

The Moderating Effect of Compensation on the Relationship between Teachers Sense of Calling and Professional Commitment in Public Universities in Ethiopia

¹Zewdie Zakie Koyira <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2465-7998> OPEN ACCESS

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between teachers' sense of calling and professional commitment among teachers in Ethiopian public universities. Specifically, it investigated whether compensation moderates the relationship between teachers' sense of calling and professional commitment. The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design grounded in Work-as-Calling Theory, Organizational Commitment Theory, and Equity Theory. Data were collected from 540 teachers drawn from eight Ethiopian public universities using a multistage sampling technique. Standardized questionnaires were administered to measure teachers' sense of calling, professional commitment, and perceived compensation. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and moderation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1) were conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. The findings revealed relatively low levels of teachers' sense of calling, professional commitment, and perceived compensation. Teachers' sense of calling was positively and significantly associated with professional commitment, while compensation also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with professional commitment. Moderation analysis indicated that compensation significantly strengthened the relationship between teachers' sense of calling and professional commitment. The overall model explained 62.8% of the variance in professional commitment. Conditional effects analysis further demonstrated that the positive influence of teachers' sense of calling on professional commitment increased progressively from low to high levels of compensation. The findings suggest that strengthening teachers' intrinsic sense of calling alone may not be sufficient to enhance professional commitment unless supported by fair and adequate compensation systems. Policymakers, university leaders, and higher education administrators should develop comprehensive compensation policies alongside strategies that cultivate professional identity, recognition, and meaningful engagement to improve teachers' commitment and institutional performance. This study extends the literature by empirically demonstrating the moderating role of compensation in the relationship between teachers' sense of calling and professional commitment within the context of Ethiopian public universities. By integrating intrinsic and extrinsic motivational perspectives, the study contributes to organizational behaviour and higher education research and provides evidence for designing balanced human resource policies that foster sustainable professional commitment.

Keywords

Teachers' sense of calling;
Professional commitment;
Compensation;
Moderation; Public
universities; Ethiopia;
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Introduction

Teaching has historically been seen as a vocation driven by intrinsic motivations such as purpose, personal fulfilment, and social responsibility. Global research regularly reveals that

¹Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Public Management, Training Institute, Ethiopian Public Service University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, e-mail: zakiezawude@gmail.com OR koyiratumato@gmail.com

teachers who regard their job as a calling have higher levels of engagement, dedication, and satisfaction, especially in the context of limited extrinsic benefits (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). However, scholars have increasingly recognized that intrinsic motivation alone is not enough to ensure long-term professional commitment. In this context, adequate compensation, career development opportunities, and benefits are essential for motivation, retention, and performance (Day et al., 2006).

The public universities in Ethiopia have experienced rapid growth recently, leading to a great need for competent academic personnel. While many teachers start their profession with a strong vocational calling, issues such as heavy workloads, low pay, and inadequate career development options have affected negatively the commitment of the teachers to their profession (Abebe & Assemie, 2023; Alemayehu & Woldemariam, 2020). Development of the issue indicates that one must take into account compensation as an important variable in understanding the process through which TSC contributes to TPC.

Three theories underlie the study, namely: Work as Calling Theory (WCT), Organizational Commitment Theory (OCT), and Equity Theory (ET). The WCT theory states that when individuals perceive their work as a calling, the job becomes more significant to them; therefore, they engage more deeply with it (Duffy et al., 2018a). This perspective highlights those teachers with a strong sense of calling exhibit greater loyalty to their students, institutions, and society.

The research has been concentrated on three major constructs: teachers' sense of calling (TSC), teachers' professional commitment (TPC), and compensation. TSC is a strong belief that one's teaching is not only meaningful but also socially valuable, thus reflecting a strong intrinsic motivation. It is assessed by the teacher's sense of calling questionnaire formulated by Jain and Kaur (2021) which covers the aspects of service, satisfaction, and longevity. TPC represents teachers' willingness, dedication, and ethical engagement through five components: commitment to the profession, students, society, excellence, and human values (Ganjali et al., 2019). Compensation involves both monetary and non-monetary rewards, such as salary, benefits, and perceived fairness of remuneration (Mbah et al., 2021). Therefore, these three constructs form a model to analyze the influence of compensation in the relationship between TSC and TPC.

Numerous educators at Ethiopian public universities have their initial motivation for teaching coming from social responsibility and altruism, which is associated with a high level of one's calling. On the other hand, due to institutional problems such as meagre salary, delay of benefits, and limited opportunities for promotion, employees frequently lose their interest in their jobs (Abebe & Markos, 2016; Guyo, 2023). Engagement may decline over time if the employee is not adequately compensated despite the fact that there is still a high level of intrinsic motivation. As a result, remuneration either amplifies or dampens the effect of TSC on TPC.

The recent research shows that intrinsic motivation such as a high level of calling and meaningfulness of work can be seen as a key motivational factor that helps employees stay committed to their professional life regardless of their financial situation (Duffy et al., 2021;

Allan et al., 2023). On the other hand, there is a different point of view which is based on the idea that appropriate financial incentives are crucial for the development of professional commitment, and insufficient payment can lead to burnout, dissatisfaction with the job, and employee turnover (Berber & Gašić, 2024). Moreover, according to another viewpoint, a relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators exists, and, as a result, the impact of a high level of calling on professional commitment becomes even stronger under conditions of fair and adequate compensation.

Empirical research conducted in Ethiopia reinforces the significance of having a contextualized approach. Though empirical studies conducted in Ethiopia have not explored the moderating role of compensation on the relationship between calling and professional commitment, there is sufficient evidence that shows that factors like compensation, job satisfaction, organizational justice, and work conditions significantly influence employee commitment (Melkamu, 2023; Fantahun et al., 2023; Gollagari & Mishra, 2024). This implies that where employees have a feeling of calling, proper compensation and organizational practices can help them maintain professional commitment.

