Teachers' Sense of Autonomy and their Work Motivation in Selected Secondary Schools in Oromia Regional State

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of teachers' sense of autonomy and its association with their work motivation in some selected secondary schools in Ethiopia. In this mixed methods research, data were gathered from 95 teachers with a questionnaire and 5 teachers with semi-structured interview guide from three secondary schools in the Oromia region, Ethiopia. T-test, one-way ANOVA, and thematic descriptions were used for data analysis. The result indicated that the perceived level of teacher autonomy as measured along two dimensions (general autonomy and curriculum autonomy) seemed to be low. Teachers' sense of autonomy was associated positively with their work motivation. External interference (e.g., imposed teaching approaches that ignore teachers' decisions and too many routine activities imposed on the teachers) was prevalent. Hence, teachers feel that they are powerless to decide what they have to do at school. This might hinder them from involving actively, confidently, creatively, and with motivation in their teaching activities. The implications of these and other findings of the study were identified and suggestions for further research were forwarded.

Keywords: *Teacher autonomy, General autonomy, Curriculum autonomy, Work motivation.*

Introduction

The notion of teacher autonomy in Ethiopia has its origin in traditional education. A study conducted by Amare (2007) indicated that though the principle of academic freedom has been known in traditional education, it has not been strongly institutionalized in modern education, particularly in higher education. Along the same line, a recent study by Ambissa and Begna (2021) on teacher identity development proposed in-depth studies on teacher autonomy in Ethiopian schools for it is under-researched and does not get proper attention in educational reforms. No doubt, teacher autonomy is one of the critical bottlenecks in educational provisions. Pearson and Moomaw (2006) and Fadaee et al. (2021) argued that teacher autonomy affects the standards of education and plays a significant role in solving school problems.

Of course, autonomy is a widely used concept in education, law, moral and political philosophies, and other known fields (Wermke & Salokangas, 2015). While its meaning differs based on the perspective from which it is seen, in this study the term 'freedom' is used to describe autonomy. According to the self-determination theory, autonomy is considered as

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governance by the self (Ryans & Deed, 2006). For these writers, this is the opposite of heteronomy, which refers to being under the sway of another or influenced by a force outside the individual. As to Hargreaves (2000), autonomy puts a demarcation line between professional and proletarian work. That is why autonomy is taken as one of the core attributes of a profession.

In education, the known forms of autonomy are teacher autonomy, learner autonomy, school autonomy, and principal autonomy (Wermke & Salokangas, 2015). Among these, teacher professional autonomy or simply teacher autonomy is the focus of this study, though these constructs are interrelated. Based on the unique nature of the teaching profession, teacher autonomy can be viewed in two ways (Paradis, 2019). Firstly, it is conceptualized as individualistic, which is considered a traditional one. It views teachers as isolated working entities. This view overlooks the social and institutional relationships and interdependencies present in teachers' work. Based on this scenario, teacher autonomy can be defined as:

> *the degree to which teaching provides substantial freedom, independence, power, and discretion to participate in scheduling, selecting, and executing administrative, instructional, and socialization and sorting activities both in the classroom and in the school organization at large* (Gwaltney in Pradis 2019: 47).

Secondly, teacher autonomy is viewed as a relational one. This is the recent conceptualization where the important connectivity found in the work of teachers is considered. In this view, teacher autonomy is founded on social and institutional supportive relationships as well as the teachers' genuine opportunities to make autonomous decisions (Pradis, 2019). The present study tends to adapt more of the first conception (i.e. freedom from control) while it is very difficult to claim that it excludes the second conception. It leans much towards the first conception because its principal purpose is to assess the perceived level of teacher autonomy which needs individual teachers' assessment of their autonomy. Besides, this individual conception of teacher autonomy is a basis for the relational one. As Pradis (2019) indicated, though relational autonomy is associated with support relationships - which is out of the scope of this study- it is also founded on whether teachers are free to make autonomous decisions. Hence, the focus of this study is more on teachers' freedom and power in their activities related to classroom instruction. Accordingly, the leading definition of teacher autonomy for this study is described as the degree of professional freedom teachers have in classrooms to make instructional decisions (Fachrurrazi, 2017; Moomaaw, 2005).

