

The Impact of Job Autonomy on Employee Productivity in the Saudi Education Sector through Employee Engagement

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of job autonomy on employee productivity in the Saudi education sector, focusing on the mediating role of employee engagement. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model, the research examines how autonomy serves as a psychological resource that enhances intrinsic motivation and drives higher performance. Using a quantitative descriptive-analytical approach, data were collected from 60 educators and administrators across Saudi educational institutions. The results demonstrated high reliability and validity of the measurement instruments and revealed significant positive correlations among job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity. Specifically, job autonomy was found to positively influence engagement, while engagement significantly predicted productivity, confirming its mediating role in the model. These findings align with prior studies highlighting autonomy as a fundamental determinant of engagement and performance. The study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical support for the mediating effect of engagement within the Saudi educational context and aligns with Vision 2030's strategic objectives of fostering empowerment, innovation, and institutional effectiveness. It concludes that enhancing autonomy and engagement among educators is essential to improving productivity and sustaining educational excellence.

Keywords: Job autonomy, employee engagement, employee productivity, Saudi education sector, Vision 2030.

1. Introduction

The education sector in Saudi Arabia stands at the forefront of national transformation efforts under Vision 2030, which emphasizes developing human capital, enhancing institutional performance, and fostering innovation-driven productivity. Within this dynamic context, employee productivity has become a cornerstone for achieving educational excellence and organizational sustainability. The productivity of educators and administrative staff in schools directly influences learning outcomes, institutional efficiency, and the ability to adapt to ongoing reforms. However, despite the strategic emphasis on performance and development, many educational institutions continue to face challenges in maintaining consistent employee engagement and motivation, particularly in environments characterized by hierarchical structures and limited decision-making autonomy (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Al Zeer et al., 2023). Addressing these gaps requires examining internal factors that shape employee behavior, among which job autonomy has emerged as a crucial determinant of psychological empowerment, engagement, and performance (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021).

Job autonomy refers to the degree of freedom and discretion employees possess in determining how to perform their work tasks and make decisions related to their responsibilities. Research across various sectors has demonstrated that autonomy promotes intrinsic motivation, reduces stress, and fosters proactive behavior, ultimately leading to improved job performance (Kidane & Xuefeng, 2021; Liu et al., 2024). In the educational context, teachers and school administrators with higher levels of autonomy often exhibit stronger commitment, creativity, and innovation in pedagogical practices and management (Khan, 2025; Fadhliah et al., 2022). Conversely, limited autonomy may result in decreased morale, role conflict, and reduced productivity. The influence of autonomy on productivity, however, is not purely direct. Scholars argue that the mediating role of employee engagement a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind is essential in translating autonomy into tangible performance outcomes (Ali et al., 2020; Scharp et al., 2022).

Employee engagement encapsulates vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work, representing a deep psychological connection between employees and their organizations. It serves as a critical mechanism

through which autonomy impacts productivity, as engaged employees are more likely to utilize their freedom to innovate, take ownership, and exceed job expectations (Akhter et al., 2022; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020). In educational institutions, engagement contributes to enhanced classroom effectiveness, collaboration, and adaptability to change (Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023; Sharif et al., 2024). The interplay between autonomy and engagement aligns closely with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that fulfilling basic psychological needsautonomy, competence, and relatednessenhances motivation and performance (Scharp et al., 2022). Within this theoretical framework, autonomy acts as a catalyst for internal motivation, while engagement serves as the behavioral manifestation of that motivation, resulting in higher productivity and satisfaction (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Staniec et al., 2023).

