

Psychological Empowerment as a Human Resource Issue in Educational Organizations

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore psychological empowerment among junior high school teachers based on four primary dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The research employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological design within an interpretative paradigm. Six junior high school teachers were selected through purposive sampling, supported by three triangulation informants. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings revealed that teachers perceived their profession as a meaningful form of service and contribution (meaning), demonstrated confidence in their professional capabilities (competence), and experienced a sense of autonomy in managing instructional processes (self-determination). However, regarding the impact dimension, teachers reported limited influence on school-level decision-making processes. These findings indicate that teachers' psychological empowerment is more strongly reflected in individual aspects than in the structural dimensions of the organization.

Keywords: *psychological empowerment, junior high school, teachers, education organization*

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational transformation marked by curriculum changes, the digitalization of learning, and increasing performance demands has significantly reshaped the role of teachers in modern educational organizations. Teachers are no longer viewed solely as knowledge transmitters, but also as learning facilitators and agents of change. As a result, their work has become more complex, requiring technological adaptability, effective learning management, and responsiveness to diverse student needs. In this context, the quality of education depends not only on pedagogical competence but also on teachers' psychological well-being as a key factor in sustaining performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), even though increasing job demands may raise the risk of burnout when school support is insufficient (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

Within this context, psychological empowerment is considered a key concept in understanding how individuals perceive and perform their roles at work. It refers to a psychological state that reflects individuals' perceptions of meaning in their work, confidence in their abilities (competence), autonomy in performing tasks (self-determination), and perceived impact on outcomes (impact) (Spreitzer, 1995). These four dimensions shape subjective experiences that determine the extent to which individuals feel empowered in their work. Empirical studies have shown that psychological empowerment is positively associated with various work outcomes, including job satisfaction, well-being, work engagement, and retention intentions, as individuals with higher empowerment tend to demonstrate more positive and productive work attitudes (Mathew & Nair, 2022; Marin-Garcia & Bonavia, 2021; Chompukum & Vanichbuncha, 2025; Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). In educational settings, teacher psychological empowerment is particularly important as it contributes to instructional quality, teaching motivation, and teachers' ability to perform their professional roles effectively amid increasing work demands.

However, the experience of psychological empowerment among teachers does not always develop optimally. Teachers still face limited autonomy in decision-making, heavy administrative workloads, and insufficient organizational support, which may hinder the development of their sense of control, meaning, and impact in work (Tsang et al., 2022; Xue et al., 2024). In addition, hierarchical school structures often restrict teachers' flexibility in performing their roles effectively (Xu & Yang, 2018). These conditions indicate that psychological empowerment is a complex phenomenon that is strongly shaped by the organizational context of education.

Research on psychological empowerment has largely been dominated by quantitative approaches focusing on its relationships with outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work engagement. However,

such approaches do not fully capture teachers' subjective lived experiences in daily practice. In particular, studies on the impact dimension, especially regarding teachers' involvement in school decision-making, remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore psychological empowerment among junior high school teachers using an interpretative phenomenological approach, focusing on meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact within the school context. The study is expected to contribute to theoretical enrichment as well as practical implications for developing more contextual and participatory teacher empowerment strategies.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research Design and Participants

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design within an interpretative paradigm to explore teachers' subjective experiences of psychological empowerment. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth and contextual exploration of participants' experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The interpretative paradigm views reality as a subjective construction formed through lived experiences and social interactions (Wiesner, 2022; Aguzzoli et al., 2024).

Participants included six junior high school teachers selected through purposive sampling based on teaching experience and active involvement in school activities. In addition, three triangulation informants were involved, namely the principal, vice principal, and a senior teacher, to strengthen contextual understanding and enhance the credibility of the findings.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by the four dimensions of psychological empowerment proposed by Spreitzer (1995): meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The interview questions focused on teachers' perceptions of work meaning, self-efficacy, autonomy in performing tasks, and perceived influence on students and the school environment. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at school, with duration adjusted according to the depth of exploration required.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to deeply understand participants' lived experiences through an interpretive process (Smith, 2016). This approach aims to explore individuals' subjective experiences in detail and contextually (Miller et al., 2018).