Statement of the Problem

In Ethiopia, the rapid expansion of public universities has not always been accompanied by proportional improvements in academic staff welfare. University lecturers often face low remuneration, rising cost of living, delayed incentives, high teaching loads, and lack of professional growth opportunities. While academics often join the profession with an idea of calling and willingness to serve the country in its development, such adverse working environments often result in a decreasing commitment to the profession on their part. As a result, there is staff turnover, decreased morale, poor research output, and difficulties in delivering quality education (Ayalew et al., 2024; Tessema & Soeters, 2022; Adanlawo et al., 2023).

There is a wide range of implications for institutions of higher learning and national development associated with these issues. The lack of professional commitment on the part of teaching staff in universities impacts the quality of instruction, the achievement of students, research activity, institutional efficiency, and the attraction of qualified educators. Ultimately, low faculty commitment impedes the capability of universities to develop well-prepared graduates who will be able to make an effective contribution to the socio-economic development of Ethiopia. Therefore, strengthening teachers' professional commitment has become an important policy and management priority for Ethiopian public universities (Okechukwu, 2025; Berber & Gašić, 2024).

The empirical literature on the subject highlights the impact of remuneration on employee motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and retention in various industries (Adanlawo et al., 2023; Berber & Gašić, 2024). While at the same time, contemporary literature shows that people who feel called to do something become more resilient, engaged in meaningful activities and commit professionally even when experiencing hard work (Duffy et al., 2021; Allan et al., 2023).

However, these two streams of research have been analyzed separately. There is very little empirical evidence on the effects of compensation either to reinforce or weaken the association between teachers' perception of vocation and professional commitment especially at Ethiopian public universities (Duffy et al., 2021; Allan et al., 2023; Berber & Gašić, 2024). Such an empirical gap raises issues not only from the theoretical perspective but also from the practical one. Without knowing how compensation affects professional commitment through the vocation of teachers, universities will keep applying ineffective human resource policies.

Nevertheless, these two streams of research have largely been examined independently. Very limited empirical evidence exists on whether compensation strengthens or weakens the relationship between teachers' sense of calling and teachers' professional commitment, particularly within Ethiopian public universities (Duffy et al., 2021; Allan et al., 2023; Berber & Gašić, 2024). Although Ethiopian studies have demonstrated that compensation, rewards, and quality of work life significantly influence academic staff commitment (Abebe & Assemie, 2023), and research on public universities has documented the level and dimensions of teachers' professional commitment (Koyira, 2023), these studies have examined the constructs separately rather than investigating the interaction between intrinsic motivation (sense of calling) and extrinsic rewards (compensation). Similarly, recent Ethiopian higher education studies have focused on organizational commitment through organizational and leadership factors, such as quality of work life, organizational culture, and transformational leadership, without considering whether compensation conditions the influence of teachers' sense of calling on their professional commitment (Abebe & Assemie, 2023; Gorfie, 2026).

Consequently, an important empirical gap remains regarding the boundary conditions under which teachers' sense of calling translates into stronger professional commitment. This gap presents both theoretical and practical concerns. Without understanding how compensation interacts with teachers' sense of calling to influence professional commitment, university leaders and policymakers may continue implementing human resource policies that fail to sustain faculty commitment, motivation, and retention in Ethiopian public universities.

Therefore, investigating the moderating role of compensation in the relationship between teachers' sense of calling and teachers' professional commitment is both timely and necessary. The findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based insights for improving compensation policies, strengthening faculty commitment, and enhancing the overall quality and sustainability of higher education in Ethiopia (Adanlawo et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2021; Allan et al., 2023).

Research Questions and Objective

The study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the level of TSC in Ethiopian public universities? 2) What is the level of TPC in Ethiopian public universities? 3) To what extent does compensation influence TPC in Ethiopian public universities? And 4) Does compensation moderate the relationship between TSC and TPC? The overall aim of this study is

to examine the moderating effect of compensation on the relationship between TSC and TPC in public universities in Ethiopia.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to theory, practice, and policy by advancing understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors jointly influence teachers' professional commitment in Ethiopian public universities. Theoretically, it integrates Work as Calling Theory, Organizational Commitment Theory, and Extrinsic Motivation Theory to provide a comprehensive framework for explaining the interaction between teachers' sense of calling and compensation in shaping professional commitment. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for university leaders and policymakers in designing compensation systems and supportive institutional practices that enhance teacher commitment, retention, and teaching quality. At the policy level, the study provides empirical evidence to support the development of context-sensitive human resource policies, including competitive compensation, improved benefits, and professional development opportunities, aimed at strengthening academic staff commitment and improving the quality and sustainability of higher education in Ethiopia.

Theoretical and Empirical Background of the Study

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical frameworks underlying this research are presented in this section through an explanation of how both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators affect the professional commitment of teachers in public universities in Ethiopia. Various motivational theories and organizational behaviour theories have been incorporated in developing the theoretical framework for this research.

The theoretical framework for the current research draws upon the concepts of Work-as-Calling Theory (WCT), Organizational Commitment Theory (OCT), and Vroom's Expectancy Theory. WCT posits that people who see their occupation as a vocation will feel an increased sense of meaning and purpose in what they are doing, which will foster their engagement in the professional sphere and commitment towards the job. In the sphere of education, teachers who see their calling will show high dedication not only towards students but also towards communities and profession, surpassing even the official demands of the position. While the focus of WCT is on intrinsic motivation, it also considers contextual influences, such as remuneration, in maintaining a calling (Duffy et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2022).

It is important to note that WCT theory is very relevant for the study at hand due to its ability to reflect the motivational essence of teachers' professional behaviour, which tends to be moralistic in nature in the case of public universities. Nevertheless, even though it sheds light on what makes teachers so committed, it fails to explain how long their commitment lasts.

In order to address the above weakness, Expectancy Theory of Vroom is included to provide an explanation of how compensation serves as an extrinsic motivator. As per Vroom, the

employees get motivated if they feel that efforts lead to performance and that performance leads to valuable outcomes like salary, fringe benefits, and career advancements (Vroom et al., 2015). In the case of the higher education sector in Ethiopia, where there are various issues related to compensation, this theory helps us understand why just intrinsic motivation may not help in ensuring sustained professional dedication.