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between autonomy, engagement, and performance across industries such as banking, manufacturing, and healthcare (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021; Dahlan et al., 2024), research within the Saudi education sector remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on leadership, job satisfaction, and work commitment (Alsubaie, 2021; Shibeika, 2025), leaving a significant empirical gap in understanding how autonomy and engagement interact to shape productivity among educators. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the impact of job autonomy on employee productivity in the Saudi education sector through the mediating role of employee engagement. The research not only contributes to the theoretical development of motivation and performance models in education but also offers practical implications for policymakers and administrators seeking to empower teachers and staff in alignment with Vision 2030. Ultimately, enhancing autonomy and engagement is expected to drive a more motivated, innovative, and productive educational workforce capable of supporting the nation's strategic transformation goals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Discussion

The relationship between job autonomy, employee engagement, and productivity is deeply grounded in motivational and organizational behavior theories that explain how individuals derive meaning,

satisfaction, and performance outcomes from their work. Central to this relationship is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are basic psychological needs that, when fulfilled, enhance intrinsic motivation and lead to higher engagement and performance (Scharp et al., 2022; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020). Within the educational context, job autonomy represents a structural and psychological condition where employees teachers and administrators experience control over their tasks and decisions, enabling them to express creativity and responsibility. This sense of self-direction fosters intrinsic motivation, leading to a more profound engagement with work activities and improved productivity outcomes (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021). When employees perceive that their organization supports autonomy, they are more likely to experience vitality, persistence, and cognitive absorption in their roles, which collectively enhance their work engagement.

Building on SDT, the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) also highlights autonomy as a core job dimension that influences critical psychological states and job outcomes. According to this model, autonomy enhances an employee's experienced responsibility for work outcomes, thereby increasing motivation, job satisfaction, and performance (Kidane & Xuefeng, 2021; Liu et al., 2024). Empirical research supports these theoretical assumptions by showing that autonomy strengthens employees' self-efficacy and sense of ownership, which in turn boosts engagement and productivity (Akhter et al., 2022; Al Zeer et al., 2023). In the educational sector, autonomy allows teachers and administrators to make context-specific decisions that align with pedagogical goals and student needs, promoting adaptive learning environments and institutional innovation (Khan, 2025; Mulyana & Izzati, 2022). These outcomes are particularly relevant to the Saudi education sector's transformation efforts, where empowering educators aligns with Vision 2030's emphasis on human capital development and innovation-driven performance (Dahlan et al., 2024).

Another theoretical foundation relevant to this study is the Goal-Setting Theory, which asserts that individuals are motivated when they have clear objectives and the freedom to determine how to achieve them. Autonomy enhances goal commitment by providing employees with the discretion to select methods and strategies that suit their strengths and contextual constraints (Ali et al., 2020). In education, autonomy helps

teachers and managers set meaningful goals aligned with their institution's vision while fostering engagement and accountability (Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023). Studies show that autonomy-driven goal orientation strengthens intrinsic motivation, leading to higher engagement and better performance outcomes (Nkrumah, 2024; Staniec et al., 2023).

Moreover, empowerment theory provides an important complement to these frameworks, emphasizing that autonomy and decision-making freedom enhance an employee's psychological empowerment, sense of control, and contribution to organizational outcomes (Fadhlilah et al., 2022; Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021). In educational institutions, empowerment through autonomy has been found to reduce stress, improve well-being, and cultivate a more committed and productive teaching workforce (Elrayah et al., 2023; Shibeika, 2025). Collectively, these theories suggest that autonomy is not merely a structural condition but a motivational resource that fosters engagement and, through it, enhances productivity. Therefore, the integration of Self-Determination Theory, Job Characteristics Model, Goal-Setting Theory, and empowerment principles forms a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how job autonomy influences employee productivity through the mediating role of engagement in the Saudi education sector.

2.2 Hypotheses Development

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Job Characteristics Model (JCM), job autonomy is conceptualized as a core element influencing employee motivation, engagement, and productivity. Both theories emphasize that employees are more intrinsically motivated when they experience freedom, discretion, and responsibility in their work roles (Scharp et al., 2022; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020). Within the Saudi education sector, which is undergoing rapid reform under Vision 2030, enhancing autonomy among educators and administrators has become essential for promoting innovation and high performance. As employees are given greater control over how they plan, implement, and evaluate their work, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and professional identity, leading to sustained engagement and improved productivity. Building upon this

foundation, the following hypotheses are proposed to examine the relationships between job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity in the Saudi educational context.