Accordingly, two types of autonomy for teachers, i.e. general autonomy and curriculum autonomy (Haapaniemi et al, 2020), which are closely related to teachers' immediate and day-to-day task, are considered. For these writers, general autonomy deals with issues related to classroom standards of conduct and personal on–the–job discretion. It includes elements concerned with the control of activities generally considered to be part of teachers' teaching responsibilities, including teaching approaches, assessment and the teacher's freedom in the use of space and time. In addition, it involves their freedom to participate in decisions related to their job in general. And, curriculum autonomy deals with teachers' freedom to participate in decisions related to curriculum planning and development such as the selection of activities,

contents, goals, objectives and materials as well as instructional planning and sequencing. It includes points related to the independence of having one's guidelines and procedures, participating in selecting contents, skills, goals, objectives and sequencing them, and choosing materials (Moomaw, 2005). Of course, it is possible to see that all these activities indicated in both aspects of teacher autonomy are intertwined. However, having the sense of autonomy in one's job in general (general autonomy) and having the feeling of freedom to participate in deciding curricular issues (curriculum autonomy) are two different things. Hence, these two aspects of teacher autonomy are used to assess teacher autonomy in this study.

It is indicated that autonomous teachers do their tasks more effectively and conveniently than non-autonomous teachers (Sehrawat, 2014). Teachers who enjoy a significant level of autonomy can create a suitable learning environment that meets learners' needs (Sehrawat, 2014). Besides, students need to be provided the freedom to learn independently and from one another (Ambissa, 2009; Sukowati et al., 2020). And, the teacher should support his/her students to participate in decision-making and to develop important skills including self-regulated learning (Yalew, 2004). Yet, as Lamb (2008) argued, all these efforts to make learners be autonomous in their learning need teacher autonomy.

Despite its importance, many scholars (e.g. Robertson, 1996; Berry, 2012; Paradis, 2019) believe that recently teacher autonomy has been eroded due to many reasons. For Berry (2012), the reason for the erosion of professional autonomy is due to the growth of marketization and the emergence of a highly competitive marketplace for education. Another reason, according to Robertson (1996), might be that teachers are considered a special target for control due to their vital role in producing society's knowledge and labor power. Others argue from the vantage point of balancing autonomy with control. For instance, Paradis (2019) stated that control in parallel with independence and freedom in teachers' tasks is important as it is the recurrent characteristic of teacher autonomy. In a related manner, Hargreaves, and Goodson (2003) contended that in this postmodern age, occupational heteronomy is more appropriate than self-protective autonomy.

From the arguments of these writers, it is possible to identify at least three reasons why they believe that teachers' autonomy is declining or being challenged at present: marketization, hegemonic control, and lack of trust in teachers' autonomy to bring about improvement in education. Contrary to this, in some education systems (e.g. in the Nordic tradition), teachers are trusted by their employers and their communities, respected for their knowledge, skills, and values, and trusted to value students' needs (Erss, 2017). Hence, they are given autonomy to make decisions on how best to establish and maintain a professional teaching pedagogy that enhances learning for their students (Darling-Hammond 2010). There are enough pieces of evidence that such education systems are doing well globally. According to Paradis (2019), when teachers are trusted and provided with a decisional opportunity as a policy or at their superiors' discretion, teachers' professionalism is enhanced, which substantially promotes a positive perception of their autonomy. Similarly, Parker (2015) strongly argued that autonomy

is considered as an essential element of teachers' work, and it plays a central role in teachers' engagement with their job.

Teachers' job situation is a function of several generic constructs including work motivation. Work motivation is described as the forces that drive an individual to spend time, energy, and resources to initiate behaviors related to his/her work (Latham & Pinder, 2005 as cited in Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). According to Drnyei and Ushioda (2011), teacher motivation has two dimensions: motivation to teach and motivation to stay in the profession. While the former refers to the day-to-day act of the teacher; the latter refers to retention within the profession or continued attachment to the profession. According to de Jesus and Lens (2005), teacher motivation at school plays a significant role in enhancing student motivation, promoting educational reform, and enhancing the job satisfaction of the teachers. A study by Dixit (2022) indicated that teacher motivation has a positive association with student motivation. Literature indicated that there are associations between autonomy and this construct. For instance, according to Losos (2000) and Hoyle and John (1995) teachers who experience more autonomy feel more satisfied in their work, are more motivated, and feel more competent. On the other hand, teachers who perceive themselves as powerless to behave autonomously may become dissatisfied, possibly leaving the profession earlier than those who enjoy better autonomy (Lamb, 2000). For Smithers and Robinson (2003), the most significant impact of lack of autonomy is perhaps the high attrition rate among new teachers.