Both the WCT and Vroom's Expectancy Theory help explain the elements of both internal and external motivation in an adequate way. WCT defines what teaching means and what is its purpose, whereas Vroom's theory defines the effects that compensation has on the commitment to it. Both theories help improve the theoretical framework for studying compensation's moderating effect in the PROCESS model by Hayes (Hayes, 2024).

Alternative approaches that have been considered but were not chosen because they did not fit the research questions well include the Self-Determination Theory which is focused primarily on psychological needs instead of compensation as an organizational tool, as well as Herzberg's two-factor theory which considers compensation a hygiene factor and cannot be used for moderation analysis. Moreover, the Hierarchy of Needs by Maslow is too broad and not specific enough for research on work commitment. Social Exchange Theory also considers reciprocity, but not professional calling, which is the subject matter of this study.

The Organizational Commitment Theory was also not applied as an important theoretical framework since this study is based on general professional commitment which goes beyond being committed to one organization and includes commitments to society, students, and the teaching profession.

Generally, WCT and Expectancy Theory by Vroom were chosen due to the fact that together, they have been able to offer a very good contextually relevant explanation of intrinsic callings and extrinsic compensations. It will be from this perspective that we will be able to build a very good theoretical background of how compensation moderates TSC-TPC relationships.

- ***The Effect of Teachers' Sense of Calling on Professional Commitment***

In terms of the connection between TSC and TPC, (Alam, 2017) found that calling on organizational commitment among East Javan lecturers at private universities has a direct impact. This study also found that lecturers' organizational commitment increased with their sense of calling. Teachers who feel that their work is calling will be more dedicated to their careers and have a strong attachment to their work, according to the same study. Teachers who exhibit these traits are motivated, passionate, committed, and enjoy what they do. According to Gradišek and Habe (2020), universities can assist educators in fulfilling their vocation, which keeps them inspired to perform their duties as educators with great zeal and commitment. Likewise, (Zhao et al., 2022) established the positive effects of teacher career calling on preventing burnout.

- ***The Moderating Role of Compensation between TSC and TPC***

Recent research consistently shows that compensation plays a crucial role in shaping employee motivation, behaviour, and organizational commitment (Alamelu et al., 2015; Amar & Patricia, 2019; AlHamad et al., 2022; Kim & Jang, 2020; Penelitan et al., 2021; Sukiman & Mintarti, 2016; Sulistiasih & Widodo, 2021; Susanto, 2020; Vizano et al., 2021). Studies indicate that employees who receive positive rewards are more likely to repeat desirable behaviours, while avoiding actions associated with negative consequences, suggesting a strong link between rewards and performance outcomes (Sari et al., 2022).

The impact of compensation on attitude and retention has also been proven in the education sector. According to Widodo (2021), proper monetary and emotional compensation is helpful for the institution in attracting and retaining competent teachers, along with enhancing their emotional commitment to the profession. AlHamad et al. (2022) and Kim & Jang (2020) have also proven that there is an effect of compensation on the behavior of the organization.

Moreover, research findings show that apart from its effect on motivation, compensation is associated with intrinsic determinants such as calling and professional mission. According to Fathorrahman et al. (2026), rewards can serve as a moderator in the connection between job performance and job satisfaction whereas Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) stressed that the combination of salary, perks, and development opportunities are necessary in retaining employees and building their commitment. While some researchers claim that calling itself can guarantee the sustainability of teachers' commitment (Duffy et al., 2018b), other authors note that proper compensation makes a contribution in improving motivation and building professional commitment (Bilal, 2012; Malik et al., 2010). Based on the literature, it is evident that compensation is an important moderator in the association of TSC and TPC.

- ***Research Gap and Justification***

Although a substantial body of literature has examined the role of compensation in influencing employee motivation, performance, and organizational commitment, several important gaps remain, particularly in the context of higher education in developing countries such as Ethiopia. First, most of the previous studies have emphasized the generality of employees or organizational context (Alamelu et al., 2015; Kim & Jang, 2020; Susanto, 2020), but there is little emphasis put on academic staff working in public universities. Consequently, the motivational processes of teachers working at universities, which may be characterized by intrinsic calling, are insufficiently studied.

The second issue is related to the existence of a lack of empirical research on the influence of compensation on the interaction between the internal and external motivation of employees, specifically on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and professional commitment. Although the connections between compensation and other variables, such as motivation, satisfaction, and performance, have already been described by researchers (Bilal, 2012; Malik et

al., 2010), much less research has focused on compensation as a moderator of the relation between intrinsic motivation and professional commitment.

Third, research in this area with respect to Ethiopian public universities is scarce, even though issues such as teacher retention problems, workload, and teachers' dissatisfaction with compensation are on-going problems. The studies that are available are not applicable to the context or only address the issue of organizational commitment in isolation without incorporating other important variables such as teachers' calling and professional commitment.

The research is thus valid for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it makes a contribution by bringing together WCT and Vroom's expectancy theory to show how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators affect commitment to the profession. Through introducing compensation as the moderating variable, the research makes a contribution to the existing body of literature on motivation and organizational behaviour with respect to teacher commitment.

In practice, the significance of this research lies in the fact that it deals with one of the burning problems of policy and administration in higher education institutions of Ethiopia – teacher motivation and retention. It is expected that the results of the research will help to develop new methods of remuneration that not only increase the material well-being of the teachers but also their sense of vocation and dedication.

Conceptual Framework

Based on reviewed literature and the extant theory, the researcher designed conceptual framework which helps to explain the relationships among TSC, TPC, and compensation. The framework presupposes that TSC is an independent construct and influences the dependent construct, TPC. In the proposed model, compensation is the moderating construct between TSC and TPC in public universities in Ethiopia.