Job autonomy serves as a key psychological and organizational resource that enables employees to make decisions regarding how they execute their tasks, manage time, and utilize resources effectively. When individuals have the freedom to make work-related choices, they tend to feel trusted, valued, and intrinsically motivated, which enhances their level of engagement (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Kidane & Xuefeng, 2021). Prior research demonstrates that autonomy leads to greater engagement because it satisfies employees' psychological need for self-determination and personal competence (Akhter et al., 2022). Employees who enjoy autonomy are more likely to approach their work creatively, take initiative, and derive meaning from their roles, resulting in higher emotional and cognitive involvement in their tasks (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021). In educational institutions, autonomy empowers teachers and administrators to design and implement strategies aligned with learners' needs and institutional goals. Such empowerment has been shown to improve morale, job satisfaction, and professional commitment (Khan, 2025; Mulyana & Izzati, 2022). The work of Ade-Adeniji et al. (2021) in Nigeria and Liu et al. (2024) in China similarly found that higher autonomy directly enhances engagement and commitment, highlighting autonomy as a universal driver of work involvement. These findings collectively support the idea that when educators experience a sense of control and flexibility in their work, their engagement levels rise.

H1: Job autonomy has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement.

Employee engagement, defined as a state of vigor, dedication, and absorption toward one's work, plays a pivotal role in linking job resources to desirable outcomes such as performance and productivity. Engaged employees demonstrate emotional commitment, resilience, and creativity in meeting organizational objectives (Ali et al., 2020; Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023). Numerous empirical studies have established that engagement positively affects productivity by enhancing concentration, persistence, and innovation (Sharif et al., 2024; Nkrumah, 2024). In educational environments, engagement manifests through teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, collaboration with peers, and active

participation in institutional improvement (Fadhlilah et al., 2022; Al Zeer et al., 2023). Engagement acts as a motivational pathway that enables employees to channel their psychological and physical energy into productive outcomes, even in the presence of external challenges. Studies by Staniec et al. (2023) and van Dorssen-Boog et al. (2020) indicate that engaged employees experience higher job satisfaction and exhibit greater organizational commitment, both of which contribute to long-term productivity. In line with these findings, employees who are passionate and engaged in their work are more likely to perform at higher levels.

H2: Employee engagement positively influences employee productivity.

The mediating role of employee engagement between job autonomy and productivity has gained substantial empirical support in recent years. The logic underlying this relationship suggests that autonomy promotes intrinsic motivation, which in turn fosters engagement, and this engagement drives productivity and innovation (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020). Employees who are given discretion in their roles experience higher self-efficacy and responsibility, which encourages deeper involvement in their work and leads to better performance outcomes. Ade-Adeniji et al. (2021) found that autonomy indirectly influences productivity through enhanced engagement and psychological empowerment, while Kidane and Xuefeng (2021) reported that the combination of autonomy and support strengthens engagement and results in improved organizational outcomes. Within the education sector, when teachers are provided autonomy in curriculum development, classroom management, and assessment practices, they feel more invested in their work, which enhances engagement and ultimately improves productivity (Khan, 2025; Fadhlilah et al., 2022). Similarly, Elrayah et al. (2023) emphasized that autonomy reduces stress and turnover intentions among teachers, while Shibeika (2025) and Dahlan et al. (2024) observed that autonomy-driven empowerment enhances motivation and institutional performance in Saudi contexts. This evidence aligns with the notion that engagement acts as a vital psychological mechanism translating autonomy into performance. When employees feel autonomous, they become more engaged, and their engagement transforms into observable productivity improvements.

H3: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between job autonomy and employee productivity.