Studies related to teachers' autonomy have been conducted in different contexts, possibly with different purposes. According to Öztürk (2011) different reforms, particularly many of those that take efficiency as their starting point, reduced space for power exercise by teachers. The new era of public administration distributed power to other authorities (e.g. to states, principals, school markets, etc.) and minimized teacher autonomy (Lundstrom, 2015). However, a curriculum that emphasizes integrative teaching has enhanced teacher autonomy and collaboration in school (Haapaniemi, et al 2020). Research by Webb (2002) found that exercising autonomy at school provides an opportunity for teachers to alter curriculum and assessment policies. A study by Ingrid and Kathryn (2006) showed that textbooks are considered as important factor in facilitating teacher autonomy to plan curriculum. A study by Moloney (1997) indicated that the autonomy of the teacher can optimally facilitate the development of learner autonomy, and hence learning. Yet, the results of studies conducted on the benefits of teacher autonomy are not conclusively consistent. For instance, a study by Gurganious (2017) showed that there was no association between teacher autonomy and student science achievement scores. Similarly, a study by Pearson and Moomaw (2005) revealed that there was little association between curriculum autonomy and job satisfaction. Hence, one can observe that the results of the studies varied and were not conclusive. This calls for more local research to understand teacher autonomy in schools deeply in the Ethiopian context. Similarly, Wermke and Salokangas (2015) highlighted the importance of context when studying the autonomy of individuals or groups as it provides a better understanding of what autonomy really means. Besides, from a study on 'Strength of professional identity development among

secondary school teachers in Ethiopia,' it was learned that teachers' autonomy in the schools is under question which needs separate and further research (Ambissa & Begna, 2021). Moreover, several studies indicated that Ethiopian teachers lack satisfaction in their jobs (Berhanu, 2018; Desta, 2014; Yitbarek, 2007). Unfortunately, the association of the observed status of teachers' work motivation with teachers' autonomy was not examined to the best of the knowledge of the present researchers.

The Ethiopian education development roadmap (2018-2030) advocates learner-centered approach at all levels of schooling (Tirussew et al. 2018). Teachers who enjoy a significant level of autonomy can create a suitable learning environment and meet learners' needs (Sehrawat, 2014) which are important features of the learner-centered approach. This necessitates teachers at schools to enjoy autonomy to devise local means to ensure the engagement of their students in learning. According to a school policy/guideline presented by the Oromia Education Bureau (Biiroo Barnoota Oromia, 1998), teachers are responsible for achieving the objectives of the curriculum prepared at the regional/central level by actively involving students in their learning activities using various teaching methods and aids. They are expected to continuously assess student progress and monitor student behavior in the classroom. In addition, they are responsible for contributing constructive ideas to improve the working curriculum. However, the issue of teacher autonomy is vague in the roadmap and the Ethiopian Education Sector Development Program VI. More emphasis is given to institutional autonomy than teacher autonomy in these documents (Tirussew et al. 2018; Ministry of Education, 2021). Therefore, the researchers believe that teacher autonomy should be examined to gain better insight into it in the Ethiopian school context.

This article attempted to answer the following research questions:
  a. What is the level of teacher autonomy in the schools?
  b. What is the perceived level of teacher work motivation in the schools?
  c. What is the relationship between teachers' sense of autonomy and their work motivation?

Geographically, the study took place in three secondary schools in Western Oromia, specifically at Nekemte and Bedele Towns. Conceptually, the study examined teacher autonomy confined to general autonomy and curriculum autonomy as they are closely related to teachers' immediate and day-to-day tasks. Besides, among teachers' job situations, this study is limited to work motivation including both motivation to teach and motivation to stay in the profession.