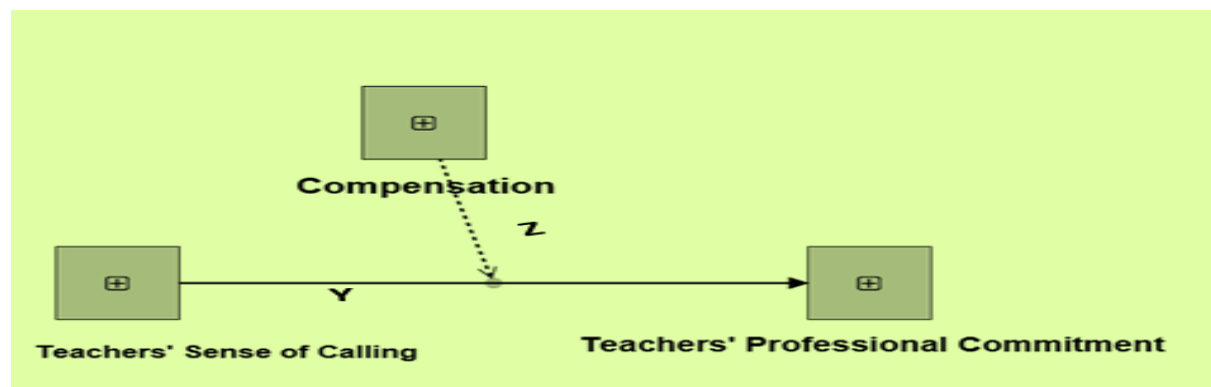


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher's own conceptualization, 2024

Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, explanatory (causal) research design with a cross-sectional survey approach. The design was used to examine the relationships among TSC, TPC, and compensation, and to determine the extent to which compensation moderates the relationship between TSC and TPC in Ethiopian public universities. Data were collected at a single point in time using structured questionnaires. The study followed a positivist research paradigm, relying on objective measurement and statistical analysis to test hypotheses derived from Work-as-Calling Theory and Vroom's Expectancy Theory. Data were analyzed using inferential statistics, particularly multiple regression and moderation analysis (Hayes' PROCESS Model), to test the proposed conceptual model.

The study population consisted of academic staff in 28 Ethiopian public universities, classified into first (7), second (12), and third (9) generation institutions based on their establishment year. Eligible respondents were full-time academic staff of assistant lecturer rank and above (assistant lecturer, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor) with at least one year of service to ensure adequate exposure to institutional systems, compensation structures, and academic work environments. Administrative, technical, support staff, part-time, visiting, adjunct, and newly appointed staff with less than one year of experience were excluded due to limited engagement with the study variables.

A multi-stage sampling technique was applied. First, the universities were stratified by generation and representative institutions were selected using proportional random sampling: three from the first generation, two from the second generation, and three from the third generation. Second, academic staffs were selected from the chosen universities. The sample size was determined using an item response theory (IRT)-based approach with a 1:10 item-to-respondent ratio (Bentler, 1990, as cited in Gollagari et al., 2022), resulting in 540 respondents. IRT was used to strengthen measurement precision by examining how individual items measure latent constructs such as TSC and TPC through item properties like difficulty and discrimination. This approach ensured adequate statistical power and reliable parameter estimation.

Proportionate stratified sampling was then used to distribute the 540 respondents across the eight sampled universities based on their staff population of 9,723. Accordingly, Addis Ababa University contributed 134 respondents, Hawassa University 91, Wolayta Soddo University 90, Dire Dawa University 46, Mizan-Tapi University 42, Ambo University 58, Wachemo University 53, and Addis Ababa Science and Technology University 26. This ensured proportional representation of institutions of different sizes.

Respondents in each university were selected through simple random sampling. Staff members who qualified for inclusion in the study were listed, and every single one of them was allocated a unique identification number. This ensured that everyone had an equal probability of being selected. Data were collected through the use of a questionnaire that was conducted using Google forms. It helped achieve a 100% response rate.

The following statistical tests were conducted for the purpose of analyzing the data. For descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation were computed in order to describe the values

of TSC, TPC, and compensation. The following tests were conducted for inferential purposes: correlation test and multiple regressions with moderation analysis in order to evaluate the moderating role of compensation in the relationship between TSC and TPC. In order to avoid multicollinearity, the independent and moderating variables were mean centered.

Results

Validity and Reliability of the Research Instruments

The concept of validity concerns the extent to which a method provides an accurate measurement of whatever it is meant to measure (Rahardja et al., 2019). In order to establish the validity of the instrument, construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were performed. It is for this reason that the outcome of factor loadings, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability tests will be discussed below.

- **Factor loading**

Factor loading is used to determine the contribution of each variable towards its respective construct. It can be seen from Figure 2 that all the variables had factor loadings of more than 0.70 (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). This means that all the variables have high levels of representation of the respective constructs (TSC, TPC, and compensation) and none of them was excluded.