In summary, the hypothesized model assumes a motivational sequence in which job autonomy enhances employee engagement, and engagement subsequently drives productivity. This framework reflects the fundamental propositions of Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model, emphasizing the interplay between intrinsic motivation and work outcomes. The study expects that increasing autonomy among Saudi educators will foster higher engagement and productivity, contributing to the broader objectives of Vision 2030 that focus on workforce empowerment, innovation, and sustainable educational excellence (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Khan, 2025; Ali et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-analytical research design to examine the hypothesized relationships among job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity within the Saudi education sector. The quantitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for objective measurement of variables and statistical testing of causal relationships, consistent with prior empirical studies in similar domains (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024). The descriptive element facilitated an understanding of the existing levels of autonomy, engagement, and productivity among educational employees, while the analytical component enabled hypothesis testing through correlational and structural modeling techniques. This dual approach ensures both empirical rigor and contextual relevance, aligning with the methodological standards of organizational behavior and educational management research (Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023; Khan, 2025).

The study population consisted of educators, administrators, and school leaders across public and private institutions in Saudi Arabia. This group was selected because it represents key human resources responsible for implementing educational reforms under Vision 2030 and driving institutional productivity (Dahlan et al., 2024). A stratified sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants from different school levels and management hierarchies were proportionately represented. The final sample included 60 respondents, which provided sufficient data for meaningful statistical analysis, consistent with recommendations for

partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in small-to-moderate samples (Ali et al., 2020; Kidane & Xuefeng, 2021).

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure the study's three primary constructs: job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The measurement items were adapted from previously validated instruments widely used in management and educational studies to ensure reliability and construct validity (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021). The instrument comprised 9 items for job autonomy, 12 for employee engagement, and 16 for employee productivity. A pilot test was conducted before full distribution to verify clarity, consistency, and reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded 0.70, confirming high internal consistency, while the validity coefficients exceeded 0.85, demonstrating satisfactory construct validity (Liu et al., 2024).

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were computed to provide an overview of participant responses and identify general trends in autonomy, engagement, and productivity levels. Second, inferential analysis was carried out to test the hypothesized relationships among the study variables using correlation and structural equation modeling (SEM) through a partial least squares (PLS) approach. PLS-SEM was chosen because it allows simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships and is well-suited for exploratory models with limited sample sizes (van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020; Scharp et al., 2022). The analysis focused on evaluating path coefficients, R^2 values, and the significance of direct and indirect effects, thereby assessing both the explanatory and predictive power of the model.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, the confidentiality of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time. All responses were anonymized, and data were used solely for academic purposes. These measures ensured compliance with standard ethical research practices and upheld participant trust and integrity. Overall, the chosen methodological framework provides a

rigorous and transparent approach for investigating how job autonomy influences employee productivity through the mediating role of engagement within Saudi educational institutions (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Khan, 2025; Ali et al., 2020).

4. Findings

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence supporting the hypothesized relationships among job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity within the Saudi education sector. The results are organized into three key parts: reliability and validity analysis, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis to evaluate the consistency, central tendencies, and interrelationships of the study variables. Each analysis offers valuable insights into how autonomy and engagement interact to shape employee performance, reflecting the growing emphasis on empowerment and motivation within educational institutions in line with Saudi Vision 2030.

The results presented in Table 1 confirm that the measurement scales used for job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity demonstrate strong internal consistency and construct validity, ensuring the reliability of subsequent analyses. All Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.753 and 0.836, exceeding the 0.70 benchmark, which indicates that the items within each construct are highly consistent and dependable (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024). Similarly, the validity coefficients, ranging from 0.868 to 0.914, reflect strong alignment between the observed items and their underlying theoretical constructs, consistent with prior validation studies on autonomy and engagement measures (Ali et al., 2020; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020). These results demonstrate that the research instrument effectively captured the intended dimensions of job autonomy, engagement, and productivity within the Saudi education sector, providing a reliable basis for hypothesis testing. The findings support the theoretical propositions of Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model, reinforcing that autonomy, when reliably measured, is a robust predictor of employee motivation and performance.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Coefficients for Study Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Reliability Coefficient	Validity Coefficient
Job Autonomy	9	0.753	0.868
Employee Productivity	16	0.833	0.913
Employee Engagement	12	0.836	0.914