Methods of the Study
The Research Design: The study employed a concurrent nested strategy under the umbrella of a mixed research approach (Cresswell, 2012). This particular research design allowed the researchers to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Both types of data (quantitative and qualitative) were treated equally in this study.

Participants: The target population comprises teachers currently teaching in three secondary schools in the Oromia region (Ethiopia). One school is from Nekemte town (East Wollega zone) and two are from Beddele town (Bunno Beddele zone). These schools were considered for the study as they are easily accessible for the researchers and the places were working sites of one of the researchers. Since, the number of teachers found in each school was manageable (e.g., school X =89; school Y =56; School Z = 39 teachers) the researchers decided to collect data from all teachers teaching in each school. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to the total number of teachers (i.e.120 teachers) who were available at the time of the school visit. Out of this, 95 (67 male and 28 female) filled in and returned the questionnaire. The interview was conducted with five teachers (two females and three males).

Instruments: A questionnaire with three parts was used to collect data for the study. The first part constituted teacher attribute variables (demographic information) and contained five items. The second part comprised teachers' professional autonomy with two sub-scales (general autonomy and curriculum autonomy). This part was adapted from a teacher autonomy scale developed by Moomaw (2005). The scales related to teacher autonomy contain a total of 18 items (Moomaw, 2005). A brief description of the teacher autonomy scale is provided below.

Teacher autonomy scale: The teacher autonomy questionnaire contains two important scales. The first is related to the General Autonomy scale. This scale contains twelve items. For example, it includes items such as "I am free to be creative in my teaching approach"; and "The selection of student-learning activities in my class is under my control". The second scale linked to the curriculum autonomy scale contains six items. For instance, it included items such as "In my teaching, I use my own guidelines and procedures."

Teachers' work motivation scale: the questionnaire contains five items targeted at identifying the work motivation of the respondents. These were prepared by the researchers based on a review of related literature. It contains items such as "I need to contribute to producing good and competent citizens;" and "I love my subject matter".

A five-point Likert-type scale used was designated as 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = undecided; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire (scales) was piloted on 40 teachers (grades 9 and 10) from two schools in Nekemte town. The primary goals of the pilot study were to analyze the clarity of the items and to further modify the items based on the findings. As a result, a few elements on the scales were modified (e.g., re-worded or re-phrased) in preparation for the major data collection. The reliability of the three tools was calculated using the split-half method. Accordingly, reliability coefficients of $\alpha = 0.67$ (for the teacher autonomy scale), $\alpha = 0.65$ (for the curriculum autonomy scale), and $\alpha = 0.69$ (for the teachers' work motivation scale) were found. According to Taber (2018), these alpha values can indicate reasonable or acceptable reliability.

Besides, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect the necessary data through discussion with selected teachers. The items in the interview guide were prepared to complement the items in the questionnaire.

Methods of Data Analysis: The data collected from these sources were sorted out and tallied. One sample t-test was used to test the perceived level of teachers' general and curriculum autonomy as well as work motivation. Pearson Correlation was used to test the relationship between teacher general autonomy and work motivation. SPSS-24 was used to analyze the quantitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The themes were identified based on the objectives of the study and from reading and re-reading the results of the interviews held with the teachers. The data from the interviews and the questionnaire were integrated under the identified themes (as found appropriate) for the purpose of the discussion.

Result

This section is devoted to the presentation of the findings through four sub-titles: teachers' perceived level of autonomy, teachers' perceived autonomy in terms of some attribute variables, teachers perceived level of work motivation and the relationship between teachers' work motivation and level of autonomy.