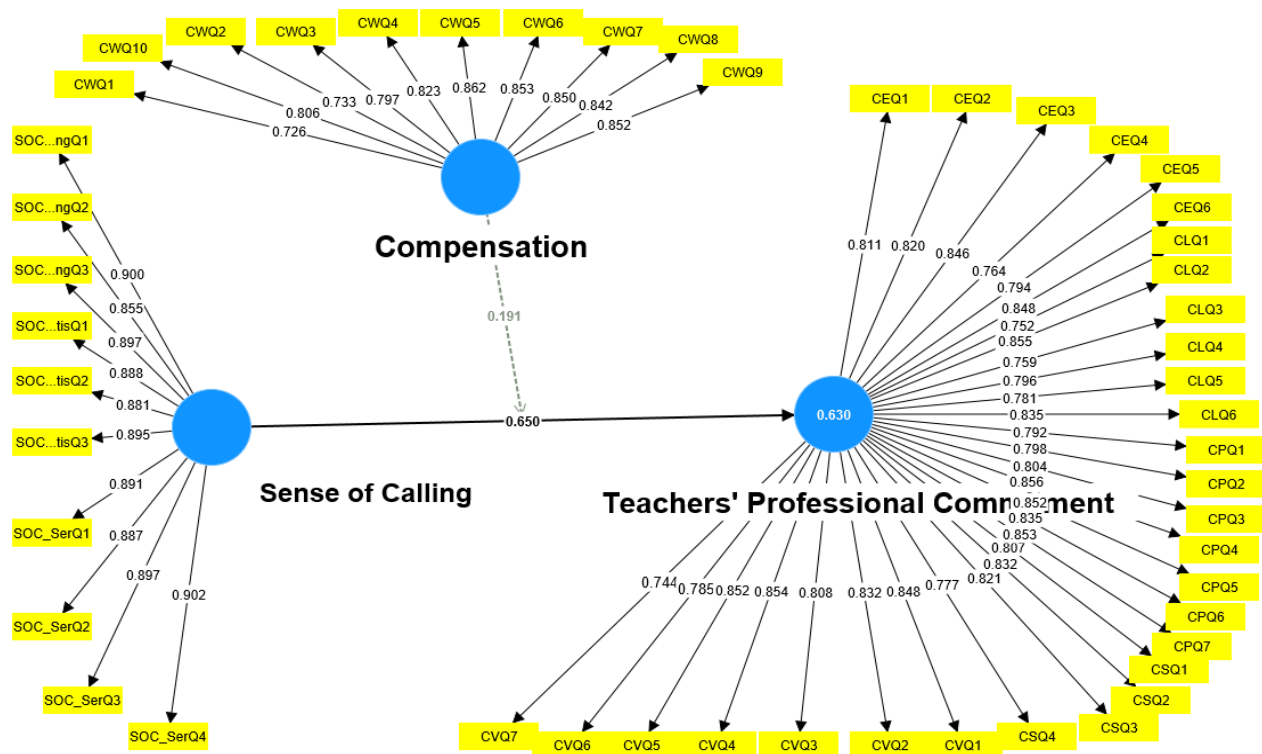


Figure 2: Factor Loadings

Source: Author's computation using SmartPLS4, 2025

- **Convergent validity**

To assess construct validity of the instrument used in this study, a convergent validity test has been performed. Convergent Validity has been defined by (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982) as being established when the average variance extracted (AVE) value is greater than or equal to the suggested value of 0.50, which indicates that the items used to measure the underlying construct have been used effectively. In this study, all AVE values are above 0.50, and therefore convergent validity is not a problem in this study.

Table 2: AVE

Constructs	No. Items	AVE	Results
Compensation	10	0.665	Established
TSC	10	0.791	Established
TPC	30	0.663	Established

Source: SmartPLS4, output, 2025

- **Discriminant validity**

As per Fornell & Bookstein (1982) criterion, a construct has discriminant validity if it's square root of AVE > correlation with any other construct (AVE is bold and italic in Table 3), therefore there is no discriminant validity issues.

Table 3: AVE & Correlations

Constructs	Compensation	TSC	TPC
Compensation	<i>0.8155</i>		
TSC	0.271	<i>0.889</i>	
TPC	0.474	0.728	<i>0.814</i>

Source: SmartPLS4, output, 2025

- **Reliability**

Table 4 shows data from two of the most frequently utilized approaches for determining reliability, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). To illustrate, Cronbach's Alpha values were 0.965-0.982 and Composite Reliability (CR) values were 0.965 to 0.983. As both reliability measures exceed the minimum criterion value of 0.70 identified by (Hair et al., 2011), it is suggested that each research construct is reliable.

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Tests Results

Constructs	No. Items	Cronbach's A	Composite R
Compensation	10	0.944	0.965
TSC	10	0.971	0.971
TPC	30	0.982	0.983

Source: SmartPLS4, 2025

Descriptive Statistics

- *Level of Teachers' Sense of Calling*

Table 5: Descriptive of TSC Items

Dimensions	Items	Mean	SD
Service	Teaching benefits the students	3.65	0.99
	Guiding students creates a positive difference in their lives	3.68	0.98
	Teaching provides an opportunity to serve the existing society	3.66	0.98
	Benefit of teaching passes down to generations	3.64	0.98
	Mean	3.43	0.981
Satisfaction	Sharing knowledge with students gives contentment	3.65	0.98
	Guiding the students gives immense satisfaction	3.61	0.99
	Working with students even outside classroom is a gratifying experience	3.64	0.98
	Mean	3.63	0.982
Longevity	Teaching is the work that I intend to pursue for years to come	3.60	0.98
	I wish to continue guiding students even after retirement	3.56	0.97
	I am willing to pursue teaching throughout my life	3.60	0.99
	Mean	3.59	0.980
TSC	Overall Mean	3.43	0.981

Source: Author's Computation using Jamovi 2.3, 2024

As can be seen from Table 5, the teachers' descriptive statistics show that there is a low level of TSC among the teachers in the Ethiopian public universities with a mean score of $M = 3.43$ ($SD = 0.981$). Taking into consideration that the six-point Likert scale was used in the research, one can conclude that the level of TSC among the teachers is slightly lower than the midpoint of the scale, which is 3.5. It means that teachers tend to disagree with the statements on their sense of calling.

Across the dimensions, the service dimension had the highest mean ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 0.981$) and showed generally weak perception towards the profession of teaching as a way of serving students and the community. Another dimension showing relatively weak perception was the satisfaction dimension, which had a low mean ($M = 3.23$; $SD = 0.982$), indicating that teachers do not get much satisfaction out of their work as teachers. Longevity dimension had the lowest mean ($M = 3.09$; $SD = 0.980$) and indicated weak long-term intention to remain committed to the teaching profession due to difficult conditions such as pay and other factors in institutions.