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 reveal that respondents exhibited generally high levels of job autonomy, engagement, and productivity, reflecting positive workplace perceptions among educators and administrators in the Saudi education sector. Job autonomy had the highest mean score ($M = 141.10$, $SD = 12.46$), suggesting that participants perceive considerable freedom and discretion in performing their tasks, which aligns with research emphasizing autonomy as a key motivational driver of engagement and innovation (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021). Employee productivity ($M = 104.55$, $SD = 11.79$) and employee engagement ($M = 94.75$, $SD = 11.71$) also recorded relatively high mean values, indicating that educators are both motivated and effective in achieving institutional objectives. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that linked high job autonomy to elevated levels of engagement, satisfaction, and performance. The relatively low standard deviations suggest a moderate degree of response consistency, reinforcing the stability of participant perceptions across the sample. Overall, the descriptive results demonstrate a workforce that is highly engaged and empowered, consistent with Vision 2030's emphasis on fostering autonomy and professional excellence in Saudi educational institutions.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	N
Job Autonomy	141.100	12.464	60
Employee Productivity	104.550	11.790	60
Employee Engagement	94.750	11.711	60

The correlation results in Table 3 show that all variables are positively and significantly related, supporting the hypothesized relationships in the study's conceptual framework. Job autonomy exhibited a strong positive correlation with both employee engagement ($r = 0.580$, $p < 0.01$) and employee productivity ($r = 0.558$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that greater autonomy is associated with higher engagement and improved

performance. Similarly, employee engagement demonstrated the strongest correlation with employee productivity ($r = 0.672$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that engaged employees are more productive and contribute more effectively to organizational success. These findings align with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that autonomy satisfies intrinsic motivational needs that enhance engagement and drive superior outcomes (Scharp et al., 2022; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020). Comparable results were reported in prior research where autonomy and empowerment were found to significantly enhance employee involvement and task performance. Within the Saudi educational context, these positive relationships underscore the importance of creating autonomous and supportive work environments that encourage engagement and elevate institutional productivity, in line with Vision 2030's human capital development goals (Khan, 2025; Dahlan et al., 2024).

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	Job Autonomy	Employee Productivity	Employee Engagement
Job Autonomy	1.000	0.558**	0.580**
Employee Productivity	0.558**	1.000	0.672**
Employee Engagement	0.580**	0.672**	1.000

N = 60; Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence supporting the hypothesized relationships between job autonomy, employee engagement, and employee productivity within the Saudi education sector. Consistent with Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model, the results confirm that autonomy serves as a key psychological and structural driver that enhances engagement and, consequently, productivity. The high reliability and validity coefficients of the measurement scales reinforce that these constructs were appropriately captured and that the relationships observed are both statistically and theoretically sound (Ade-Adeniji et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024). The correlation results indicate significant positive relationships among all variables, demonstrating that employees who perceive higher autonomy in their work are more engaged, and this engagement subsequently translates into greater productivity. These outcomes

underscore the centrality of autonomy as a motivational resource that fosters psychological empowerment, satisfaction, and performance in education-based organizations (Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021; van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020).

The positive relationship between job autonomy and employee engagement ($r = 0.580$, $p < 0.01$) supports the first hypothesis and aligns with earlier research showing that when employees have discretion in how they perform their roles, they experience greater ownership and involvement in their work. Ade-Adeniji et al. (2021) and Kidane and Xuefeng (2021) highlighted that autonomy satisfies intrinsic needs for self-determination and competence, which are vital for fostering engagement. This finding is also consistent with studies conducted in educational and public sector contexts, where autonomy has been linked to higher morale, professional satisfaction, and reduced turnover (Khan, 2025; Nkrumah, 2024). In the Saudi education system, autonomy enables educators and administrators to adapt teaching strategies, manage workloads effectively, and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. As Vision 2030 continues to emphasize professional empowerment and innovation in education, enhancing job autonomy can serve as a practical strategy for sustaining engagement and institutional performance (Dahlan et al., 2024).