A. *Teachers' Perceived Level of Autonomy*

In gauging the level of teachers' professional autonomy based on the data collected, one of the challenges the researchers confronted was that they didn't come across any data/information from previous research that could serve as a test value against which the measurement of a good level of teacher autonomy is gauged. Hence, they had to set the reference following the rating scale presented to the teachers. Teachers were asked to rate their perceived level of autonomy in the schools along a five-point Likert-type scale. Taking four points (4) (out of the five scales categorized as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) as a minimum possible positive value and multiplying it with the number of indicators/items (12), 48 as a test value for general autonomy. A similar assumption is used throughout this report wherever a one-sample t-test was applied. Thus, a one-sample t-test of the perceived level of autonomy of the teachers in terms of the two dimensions (General Autonomy [GA] and Curriculum Autonomy [CA]) is organized as in Table 1:

Table 1: *One-Sample T-test on Teachers' Autonomy*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Test Value	t	P
GA	95	39.03	4.88	48	17.53	0.000
CA	95	20.40	2.92	24	12.04	0.000

General Autonomy (GA): is an aspect of teacher autonomy where teachers are expected to participate in classroom activities and on-the-job discretion (Pearson and Hall, 1993 as cited in Haapaniemi, et al 2020). It gears towards teachers' feeling of freedom on their job activities in general. Table 1 shows that in the comparison of the mean value of teachers' general autonomy (39.03) with the test value (48) there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers'

rating of their level of general autonomy and the test value (t = 17.93, df = 94, P = .000). Based on this result, it is possible to say that the teachers' general autonomy is at a low level.

Curriculum Autonomy (CA): This is another aspect of teacher autonomy where teachers are empowered with the capacity to select activities and materials for teaching, instructional planning, and sequencing (Pearson and Hall, 1993, as cited in Haapaniemi, et al., 2020). This aspect of teacher autonomy focuses on teachers' power to alter and minimize the total dependence on the prescribed curriculum. As described earlier, a list of six specific indicators/items were used to assess this along the five-point scale. Consequently, the test value will be the result of the product of 6 and 4, which results in 24. The result has been organized as in Table-1 and it shows the comparison of the mean value of teachers' curriculum autonomy (20.40) with the test value (24) using one-sample t-test. From the analysis it was learned that there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' rating of their level of curriculum autonomy and the test value (t = 12.04, df = 94, P = .000). This implies that the level of curriculum autonomy, as perceived by the teachers, is below what is expected to be. Based on this result one can conclude that teachers' curriculum autonomy is low.

Another test was also conducted using a one-sample t-test to see the cumulative form of rating for the two dimensions of teacher autonomy together to determine the level of teachers' autonomy. A total list of 18 specific indicators/items was used to assess the cumulative result of teacher autonomy on a five-point scale. Consequently, the test value will be the result of the product of 18 and 4, which results in 72. The result is organized in Table 2.

Table 2: *One-Sample t-test on the cumulative result of Teacher Autonomy (TA total)*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Test Value	t	p
TA total	95	59.43	5.74	72	21.36	0.000

The result presented using Table 2 shows that the cumulative mean value for teacher autonomy is significantly different from the test value (t=21.36, df =94, P=0.000) and lower. This implies that teachers, in general, feel that they are not autonomous in their profession.

From the qualitative data the following themes were identified:

(i) Imposed teaching approach
The teacher respondents indicated that they are urged to use a student-centered method when a supervisor comes. One of these respondents said:

> *When a supervisor comes, we will be urged to plan a student-centered approach to teaching without considering the content, purpose and other issues which are assumed to be factors affecting the methodological choices* (Teacher D from School Z; Age = 53; Experience = 32).

> *The Woreda Education Office dictates us to give multiple tests during a semester. This is checked from the student results register which every teacher is supposed to have. Therefore, we have to fill all that is needed before the supervisor's visit,*

whether or not that is professionally sound. (Teacher E from school X; Age 41; Experience = 22).

This implies that teachers are forced to use a teaching approach without considering their teaching context. They are not free to choose either the teaching method or how to assess their students' learning progress because the supervisor visits the school to check that teachers are doing their activities along the prescribed approaches. This could negatively impact teachers' confidence in choosing teaching methods based on the type of objectives and content they are teaching.

(ii) Too much work from bosses - routines
The interview result showed also that teachers are busy in doing routine activities (often not directly professional) given to them from 'the top'. For instance, one of the interviewees said:

> *We have been always reactive, responding to what others are loading on us. We are forced to complete many things coming from our bosses. We are too busy doing routine activities coming from administrators. We do not have time to be free and creative in our major activities. We do not feel well in terms of doing things freely and independently.* (Teacher A from school Z; Age 34; Experience = 11).

