communication accounted for 0.6% of the variance in teachers’ task performance and was a statistically significant predictor. This indicates that effective communication within the school system, such as clarity of instructions, timely feedback, and open interaction channels, enhances

teachers' understanding of expectations and improves task execution. This finding is consistent with Okotoni and Akinwale (2019), who established that principals' communication styles significantly predict teachers' job performance. Conversely, Sdeeq et al. (2021) reported that communication effectiveness alone was not a strong determinant of performance outcomes in some educational settings. Despite this, the present result underscores communication as a functional leadership tool that supports coordination, reduces ambiguity and strengthens instructional effectiveness.

3.3. Professional Development and Teachers' Task Performance

The results showed that professional development accounted for 0.4% of the variance in teachers' task performance and significantly predicted teachers' task performance. This suggests that continuous capacity-building opportunities contribute to improved instructional competence, classroom management, and pedagogical effectiveness. This finding is supported by Agbajeola and Hassan (2023), who reported that professional development significantly enhances teachers' job performance. However, Douglas (2020) argued that professional development alone may not significantly improve workplace performance without supportive organizational conditions. The implication is that structured and continuous training remains essential for enhancing teachers' adaptability and instructional quality.

3.4. Reward System and Teachers' Task Performance

The findings revealed that reward accounted for 1.6% of the variance in teachers' task performance and significantly predicted teachers' task performance. This indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems contribute to teachers' motivation and effectiveness, although the magnitude of influence remains modest. This result agrees with Juma et al. (2023), who found that reward systems significantly influence teachers' performance and commitment. In contrast, Emejulu (2020) reported that reward systems did not significantly predict performance in some organizational contexts. The implication is that fair and consistent reward structures, such as recognition, promotion and incentives, improve teachers' commitment and instructional productivity.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that ethical leadership plays an important role in improving teachers' task performance in public secondary schools. When principals apply fairness in decision-making, communicate effectively, support teachers' professional development, and implement equitable reward practices, teachers become more committed, motivated, and productive in carrying out their duties. Therefore, principals should strengthen participatory decision-making, maintain clear and timely communication, support continuous professional development, and apply fair reward systems to enhance teachers' competence, commitment, and overall school effectiveness.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors in this publication declare no conflict of interest regarding the title, data, location, and results of the research.

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Supplementary Materials

This study does not include any supplementary materials.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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