
Principals' Optimism, Teachers' Psychological Safety and Job Performance in Secondary Schools of Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Leader optimism is a resource that have been shown to impact a leader's capacity to positively influence followers towards successful job performance even in the face of crisis or insecurity. This study investigated the relationship between principals' optimism, teachers' psychological safety and job performance in Awgu Education Zone of Enugu State. Three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. A correlational research design was employed using a sample of 250 teachers drawn through simple random sampling method. Principals' optimism in insecurity, teachers' psychological safety and job performance were measured using scales adapted from previous studies with reliability indices ranging from 0.71 to 0.83. The data analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation revealed that there was a moderate negative relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety and a positive relationship between teachers' psychological safety and teachers' job performance. The findings imply that the display of optimism by school principals in the context of the current state of insecurity in the country can dampen teachers' sense of psychological safety thereby impede on the performance of their teaching responsibilities. Based on the findings, it was recommended among other things that mechanisms to boost optimism among principals such as counselling by psychologists, organization of workshops for fostering principals' optimism and creating awareness training campaign to be organized by the schools' governing boards and Post-Primary Schools Management Board on school leaders' optimism.*

KEYWORDS: Principals' optimism, teachers' psychological safety, job performance and secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is one of the biggest countries in Sub-Sahara Africa. Quite recently the big oil producing country, has been plunged into the menace of insecurity which may led to a break down in the

polity. Insecurity in recent times has taken the center stage in the country and the international discourse. People feel unsafe because of banditry in the north, abduction and kidnapping of students and consistent agitations and separatist movement in the south east. These situation heightens fear in the education sector as news of deaths, abducted school children, people being maimed, houses burnt, and unsecured environment filter in the polity to show that one is not safe. Principals are the head and security managers of the secondary educational institutions of the country. Safety of lives and properties are entrusted in their care. In other words, a principal may be liable when the life of any school personnel is at risk. Given the problematic tendencies of instability in the society occasioned by insecurity which appears to have impacted heavily on the education sector. The need for optimistic leaders in the school becomes more imperative now than ever. Yuan and Wang (2016), defined optimism as a tendency that people attribute specific negative incidents to temporary and external factors, while attribute positive incidents to permanent and internal factors. In other words, Optimism can be altering state which can be harmed when an individual is constantly facing negative situations. Seligman (2006) described optimism as an individual belief that a bad event or failure is only temporary, will not affect other activities, and is not absolutely self-induced but can be caused by other things. This is to say that optimistic principals help to motivate teachers to be hopeful, insightful in their academic, emotional and psychological development which will in turn prepare the students for higher academic achievements. Optimism can be seen as a person's positive outlook towards life events. Optimists believe that good outcomes will occur in life and can therefore appraise stressful events more positively and mobilize their resources to take direct action in response to the stressor. Gallo in (Gabriel, Roosevelt, Paul, Renan, Maria & Valddiney 2018), identified optimism as an essential characteristic for leaders, because being optimistic allows them to inspire workers, influence teachers' attitude, see prospects even in adverse situation, and to lead people to a better future. Principal's optimism therefore is the display of enthusiasm by the school manager who inspires staff, influences teachers work attitude, hardly expects things to go wrong, identifies opportunities even in adverse situation, and leads people to a better future. This disposition can impact the psychological safety of the teachers.

Teacher psychological safety is used to describe a situation where teachers have the feeling that taking an interpersonal risk will not result in embarrassment, shame or ridicule (Wanles, 2016). Similarly, Yuan and Wang, (2016) explains that psychological safety refers to an individuals' perception about the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in the work place and describes a climate where employees have no fear of condemnation and in which they feel comfortable engaging in constructive discussion that solves problems (Edmondson 1999). This gives room for the "voice" of the employees to be heard. This implies that the teacher is disposed to freely air his views on issues concerning the school without being victimized by the authority. A number of scholars have linked psychological safety to employees work engagement (Dramanu, Milledzi & Asamani 2020), employees' sense of job insecurity and work place fun and voice behaviour (Yuan and Wang, 2016). These studies suggest that psychological safety has the potential of affecting employee job performance.