- *Level of Teachers' Professional Commitment (TPC)*

The descriptive statistics in Table 6 show that teachers in Ethiopian public universities have a generally low to slightly moderate level of TPC. The overall mean score is $M = 3.48$ ($SD = 0.628$). This score is near the lower end of the moderate range, which suggests that teachers' professional commitment is not well developed. The small standard deviation indicates a moderate level of agreement among respondents about their commitment levels.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of TPC Dimensions

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Rank		
Commitment to students	540	3.48	0.987	1st		
Commitment to society	540	3.43	1.032	5th		
Commitment to profession	540	3.47	1.059	2nd		
Commitment to excellence	540	3.46	1.012	3rd		
Commitment to values	540	3.44	1.043	4th		
Construct	N	Mean	SD	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Professional Commitment	540	3.48	0.628	3.18	1.80	4.98

*SD= Standard Deviation

Source: Author's computation, using SPSS, 2024

Among the measured dimensions, commitment to students achieved the highest mean score ($M = 3.48$; $SD = 0.987$), suggesting that teachers demonstrate a stronger focus on supporting and engaging with students relative to other areas. Commitment to the profession ($M = 3.47$; $SD = 1.059$) and commitment to excellence ($M = 3.46$; $SD = 1.012$) followed, indicating a moderate orientation toward professional standards and quality. Commitment to values ($M = 3.44$; $SD = 1.043$) and commitment to society ($M = 3.43$; $SD = 1.032$) received the lowest mean scores, reflecting comparatively weaker alignment with broader ethical and societal responsibilities.

The results indicate that although teachers demonstrate a certain degree of professional dedication, especially toward students, their broader professional and societal commitments are comparatively limited. This finding underscores the necessity for institutional strategies to enhance overall professional commitment, with particular emphasis on societal contribution, value alignment, and sustained professional engagement.

Inferential Statistics

- *The Influence of compensation on TPC*

Correlations Analysis

Table 7: Mean SD, Skewness, Kurtosis, and Correlation Coefficients (N=540)

Constructs	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	TPC	TSC	COMP
TPC	3.48	0.989	-0.465	-0.287	1		
TSC	3.43	1.04	-0.518	-0.493	0.711**	1	
Comp	3.09	0.961	-0.490	0.023	0.753**	0.695**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: SPSS output, 2024

Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics and correlation findings for TPC, TSC, and compensation. Normality tests reveal that the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables are within the acceptable range of -1 to +1, confirming that the data are approximately normally

distributed. The average scores for all constructs are below the midpoint of the six-point Likert scale (3.5), suggesting generally low to moderately low levels of the study variables. Regarding variability, TPC (SD = 0.989) and compensation (SD = 0.961) demonstrate relatively low dispersion, whereas TSC (SD = 1.04) shows slightly greater variability among respondents.

The correlation analysis demonstrates significant positive associations among all variables. TSC is positively and significantly correlated with TPC ($r = 0.711$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of calling correspond to stronger professional commitment. Compensation also exhibits a strong positive relationship with TPC ($r = 0.753$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that more favourable compensation is linked to greater professional commitment. Additionally, TSC is positively related to compensation ($r = 0.695$, $p < 0.01$), implying that teachers with a stronger sense of calling are more likely to perceive compensation positively. Overall, these findings confirm that all key constructs are positively interrelated, supporting the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model.

Summary of the Outcome Variable

Table 6.7 presents the results of the moderation analysis examining the effect of TSC on TPC, with compensation as a moderator. The overall model is significant ($R = 0.793$, $R^2 = 0.628$, $F(3, 536) = 298.23$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the predictors collectively explain a substantial portion of variance in TPC. The direct effects of TSC ($\beta = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$) and compensation ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$) are both significant. Importantly, the interaction term (TSC $\times$ Compensation) is also significant ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2\text{-change} = 0.0364$), providing evidence that compensation moderates the relationship between TSC and TPC. This suggests that the effect of TSC on TPC is strengthened as compensation increases.

Table 8: Model Summary

Outcome Variable	R	R-sq	MAP	F	df1	df2	P
TPC	.7926	.6282	.3586	298.2345	3.0000	536.000	.0000
Items	Coefficient	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULI	
Constant	4.4076	.0306	144.0404	.0000	4.3475	4.4677	
TSC	0.6420	.0328	19.5579	.0000	.5775	.7065	
COMP	0.3980	.0419	9.4926	.0000	.3157	.4804	
Int_1	0.2224	.0433	5.1339	.0000	.1373	.3075	
Unconditional Interaction		R2-change	F	df1	df2	p	
TSC x COMP ; X*W		.0364	26.3565	1.0000	536.0000	.0000	

Source: Author's computation using PROCESS Model (1), 2024

- *Moderating role of compensation between TSC and TPC*

Unconditional Interactions

Table 9 presents the results of the moderation analysis which explains the unconditional interaction between TSC and compensation on TPC. The interaction term (Int_1: TSC $\times$

Compensation) has a coefficient of 0.2224 with a standard error of 0.0433, t-value of 5.13, and $p < 0.001$. The 95% confidence interval for the coefficient ranges from 0.1373 to 0.3075, indicating that the interaction is statistically significant. This positive coefficient suggests that the influence of TSC on TPC increases as compensation increases.

The unconditional interaction is further supported by the R^2 -change of 0.0364, which is significant ($F = 26.36$, $df1 = 1$, $df2 = 536$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that including the interaction term explains an additional 3.64% of the variance in professional commitment beyond the effects of TSC and compensation individually. While the added variance may appear modest, it is meaningful in the context of social science research, where human behaviours like professional commitment are influenced by multiple interrelated factors.

To sum it up, the findings clearly show that compensation plays an important role in how teachers connect their motivation with professional commitment. When teachers feel they are fairly compensated, they tend to channel their intrinsic motivation more effectively into their work. This highlights the need to balance financial incentives with what drives teachers internally, especially in the context of higher education.

Table 9: Model Summary

Items	Coefficient	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULI
Int_1	0.2224	.0433	5.1339	.0000	.1373	.3075
Unconditional Interaction	R2-change		F	df1	df2	p
TSC x COMP ; X*W	.0364		26.3565	1.0000	536.0000	.0000

Source: Author's computation using PROCESS Model (1), 2024

Conditional direct effects

Table 10 shows how the relationship between TSC (Total Supply Chain) and TPC (Total Production Cycle) changes depending on the level of the moderating variable, which in this case is compensation. When we talk about moderation, it means that the impact of one variable on another isn't the same across the board; it shifts based on the level of the moderator. In this model, we take a closer look at compensation at three different points: low (-1 standard deviation), average (the mean), and high ($+1$ standard deviation). This approach helps us understand how compensation influences the link between TSC and TPC.