Another teacher added that tasks extra to teaching including, political activities are common at school. He said:

> *These politicians urge us to accomplish both the teaching and political tasks for them. You will become over and over busy. You accomplish many tasks outside the school, which is not related to your profession. The burden is on you, but the benefit is for them. We have almost forgotten that our main task is teaching* (Teacher E from school X; Age 41; Experience = 22).

This indicates that teachers spend most of their time performing non-teaching tasks and other routine activities at school – all of these are through imposition rather than through free professional choice.

(iii) Limited say on students' discipline matters
Teachers are unable to decide on students' discipline issues/problems in school. One of the interviewees said:

> *The teacher is not free to suggest and take corrective measures on issues related to the students. We do nothing when the students become out of the normal line. For example, if a student comes to class without doing homework, the teacher fears to take corrective measures on the student. If a teacher tries to take corrective action, the parent would come to school and shout at him/her. The school leaders do not want to protect the teacher in such cases. The students may bully the teacher or disturb the normal working of the whole class. The community out of school does not support teachers* (Teacher C from school Y; Age 44; Experience = 23).

Focusing on the same problem, another informant added:

> *We teachers cannot use our mechanisms to handle and manage our students' disciplinary problems at school. …. When we take any preventive and/or corrective measures, school leaders would call us to their office and warn us not to do that again. Even some parents come and insult us in front of our students. In addition, sometimes students might harass or even try to beat teachers out of the school compound. Hence, now I have begun to compromise mistakes committed by the students, as if I didn't see it, just to save my life* (Teacher D from School Z).

Therefore, teachers' roles in disciplining students using their mechanisms are very much limited at best and missing at worst. They are not autonomous in that respect.

(iv) Society does not respect teachers/teaching - low social status.

How society perceives teachers has an important impact on teachers' sense of independence and confidence as professionals. The informants have talked about this. For instance, a respondent said,

> *Society respects the name teaching profession because they know that it brings their children out of 'darkness,' as often said. But society's internal feelings do not reflect that. It is not an exaggeration if one says the society has forgotten teachers. One indicator is that society doesn't want its children to take up teaching as their career. The reason may not be necessary to mention here. There is a growing materialistic orientation among the society. There is an increasing tendency to interpret everything in terms of material return which is clear that teachers do not have much of that. This situation has made teachers not feel confident to participate and contribute in community affairs* (Teacher B from School X; Age 36; Experience = 14).

Another respondent underscored teachers' economic situation to strengthen the same idea:

> *After more than 20 years of teaching, I'm still living in a rented room often at the back of the houses of my students' parents or in their neighborhood. I do not have my own house. Then, how can I stand and teach in front of my students with confidence? I do not feel free. The place we have in the society is very low. The community does not give value to us. The students also assume that we have nothing* (Teacher C from school Y).

The weak social status and teacher poverty are likely to affect teachers' capacity to do things autonomously and confidently.

(v) Pressures connected to testing, assessment, and grading

An important area in the general autonomy of a teacher is connected to testing, assessing, and promoting or detaining students. The respondents indicated that several problems that shake teachers' autonomy are experienced in connection to these. Here are a few responses to these:

> *When we invigilate students at examinations, especially during national/regional examinations, bosses would call personally and urge us not to be very serious in the exam rooms. The community also directly or indirectly influences us to do the same. If not, the students will harm the teacher out of the class/school in groups. In general, teachers who do not allow cheating are the most hated in the community, especially among most of the students* (Teacher C from School Y).

This implies that teacher harm is prevalent in secondary schools. The teacher may be harassed and beaten by students just because he/she wants to demonstrate his/her professional integrity.

A related situation is an instance where teachers are urged to pass students without making sure that the students have achieved the required competencies. Here is a typical response:

> *Teachers are expected to make sure that their students pass to the next grade level freely. This simply means teachers will be urged to fill rosters/marks for their students and make them pass. Or they might be pressured to use different mechanisms through continuous assessment simply to make them pass to the next grade level. This contradicts one's desire for professional integrity.* (Teacher E from school X)

This may be taken as an important challenge to teachers' quest for professional autonomy.