The performance of an employee is one of the most important factors that affect the performance of the organization. In the school system, teachers' job performance is a set of teaching goals of a course. It involves the extent to which the teacher participates in the overall running of the school in order to achieve expected objectives and goals of the school. Obiekwe, Ogbo and Igbokwe, (2020) sees teachers' job performance as tasks performed by a teacher at a particular period towards achieving the goals of the school. These task involves teaching in class, being punctual to school and class, finishing the termly scheme of work, making sure the lesson plan and notes are up to date, and helping students solve their academic and learning difficulties.

Despite the crucial role performed by teachers in achieving educational goals, the researchers have observed that teachers in some secondary schools in Enugu State show poor work behaviour, incompetence, conservativeness, computer illiteracy and poor teachers' professional growth. Studies have shown that teachers are falling short in the performance of their duties as recorded by Ogbo (2010), Obiekwe and Mbanefo (2019) and Okeke- James, Igbokwe, Ekweogu and Anyanwu (2020). One of the factors that can positively influence teachers' job performance is the perception of their principal's psychological disposition. Research shows that how teachers (followers) perceive their leaders show of optimism or pessimism in the face of crises or insecurity impact their own psychological disposition. Recent studies in the field of mental health or positive psychology have shown that leader optimism influences followers' job engagement, creativity/ innovative behaviours (Dramanu, Milledzi & Asamani 2020) and voice behaviour (Yuan and Wang, 2016). However, no known study to the researchers has examined this variable in relation to teacher performance. This is what this work is set to do.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between principals' optimism, teachers' psychological safety and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zone of Enugu State. Specifically, this study determined the:

1. Relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu Education zone of Enugu state.
2. Relationship between principals' optimism and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu state.
3. Relationship between teachers' psychological safety and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What is the relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu Education zone of Enugu state?
2. What is the relationship between principals' optimism and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu state?

3. What is the relationship between teachers' psychological safety and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu state?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu Education zone of Enugu state.
2. There is no significant relationship between principals' optimism and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu State.
3. There is no significant relationship between teachers' psychological safety and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu State.

Theoretical Frame work

The theoretical frame work of this study is hinged on Path-Goal Theory which was based on Vrooms (1964) expectancy theory in which an individual will act in a certain way based on the anticipation that the act will be followed by a given outcome and on the desirability of that outcome to the individual. Path-goal theory was first introduced by Martin Evans (1970) and was further developed by House (1971). He explained that:

- i. The leader's specific functions is to enhance the psychological states of his followers which results from motivation to perform his job satisfactorily. The leader's function is to provide his workers with "Coaching, guidance, support and rewards necessary for effective and satisfying performance that will be lacking in the environment.
- ii. The specific leader behaviour that will accomplish these functions are determined by the situation in which the leader operates. This situation could be the characteristics of tasks to be performed by the subordinates and environmental factors. The emphasis in this theory, is to determine the employee and environmental factors, select a leadership style and focus on motivational factors that helps the employee succeed.

According to Ezeugbo and Anozie (2019), Path- Goal theory is a thought process in which leaders select specific behaviours that suits the employees' needs and working environment so as to guide them through the track to achieving their daily work activities or goals. The relationship between this theory and the present study is that an optimistic principal communicates hopefulness in his body language and expects good things to happen in his school. Based on this position, he makes desperate effort to train, direct and reward teachers. By doing these, good school climate has been created and teachers feel relaxed, speak out their minds easily and share information about problems and disagreements without hindrances. With this development, teachers become encouraged and teachers' psychological safety is assured leading to improved job performance.

On the other hand, teachers feel internally or psychologically unsafe, if they keep quiet during staff meetings, and engage in secret criticisms about the problems in the school because they fear being punished. Moreover, some teachers that are internally unsafe hardly settle down to do any tangible job. For instance, a kidnapped victim hardly forgets the traumatic experiences he had, and it is only an optimistic principal that may erase fear of insecurity from the teacher's psyche. An optimistic principal directs teachers by describing the tasks to be performed, recognizing the employees and environmental characteristics, selecting the leadership behaviour that prompts teacher- participation and providing the motivational factors to help workers overcome obstacles on their job. This leads to achievement of the school's goals and educational objectives.