The results show that the effect of TSC on TPC is positive and statistically significant at all levels of compensation ($p < 0.001$). At a low level of compensation (-0.8584), the effect of TSC on professional commitment is $\beta = 0.4511$, indicating that even when compensation is low, teachers' sense of calling still contributes meaningfully to professional commitment, although the magnitude of the effect is relatively weaker. At the average level of compensation (0.0000), the effect increases to $\beta = 0.6420$, suggesting a stronger translation of intrinsic motivation into professional commitment under moderate compensation conditions.

At high levels of compensation (0.8584), the effect of TSC on TPC seems to be of greatest magnitude ($= 0.8329$) and the narrow confidence interval, therefore the effect is stable and

dependable. This means that there is a clear trend in the data showing that the higher the compensation, the greater the influence of teachers' sense of calling on professional commitment. The findings indicate that compensation directly impacts professional commitment and amplifies the effect of teachers' intrinsic motivation, hence, highlighting its role in fostering professional commitment in Ethiopian public universities.

Table 10: Conditional effects of the TSC at values of the compensation

COMP	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULI
-.8584	.4511	.0519	8.6998	.0000	.3492	.5530
.0000	.6420	.0328	19.5579	.0000	.5775	.7065
.8584	.8329	.0472	17.6313	.0000	.7401	.9257

Source: Author's computation using PROCESS Model1, 2024

Visualizing the conditional effects

Figure 3 illustrates the moderating effect of compensation on the relationship between TSC and TPC. The conditional effect of compensation on the relationship between TSC and TPC is shown by the equation $\theta_{TSC \rightarrow TPC} = 0.6420 + 0.2224 * \text{Compensation}$. From the equation, it is evident that for every one-unit increase in compensation, the effect of TSC on TPC will increase by 0.2224 units (Hayes, 2018). This confirms that the effect of TSC on TPC is not linear but rather moderated by the level of compensation. The simple slopes in Figure 3 also show the relationship between TSC and TPC at low (-1 SD), average (mean), and high (+1 SD) levels of compensation. At low levels of compensation, the slope is not as steep, indicating that as the level of teachers' sense of calling improves, there are no significant improvements in professional commitment. At the average level of compensation, the slope is steep. At the average level of compensation, the slope becomes steeper, suggesting a stronger relationship between TSC and TPC. The steepest slope is observed at high compensation, demonstrating that the positive effect of TSC on professional commitment is most pronounced when compensation is perceived as adequate or favourable.

In general, the visualization clearly shows that compensation has a positive graphical effect on the relationship between TSC and TPC among teachers. Although sense of calling has a positive effect on professional commitment regardless of the level of compensation, the effect is significantly strengthened at the average and high levels of compensation. This supports the argument that compensation is a critical factor for teachers to convert their intrinsic motivation into professional commitment in Ethiopian public universities.

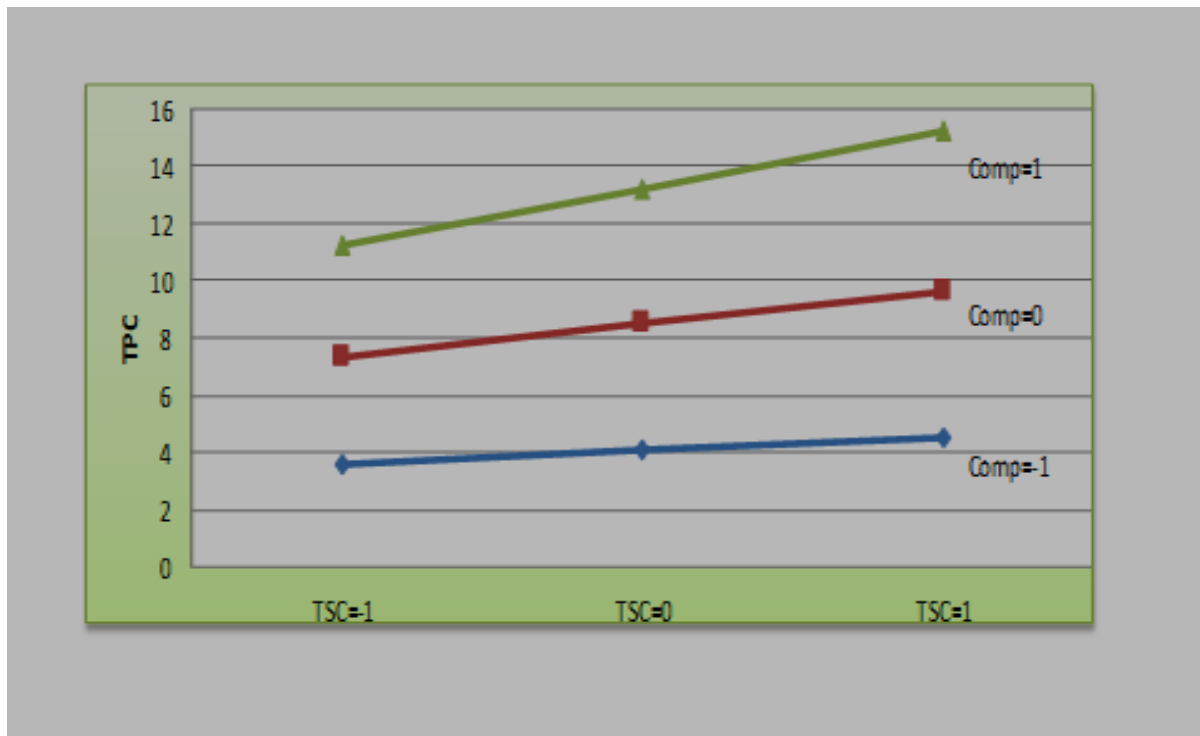


Figure 3: Conditional Effects of TSC on TPC

Source: Author's computation using PROCESS Model (1), 2024

Discussion

The findings highlight a point that many have recognized: fair and competitive pay plays a crucial role in motivating employees and encouraging them to stay with their organizations. This insight is supported by earlier studies, including the work of Widodo & Sulistiasih (2021) and Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015). Additionally, research has consistently shown that effective reward systems can significantly enhance job satisfaction, performance, and commitment among academic staff, as seen in the studies by Ashraf (2020) and Nanjem & Winarsih (2025).