In general, the qualitative data indicate that there is much interference in teachers' tasks by several bodies in and out of school, which makes them feel no freedom to exercise their profession. For instance, their freedom in using teaching approaches, deciding on students' disciplines, and in promoting/detaining students has been compromised by the school leaders. Teachers are heavily preoccupied with doing routine activities at school. Besides, teachers' low social status eroded their confidence and capacity to perform activities autonomously and confidently. From this one can learn that teachers are facing challenges that hinder them from exercising their professional tasks autonomously. It is generally observed that results from qualitative studies are consistent with those from quantitative studies.

B. *Teachers' Perceived Level of Work Motivation*

Teacher work motivation is described as the forces that drive an individual to spend time, energy and resources to initiate behaviors related to his work (Latham & Pinder, 2005, as cited in Karaolis & Philippou, 2019). Several factors in education, including student motivation, teaching activity, educational reform, and teachers' psychological satisfaction and well-being, are thought to be directly related to teacher motivation (Han & Yin, 2016). As described earlier, a list of five specific indicators/items was used to assess teachers' work motivation along the five-point scale. Consequently, the test value will be the result of the product of 5 and 4, which results in 20. As we did earlier, the one sample t-test was used to examine whether teacher respondents have a good level of perceived work motivation in the schools as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: *One-Sample T-test on Teachers' Work Motivation (WM)*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Test Value	t	P
WM	95	15.59	3.59	20	11.96	0.000

The result presented using Table 3 shows the comparison of the mean value of teachers' work motivation (15.59) with the test value (20) using the one-sample t-test. The analysis indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' rating of their level of motivation and the test value (t = 11.96, df = 94, P = .000). This implies that the level of work motivation, as perceived by the teachers, is below what it is expected to be. Based on this result one can say that the respondent teachers believed that their motivation for their work is low.

C. *The relationship between teachers' sense of autonomy and work motivation*

The correlation between the cumulative result of teacher autonomy (TA total) and Work Motivation (WM) was examined and presented as in Table 4 below.

Table 4: *Pearson Correlation (r) between teacher autonomy (TA) and work motivation (WM)*

	TA	WM
TA	1	0.289**
WM	0.289**	1

P** < 0.01

Note: 'TA' refers to teacher autonomy and 'WM' refers to work motivation

As shown here, the association teacher autonomy has with work motivation (r=0.289) was found to be positive and statistically significant. Table 4 shows that the correlation between teacher autonomy and work motivation is moderate (Evans, 1996). Accordingly, teacher autonomy has a moderate positive correlation with work motivation. This means that as long as teachers' professional autonomy is low (as presented in the above results), the teachers are more likely to have low work motivation.

Discussion

According to teachers' ratings, the perceived level of teacher autonomy is low. Similarly, the two dimensions of teacher autonomy considered in this study (i.e. general autonomy and curriculum autonomy) were examined separately, and both of them were found to be at a low level. This means, teachers think that they are not autonomous in both general and curriculum autonomy in school. They do not feel empowered to become creative or in devising new ways for their classroom activities as well as regarding curricular issues. The qualitative result also indicated that teachers are too busy in doing many routine activities given to them by different external bodies (e.g. school leaders, supervisors, local political leaders, etc.). This implies that much interference is there in the teachers' tasks in the schools. As a result, they don't get enough time to perform their professional activities freely and independently. This might also indicate that teachers are not feeling autonomous. This finding is different from a study that took place in Indonesia, which showed that most teachers attained moderate teacher work autonomy

(Fachrurrazi, 2017). The situation observed might be related to a series of packaged top-down reforms Ethiopia has been experiencing. The tendency of the centers (whether the center is the Federal government or the Regional one or its affiliates) to control what goes on in the schools might be behind such pressure over teachers' autonomy. This situation deserves careful attention if teachers are to practice their profession freely and creatively.