Similarly, principals' optimism will likely motivate teachers to be innovative despite security challenges and could bring in positivity, active participation, freedom to lend their voices and willingness to help each other in problem solving. This positive behaviour from principal, brings in desired school climate where peace, cooperation, psychological safety and team work abound to improve teachers' job satisfaction and performance.

METHOD

The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of study comprised 1,276 teachers in 54 public secondary schools in Awgu zone of Enugu state according to data collected from the Post Primary School Management Board, Enugu (September, 2022). The sample size for the study consisted 250 teachers drawn from the population using simple random sampling method. This design is suitable since the study sought to collect data to establish relationship between principals' optimism, teachers' psychological safety and teachers' job performance in Awgu Education zone of Enugu state. Three instruments were adapted by the researchers from the work of Greenberg (2006) to measure Principal optimism in Insecurity (POI), Teachers Psychological Safety Questionnaire (TPSQ) from Garvin et al' (2008) psychological safety assessment instrument while Teachers job performance(TJP) instrument designed for secondary schools by Muhammad, Rahmat, Ayaz, and Malik (2013). The POI have 4-items, TPSQ (3 -items) while TJP consists of 24 items on teaching skills, Management skills, Discipline and Regularity and Interpersonal Relations. The total number of the items for the three constructs (POITPSQTJP) is Thirty-one (31). The instrument was structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Principals' optimism in insecurity, teachers' psychological safety and job performance were measured using scales adapted from previous studies with reliability indices ranging from 0.71 to 0.83. A total of 261 copies of questionnaires were administered by the researchers with the help of three research assistants who are secondary school teachers in Awgu education zone. A total of 250 copies of the questionnaires were properly filled and retrieved, indicating a 98% return rate. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation for research questions and hypotheses. Decisions on research questions, the coefficient (r) and the size of relationship was interpreted using the interpretation of correlation coefficient by Downie and health cited by Nworgu (2015) as shown:

0.80 and above for high, above 0.30 - below 0.80 for moderate and 0.30 and below for low. For decision on hypotheses, if the p-value is equal to or greater than significant value of 0.05 ($P > 0.05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected and the difference was taken not to be statistically significant but if p- value is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), the null hypothesis was rejected and the difference was taken to be statistically not significant.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between Principals' Optimism and Teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State?

Table 1: Pearson's r on Principals' Optimism and Teachers' Psychological Safety Scores in Public Secondary Schools in Awgu Educational Zone of Enugu State.

Source of Variation	N	r	Remark
Principals' Optimism Teachers' Psychological Safety	250	-45	Low Negative Relationship

As indicated in Table 1, the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) is -45. This shows that there was low negative relationship between teachers' perception of principals' optimism and Teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu educational zone of Enugu State. Thus, the relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety is inverse. This implies that increase in principals' optimism will lead to a low decrease in teachers' psychological safety and vice versa.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between Principals' Optimism and Teachers' Job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State?

Table 2: Pearson's r on Principals' Optimism and Teachers' Job performance Scores in public Secondary Schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State.

Source of Variation	N	r	Remark
Principals' Optimism Teachers' Job Performance	250	0.25	Low Positive Relationship

The data presented in Table 2 shows that the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) is 0.25. This shows that there was a low positive relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu educational zone of Enugu State. This indicates that an increase in principals' optimism, leads to a low positive increase on teachers' job performance and vice versa.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between Teachers' Psychological safety and Teachers' Job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State?

Table 3: Pearson's r on Teachers' Psychological Safety and Teachers' Job Performance Scores in Public Secondary Schools in Awgu Educational Zone of Enugu State.

Source of Variation	N	r	Remark
Teachers' Psychological Safety	250	0.20	
Teachers' Job Performance			Low Positive Relationship

The result presented in Table 3 indicates that the Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) is 0.20. This shows that there is a low positive relationship between Teachers' psychological safety and Teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Awgu educational zone of Enugu State. This implies that an increase in Teachers psychological safety will lead to a low positive increase in Teachers' job performance and vice versa.

Hypothesis Testing:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu Education zone of Enugu state.