The data analysis process used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is idiographic and interpretive in nature, to understand the participants' subjective experiences (Smith, 2016). The analysis was conducted through several stages: reading and re-reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, and looking for patterns across cases. These stages were carried out systematically to identify themes, patterns of similarities, and differences in experiences between participants. In the final stage, the researcher interpreted the findings by linking them to the psychological context and dimensions of psychological empowerment to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

2.4. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as indicators of research quality and rigor (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility was strengthened through member checking and source triangulation, transferability through detailed contextual description, dependability through systematic documentation of the research process, and confirmability through researcher reflexivity and transparency in data analysis.

In this study, member checking was conducted with participants, while triangulation was performed by comparing data from primary participants and additional informants. All stages of data collection and analysis were systematically documented to ensure consistency and accuracy of interpretation. Participants were also informed about the study objectives, data confidentiality, use of pseudonyms, and their right to withdraw at any time, ensuring ethical compliance and research integrity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Meaning: Dedication and Contribution to Student Development

Interview findings indicate that junior high school teachers interpret their profession as a form of dedication that directly contributes to student development. Teaching is not perceived merely as a professional occupation, but also as a means of shaping character, supporting students' future development, and generating broader social impact.

This is reflected in teachers' statements emphasizing their role in students' growth:

"Being a teacher is very meaningful for me because I feel I can help students develop, not only academically but also in their character." (G1)

"This job has great value because I feel responsible for shaping the future generation. It keeps me motivated every day." (G2)

"Teaching is not just a job, but a form of dedication. It gives deep meaning to my life." (G6)

These statements show that teachers' sense of meaning emerges from the connection between professional responsibility and personal values rooted in dedication.

3.1.2. Competence: Self-Belief and Professional Development

Findings reveal that teachers generally hold strong confidence in their professional abilities in delivering instruction. This confidence is shaped by teaching experience, participation in training, and supportive school environments that encourage professional growth.

This is illustrated in the following statements:

"I feel confident because I have years of teaching experience and regularly attend teacher training." (G1)

"I feel capable, especially in delivering material, although I still need to improve my use of learning technology." (G2)

"I feel confident because the school also supports competence development through workshops and training." (G5)

These responses indicate that teacher competence is shaped not only by individual experience but also by continuous learning processes. At the same time, the acknowledgment of limitations suggests that self-confidence in competence is dynamic and continuously evolving.

3.1.3. Self-Determination: Instructional Freedom

The self-determination dimension is reflected in teachers' perceived freedom to select teaching methods, strategies, and instructional approaches in the classroom. This autonomy allows them to adjust learning processes to students' needs while still operating within the school curriculum framework.

This is evident in the following statements:

"I am given the freedom to choose teaching methods that suit the class as long as I follow the curriculum." (G1)

"I feel quite independent, especially in designing teaching strategies and student assessment." (G2)

"The school provides space for teachers to innovate, so I can try new learning models." (G3)

These experiences indicate that teachers retain a certain degree of control over instructional practices, which enables the emergence of more varied and context-sensitive teaching strategies.

3.1.4. Impact: Limited Structural Influence

The impact dimension shows a different pattern compared to the previous dimensions. Although teachers perceive that they contribute to student development, particularly in learning outcomes and behavioral change, their influence in school-level decision-making remains limited.

This is reflected in the following statements:

"I sometimes feel that my opinions are not fully heard, for example during meetings on learning evaluation and school activities." (G1)

"My suggestions have not been fully implemented in student remedial programs." (G2)

"Teachers' opinions are not always considered in school decision-making." (G4)

These experiences suggest that teachers' contributions are more visible at the instructional level, while their involvement in institutional decision-making remains limited, indicating restricted structural influence within the school.