In addition, it is revealed that there is no support to the teachers both from the community and the local government. Hence, teachers feel isolated. But Paradis (2019) noted that if teachers enjoy supportive and trusting social relationships with parents, principals, and colleagues, and if they enjoy supportive institutional relationships with the general public, they could consider themselves autonomous in a relational sense. In turn, such teachers are said to be effective. Besides, it was found out that teachers felt that they are not autonomous in managing students' disciplinary issues, in using a teaching approach they think relevant (particularly during supervisory visits), and in promoting students from one grade to the next. However, according to Wilches (2007) and Pearson and Hall (1993) as cited in Haapaniemi, et al (2020), these tasks are activities over which teachers should exert control and involve actively in school. This finding is also different from a study conducted in many countries like Australia, England, Finland, etc. (though there is variation among them), where a large proportion of teachers in school enjoy a high level of autonomy in establishing students' disciplinary and assessment procedures, selecting the learning materials and content, approving students' admission and in allocating budgets (Freeman et al., 2014). As Paradis (2019) argued, a low level of teacher autonomy in practice and perception negatively affects the performances of the teachers.

An attempt was made to examine the association teacher autonomy has with their work motivation. The result indicated that teacher autonomy is moderately and positively correlated with this variable. This means that if teachers are autonomous in their work, then that is associated with their work motivation. This suggests that if teachers have a good level of autonomy in school, it is likely that they also have a good level of work motivation. This finding coincides with a result of a study by Paradis (2019) which showed that teachers who feel autonomous are more motivated. Moreover, Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013) noted that autonomy can be an important motivational factor for workers. Hence, teacher autonomy is positively and moderately associated with work motivation. This implies that additional variables need to be looked for to enhance the strength of teachers' work motivation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The result of this study showed that teachers' perceived autonomy is low and it is positively associated with teachers' work motivation. It is known that various measures were proposed in the new education development roadmap (Tirussew et al., 2018) to improve the situation of teachers as a mechanism to improve the quality of education. Incentive packages are among the most important ones. However, other than institutional autonomy not much attention has been given to individual autonomy of teachers as professionals. Hence, we suggest that there is a need to create a space for teacher autonomy in Ethiopia both at the policy and practice (school) level.

Teachers should be helped to enjoy a level of autonomy in the classroom activities (like, in deciding on assessment, evaluation, and disciplining of their students), curricular activities, and other administrative tasks. Unnecessary interferences by different stakeholders should be minimized, so that teachers might feel to be trusted and their actions are valued or respected. Darling-Hammond (2010) argued that teachers are given autonomy just to empower them in making decisions on how to maintain the professionalism of teaching through professional pedagogy that enhances students' learning. Therefore, teacher autonomy is important for the teacher, the learners as well as the profession. Under this general proposition, we would like to forward the following specific recommendations:

a. The issue of teacher autonomy needs to be problematized across the education system and be taken as a topic for discussion. The discussion on the matter at every level should include the teacher representatives, educational leaders (e.g. heads of district education), public administrators, and even the political parties. Among others, the focus of the discussion is advised to be on teacher accountability, professional trust, and the value of teachers' freedom of action.

b. Teacher autonomy should be given emphasis in school, teachers' roles and responsibilities must be respected, and extracurricular tasks should be kept to a minimum.

c. Teaching has to be freed from political interference. Teachers should be entitled to make their own choices and should not be assigned as political cadres for the governing parties.

d. Strengthen teachers' professional associations (unions) so that the associations are empowered to take up building the professional integrity of teaching and teachers as their important concerns.

e. Build harmony (and partnership) among members of the school community, namely school leadership, teachers, parent-teachers-student associations (PTSA), and individual parents. Such harmony should be promoted to strengthen the unity of purpose among the community - e.g. on the underlying purpose of controlling students' school activities.

f. Provide continued on-the-job professional development for teachers on teacher professionalism so that teachers themselves come to have a consolidated understanding of what they stand for as professionals.

g. Finally, we suggest that further research needs to be conducted on how to enhance the professional trust of teachers; teacher autonomy (including its other dimensions), and professional accountability at the school level in the Ethiopian context. Additional variables need to be looked for to enhance the strength of teachers' work motivation.

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Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
SS	17	58.94	8.374	2.031	54.28	62.89	45.00	77.00
NS	31	59.90	4.773	.858	58.99	62.49	53.00	73.00
MATHS	19	58.25	5.500	1.262	56.98	62.28	51.00	70.00
L	27	60.07	5.919	1.139	57.69	62.39	50.00	74.00
Total	94	59.29	5.970	.616	58.70	61.13	45.00	77.00