Table 4: Test of Significance of Pearson r between Principals' Optimism and Teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State.

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Principals' Optimism	250	-45		
Teachers' Psychological Safety			0.00	Sig

The data presented on Table 4 shows that there is a significant negative correlation between Principal Optimism and Teachers' psychological safety. $r = -45$, $P\text{-value} < 0.05$. The first null hypothesis was therefore accepted. Thus, the relationship between principal optimism and Teachers' psychological safety in public secondary schools in Awgu educational zone of Enugu State is not significant.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between principals' optimism and teacher's job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Education zones of Enugu State.

Table 5: Test of significance of Pearson r between Principals' Optimism and Teachers' Job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State.

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Principals' Optimism	250	0.25		
Teachers' Job Performance			0.00	Sig

Table 5 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between Principal Optimism and Teachers' job performance. $r = 0.25$, P -value < 0.05 . The second null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This shows that a significant but negligible relationship exists between principal optimism and Teachers' job performances in public secondary schools in Awgu educational zone of Enugu State.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between Teachers' psychological safety and Teachers' Job performance in secondary schools in Awgu Educational zone of Enugu State

Table 6: Test of Significance of Pearson r between Teachers' Psychological Safety and Teachers Job Performance in Secondary Schools in Awgu Educational Zone of Enugu State.

Source of Variation	N	r	p-value	Remark
Teachers' Psychological Safety	250	.20	0.00	Sig
Teachers' Job Performance				

Table 6 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between Teachers' psychological safety and teachers' job performance. $r = .20$, P -value < 0.05 . The 3rd null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This shows that a significant relationship exists between Teachers' psychological safety and Teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Awgu educational zone of Enugu State.

DISCUSSION

The findings in table 1 reveals a low negative relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' psychological safety in secondary schools in Awgu education zone of Enugu state. This indicates an inverse relationship where increase in principals' optimism, results to decrease in teachers' psychological safety. It also, recorded a significant relationship between the two variables. This result supported the study of Koliouli, & Canellopoulos, (2021) that recorded a high negative correlation between levels of dispositional optimism and sense of helplessness, and sense of self-efficacy. Their study in relation to stress explained that dispositional optimism is the expectations which individuals have of the future that enables the individual to draw personal strength and explore new perspectives after a traumatic experience. This result is not surprising because teachers' sense of safety could be perceived from their principals' show of overconfidence (optimism) or negativity (pessimism) in the face of crisis and insecurity. Teachers work place are psychologically safe if employees are free to voice and make suggestions on new innovative ideas, seeking and providing feedback, willingly taking a risk and corroborating in a way to overcome threats to individuals as well as move the school forward (Edmondson,1999). Workers are required to contribute to the improvement of the organizational practices to enable learning through voicing and experimenting with new ideas. This depends on the principal's leadership style e.g. voicing a new idea may challenge existing norms, system or ways through which work is carried out or

conflict with the interest of other staff members. When an organization fails to provide a safe work environment and make employees to experience job insecurity, workers tend to respond with negative attitudes and behaviours in accordance with give-and-take norms (Lam, Liang, Ashford & Lee, 2015) and vice versa if they feel satisfied from work, they respond in form of an attitude, and positive work behaviour.

It is possible, that principal's optimistic characteristics of overconfidence as reported by Malmendier and Taylor (2015), manifests in their belief of having accurate information, knowing it all and believing that all events are under their control in the school, becomes a vital factor that can be harmful to teachers' psychological safety. Teachers are aware of events of insecurity arising from public occurrences, disaster and war. With this situation in mind, an optimistic principal, have the tendency of inducing stress and anxiety on some doubtful teachers. Teachers stress could manifest in antagonism, absenteeism and non-commitment to their instructional duties and this can threaten their physical and psychological safety. This view is in conformity with Nandi and Galea (2008) who argued that disaster can be tremendous stressors, as lives of people are threatened. For instance, incidents of shootings in schools and churches can trigger insecurity. Specifically, general insecurity propels individuals to be careful about their safety, mentally preparing them with an alternative means of coping with potential threats. This explains why some teachers feel threatened by their principals' positivity towards the achievement of educational goals at the verge of insecurity.