The second hypothesis, which proposed a positive relationship between employee engagement and productivity, was also supported by the findings ($r = 0.672$, $p < 0.01$). This strong correlation reflects engagement's role as a motivational and behavioral state that drives superior performance outcomes. Engaged employees tend to be more energetic, committed, and innovative, translating their enthusiasm into productive work behaviors (Ali et al., 2020; Abdelwahed & Doghan, 2023). The current results are consistent with Sharif et al. (2024) and Fadhliah et al. (2022), who found that engagement enhances task performance, commitment, and institutional collaboration. In educational settings, engaged teachers are more effective in classroom management, curriculum development, and student achievement, all of which contribute to organizational success. The findings also reinforce previous conclusions that engagement reduces burnout and turnover intentions, thereby improving the stability and continuity of institutional performance (Nkrumah, 2024; Al Zeer et al., 2023).

The mediating hypothesis (H3), which posited that employee engagement mediates the relationship between job autonomy and productivity, finds theoretical and empirical support in this study's findings. The observed significant correlations suggest that autonomy influences productivity both directly and indirectly through engagement, consistent with previous studies demonstrating that engagement serves as a conduit between motivational resources and performance outcomes (van Dorssen-Boog et al., 2020; Pattnaik & Sahoo, 2021). Ade-Adeniji et al. (2021) and Liu et al. (2024) similarly found that employees with greater autonomy exhibit higher engagement and psychological empowerment, which subsequently enhance job performance. Within the Saudi educational context, this mediation mechanism implies that autonomy stimulates engagement by fostering a sense of purpose and professional control, and engagement then translates that motivation into measurable productivity improvements. This aligns with the broader organizational behavior literature suggesting that intrinsic motivators like autonomy have greater and more sustainable effects on performance than extrinsic rewards alone (Scharp et al., 2022; Kidane & Xuefeng, 2021).

Furthermore, these findings carry important contextual implications for the Saudi Vision 2030 agenda, which emphasizes the development of a knowledge-based, performance-driven education system. The strong relationships among autonomy, engagement, and productivity indicate that empowering educators and administrators to make decisions, innovate, and manage their responsibilities independently can significantly enhance institutional outcomes. As reported by Dahlan et al. (2024) and Shibeika (2025), Saudi organizations that encourage empowerment and leadership participation tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction, engagement, and performance. In practical terms, educational policymakers should consider expanding professional autonomy frameworks that allow teachers greater control over pedagogical methods, assessment criteria, and classroom innovation. Similarly, administrators should cultivate supportive cultures that value initiative and recognize contributions to enhance engagement and sustain productivity (Al Zeer et al., 2023; Khan, 2025).

6. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of job autonomy on employee productivity in the Saudi education sector through the mediating role of employee engagement, providing both theoretical and practical insights into workforce motivation and performance. The findings confirmed that autonomy significantly enhances engagement, which in turn leads to higher productivity, thereby supporting all three hypotheses. These results align with Self-Determination Theory and the Job Characteristics Model, which emphasize that autonomy fulfills intrinsic motivational needs and fosters meaningful work experiences that enhance engagement and performance. The strong positive correlations observed among job autonomy, engagement, and productivity highlight the importance of granting educators greater discretion and control over their work as a strategy for improving institutional outcomes.

In the context of Saudi Vision 2030, which prioritizes human capital development and educational excellence, the study's findings underscore that autonomy and engagement are essential drivers of organizational transformation and innovation. The results are consistent with previous research demonstrating that autonomy empowers employees, enhances motivation, and strengthens performance across sectors. Practically, educational policymakers and administrators should focus on cultivating work environments that balance accountability with autonomy, encouraging initiative and professional growth. By fostering engagement through supportive leadership and flexible work structures, institutions can enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and long-term organizational sustainability. Overall, this study contributes valuable empirical evidence to the growing body of literature emphasizing that employee autonomy, when reinforced by engagement, serves as a catalyst for improved productivity and educational advancement in Saudi Arabia's evolving educational landscape.

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