Interestingly, while intrinsic motivation like a sense of calling remains vital, it often needs to be paired with external rewards to truly make an impact, as noted by Mortimer & Klein (2023). Some scholars, like Duffy et al. (2018b), argue that intrinsic satisfaction can be enough to maintain commitment on its own. However, the current findings suggest that this commitment is even stronger when employees receive the right kind of compensation.

Overall, the results highlight the complementary nature of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors in shaping professional commitment. Teachers who perceive teaching as a calling are more likely to convert that motivation into sustained commitment when they are adequately rewarded. This suggests that compensation serves not only as a motivating factor but also as an enabling condition that enhances the effectiveness of intrinsic motivation. Therefore, improving compensation systems in public universities is essential for reinforcing teachers' commitment, reducing attrition risks, and improving the overall quality of higher education in Ethiopia.

Conclusions

The study reveals some important insights about teacher-student connections (TSC), teacher professional development (TPC), and how compensation affects educators in Ethiopian public universities. One of the key takeaways is that teachers generally show a low level of TSC. This hints that many educators don't feel a strong sense of teaching as a calling, especially when it comes to their feelings of service, job satisfaction, and commitment to a long-term career in education. While there's some level of intrinsic motivation among faculty, it doesn't seem to be robust enough to keep them fully engaged in their professional roles over time.

The findings suggest that teachers generally feel a low to moderate level of professional commitment. Interestingly, their dedication is much stronger when it comes to their students compared to their commitment to society, core values, or striving for professional excellence. This pattern shows that while teachers are dedicated to their immediate responsibilities in the classroom, they may struggle to feel a deeper connection to the larger aspects of their profession. It raises concerns about how they can maintain long-term engagement and develop a well-rounded professional identity in their careers.

The study emphasizes that compensation plays a vital role in fostering professional commitment among teachers. It reveals that when teachers receive higher levels of compensation, their sense of calling is more likely to translate into a deeper dedication to their work. This finding highlights that while intrinsic motivation is important, it needs to be complemented by appropriate external rewards to truly make an impact. In essence, feeling called to teach is great, but having the right support and recognition can take that commitment to the next level.

The study highlights the important relationship between intrinsic factors, like a teacher's sense of calling, and extrinsic factors, such as pay. By looking at both aspects together, we gain a deeper understanding of what drives teachers' commitment to their profession. It turns out that while fair compensation plays a crucial role on its own, it also amplifies the impact of teachers' intrinsic motivation. This insight suggests that to truly inspire and retain educators in Ethiopian public universities, we need to improve compensation systems. Doing so would not only motivate teachers but also strengthen their dedication to their work, ultimately leading to a higher quality and more sustainable higher education system.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant theoretical, practical, and policy implications for understanding teacher motivation and professional commitment in higher education. This study theoretically expands the application of Work-as-Calling Theory (WCT) and Vroom's Expectancy Theory by demonstrating that intrinsic motivation, particularly teachers' sense of calling, is insufficient on its own to explain professional commitment. The findings suggest that compensation plays a crucial role in enhancing this relationship, thereby supporting an integrated model of the interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. This research adds to the

existing literature on motivation by providing empirical evidence of how compensation moderates professional commitment within an academic context.

Practically, the findings highlight an important takeaway for university leaders: boosting teachers' professional commitment involves more than just sparking their passion for teaching. While many educators naturally feel a strong sense of purpose, this study reveals that their commitment grows even stronger when they're compensated fairly. This means that universities need to prioritize improving salary structures, benefit packages, and recognition systems, along with offering meaningful career development opportunities. By doing so, they can not only motivate their teachers but also help retain talented academic staff who are dedicated to their students and the institution.

From a policy perspective, the study highlights the urgent need for higher education institutions and government bodies to craft compensation policies that resonate with educators' commitment to their calling. By aligning financial rewards with the profound professional expectations and workload demands faced by university teachers, we can cultivate a more motivated workforce. In Ethiopia, where resource limitations and heavy pressures are common, it becomes even more critical to harmonize compensation systems with the intrinsic motivations of educators. Such tailored policies are not only essential for reducing staff turnover, but they also enhance job satisfaction and foster a lasting dedication to delivering quality education.

Overall, the study emphasizes that improving performance in higher education is not just about one thing; it's about finding the right balance. By focusing on both intrinsic motivation—what drives people from within and external rewards, we can create an environment where academic staff feel truly committed, engaged, and productive. This holistic approach is particularly important for Ethiopian public universities, where fostering a dedicated and motivated workforce can make a significant difference.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings of the study, several recommendations are forwarded to improve Teachers' Sense of Calling (TSC) and Total Professional Commitment (TPC) in Ethiopian public universities. First, university leaders should strengthen institutional conditions that enhance teachers' intrinsic motivation by promoting a stronger sense of calling. This can be achieved through supportive leadership, recognition of academic work, reduced administrative burden, and creating a positive academic culture that values teaching, research, and community engagement.

Second, universities and policymakers should prioritize the improvement of compensation structures for academic staff. The findings clearly show that compensation not only directly influences professional commitment but also strengthens the effect of teachers' sense of calling. Therefore, fair and competitive salary schemes, improved benefit packages, timely promotions, and performance-based incentives should be implemented to enhance staff motivation and retention.

Third, higher education institutions should develop integrated human resource strategies that combine both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. In addition to financial rewards, opportunities for continuous professional development, career advancement, and academic recognition should be expanded. Such holistic strategies can help teachers translate their sense of calling into sustained professional commitment.

Finally, the Ministry of Education and university governing bodies should design national-level policies aimed at improving working conditions and reducing disparities in compensation across institutions. Addressing these systemic issues is essential for retaining qualified academic staff, reducing turnover intentions, and ensuring the long-term quality of higher education in Ethiopia.

Disclosure Statement

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