Findings in table 2 reveals a low positive relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Awgu educational zone. It also, recorded low significant relationship between the two variables. Recent studies in the field of mental health or positive psychology have shown that leader optimism influences followers' job engagement, creativity/innovative behaviours (Dramanu, Milledzi & Asamani 2020). This result of positive relationship of leader optimism influencing followers' job commitment is in conformity with the findings of Imhangbe and Obozuwa (2018) that found a positive relationship between principals' leadership style and teachers' job performance in Edo senatorial District. The possible explanation to this finding is that optimistic principals are always positive, enjoys team work and inspires their teachers for better job performance by creating conducive school environment. Good school climate will stimulate teachers to effectively discharge their duties. In support of this view, Arogundada (2018) in his study found a significant relationship between school factors and teachers job performance. The author explained that the level of teachers' job performance is moderate if the indices (such as adequate knowledge of subject matter, lesson note preparation, students' evaluation, instructional delivery, classroom management, use of instructional materials, ensuring discipline among students, students assessment) are given adequate attention. Teachers with the above secrets have job satisfaction. According to Nwosu (2017), job performance is measured through teachers' job satisfaction and job attitudes such as job commitment, feelings of job challenges, job meaningfulness and job responsibility. In other words, job performance increases when individuals are satisfied on the job. In conformity with this finding, Caldwell

(2011) argued that teachers who display high level of performance seem to view their principal as extra dependable. This implies that the principal earns their trust through the use of effective communication to stimulate the teachers into positive actions.

It was also found in Research question three that there was a low positive relationship between teachers' psychological safety and teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Awgu education zone. Findings in table 6 showed that the relationship between the two variables are significant. These findings corroborate the findings of Alam, Shabana, Muhammad, and Naeem (2019) that recorded a positive correlation of inclusive leadership, interpersonal relationship with psychological safety while adherence to norms was also negatively correlated with inclusive leadership ($r = -0.267$, $p < 0.05$) and interpersonal relationships ($r = -0.414$, $p < 0.01$); the hypotheses are accepted. The possible explanation to this, is that strong leadership and interpersonal relationship powerfully impact the individual beliefs about speaking up (voicing), suggesting ideas, seeking and providing feedback and reducing the fear of facing any consequences that may arise from speaking up, effectively creating safety in the work place. It is not surprising that conforming to existing norms was negatively correlated with general leadership and workers felt less unsafe. Workers are always afraid of existing rules that must be obeyed and failure attracts punishment leading to job insecurity. Findings of Amelia, Adnans and Zahreni (2020) contradicts this view, where perceived organizational support has a negative and significant effect on job insecurity. Job insecurity has a negative impact on workers' attitude and behaviour especially if organizations fail to provide a safe work environment. A safe work environment is where workers perceive that if they commit any mistake or ask ignorant questions, that others will not view them negatively. When one is free from psychological violence in daily interactions among people, this fulfills the need for interpersonal trust, communication and creating a sense of belongingness. Psychological safety makes individual feel free and capable for one to change his behaviour in response to organizational challenges. Roussin and Webber (2012) explains that psychological safety increases an employee's job engagement, improves an individual's performance and learning and reduces the individuals' tendency to indulge in dubious decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that more knowledge about principal optimism is necessary because overconfident principal has the tendency of threatening the teachers' psychological safety. Over confidence can trigger inferiority complex on the part of some teachers, leading to absenteeism and poor job performance. The study recorded negative relationship between principal optimism and teachers' psychological safety while positive relationship was found between teachers' psychological safety and teachers' job performance. Also, there was a positive relationship between principals' optimism and teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Awgu education zone of Enugu state.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended among other things:

1. That the Ministry of Education should work together with school board, to create awareness on the role of school leaders' optimism and make provisions for in-service training for principals on how to improve and apply leader optimism for maximum result in school administration.
2. Also all school mechanisms must be utilized to boost optimism among principals such as counselling by psychologists, organization of workshops for fostering principals' optimism.
3. Principals' should encourage teachers to speak out on the best ways to move the school forward. This freedom to talk without being threatened by principals will earn the teachers trust and ensures job security which leads to improvement in their job performance.

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