3.2. Discussion

Findings indicate that psychological empowerment among junior high school teachers is reflected across four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. The findings show that meaning, competence, and self-determination are more prominently reflected in teachers' experiences, while the impact dimension remains limited at the organizational level.

3.2.1. Meaning

The results show that teachers construct meaning through a sense of dedication and contribution to student development. Teaching is viewed not only as instructional activity but also as a space for character building, inspiration, and supporting students' future trajectories (Karataş & Özdemir, 2022). This meaning is deeply value-based and becomes part of teachers' personal and professional identity.

A sense of meaning functions as an internal motivational source that enhances engagement, satisfaction, and performance quality (Comin & Pauli, 2018), while also strengthening teacher–student relationships (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). Ultimately, it contributes to greater professional commitment (Suyatno et al., 2021).

3.2.2. Competence

Teachers generally perceive themselves as capable in carrying out their professional responsibilities, which is developed through experience, training, and institutional support. This competence includes pedagogical knowledge, skills, and adaptive capacity that evolve continuously (Dervenis et al., 2022), supported by organizational learning opportunities such as training and professional development (Buksnyte-Marmiene et al., 2022; Berhanu, 2025).

However, limitations remain, particularly in integrating educational technology, indicating that contemporary teacher competence requires ongoing development of both technical and pedagogical skills (Uerz et al., 2018; Wicagsono et al., 2023). Overall, teacher competence is dynamic and reflects self-efficacy that contributes to engagement and well-being (Bhattacharya & Narad, 2024).

3.2.3. Self-Determination

Teachers demonstrate self-determination through their autonomy in selecting teaching approaches within curricular boundaries, reflected in their autonomy to select teaching approaches within curricular boundaries. This reflects perceived control over work processes (Spreitzer, 1995), enabling more flexible and context-based instruction. Autonomy also supports intrinsic motivation and engagement (Guay, 2021).

In addition, trust from the school and a less bureaucratic environment strengthen teachers' sense of independence (Tsang et al., 2022; Kõiv et al., 2019). This autonomy contributes not only to instructional freedom but also to pedagogical creativity, adaptability, and stronger engagement in teaching practice.

3.2.4. Impact

The impact dimension differs from the others, as teachers' influence on organizational decision-making remains limited despite their contributions to student learning and behavior. In the psychological empowerment framework, impact refers to the degree to which individuals can influence organizational decisions and direction, indicating that teachers' involvement at the strategic level is still restricted (Spreitzer, 1995).

Teachers report that their input is not always included in evaluation and policy-making processes, resulting in stronger involvement at the instructional rather than structural level. This aligns with findings that limited participation in decision-making reduces perceived impact (Lee & Nie, 2015; Vrhovnik et al., 2018) and is influenced by communication and leadership practices that are not fully open (Yao et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2019). Overall, this indicates a gap between pedagogical contribution and decision-making influence, suggesting that the impact dimension remains underdeveloped and requires greater teacher participation in school governance.

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers' psychological empowerment is primarily experienced at the personal and instructional levels rather than at the organizational level. Teachers' experiences reflect meaning, confidence, and instructional autonomy; however, their limited involvement in institutional decision-making indicates that empowerment has not yet been fully structurally supported within the school context. These findings imply that schools need to strengthen participative leadership and provide wider opportunities for teacher involvement in organizational decision-making. Increasing teacher participation may contribute to a more balanced form of psychological empowerment across both instructional and structural dimensions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that junior high school teachers' psychological empowerment is reflected across three dimensions: meaning, competence, and self-determination. Teachers perceive their profession as a meaningful form of service, demonstrate confidence in their competence supported by experience and training, and experience autonomy in the learning process. However, the impact dimension remains limited due to restricted teacher involvement in school decision-making and policy-making.

Overall, teacher psychological empowerment is more prominently reflected in the individual and pedagogical aspects than in the organizational structural aspects. Therefore, empowerment efforts need to focus not only on developing individual capacity but also on expanding teacher participation in school decision-making.

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