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Research Article

Competence and Work Engagement Among Teachers in Public Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between perceived job autonomy and employee engagement in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The cross-sectional research design was employed in the study. A questionnaire for perceived job autonomy and employee engagement was used to generate data for the study with Cronbach's alpha reliability scores above .80. The respondents to the research instrument comprised 312 public secondary school teachers drawn from 144 public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Data generated were analyzed with Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) at the 0.05 level of significance. The results showed a significant relationship between competence and the measures of employee engagement. Given these findings, it was concluded that there is a significant empirical relationship between perceived job autonomy and employee engagement among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Based on this conclusion, it was recommended firstly that: To get employees to be more Vigor ous in their assignments, administrators of public secondary schools should stimulate their staff to believing that they have what it takes to be successful in their careers. This could be done through face-to-face conversations and through recommendations. If this is done staff would be able to take on even challenging tasks and demonstrate vigor in completing such tasks. Also, school administrators should enhance engagement by making their staff to be dedicated through enhancing their feelings of competence. Finally, school administrators should put in place mechanisms that will drive competence among their staff by helping them to heighten their levels of self-esteem, optimism and hope as these would encourage absorption.

Keywords: *perceived job autonomy, vigor, dedication, absorption.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Active teacher job engagement is very essential in secondary schools as it affects both the quality of education and student academic achievements. Teachers who demonstrate engagement and dedication toward their school work together as they proactively fulfil their duties and create superior learning conditions (Bakker & Bal, 2010). However, active teacher work engagement is mostly dependent on the subjective believe that they have the necessary teaching skills. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) opined that competence represented by "teacher self-efficacy" occurs when feel they can attain their desired learning outcomes.

Studies reveal that teacher self-efficacy far exceeds positive work engagement. Teachers who believe they have strong effective teaching skills demonstrate deeper work engagement through by being vigorous and dedicated in teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Higher levels of engagement together with improved performance not only increase job satisfaction but also significantly decrease burnout (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Secondary school teachers deal with various professional challenges. Teachers who feel competent possess the capability to handle such professional challenges with success which helps them maintain engagement while staying committed to their duties (Bandura, 1997).

Recent research studies have shown new insights on the link between competence and engagement. Fathi et al. (2021) demonstrated that individual teacher competence acts as a significant predictor of work engagement levels thereby indicating that improvements in self-efficacy serve as an effective method to boost teacher engagement. Teachers who exhibit stronger self-efficacy demonstrate enhanced resilience and possess better capabilities to deliver innovative instruction and create modern enthusiastic learning environments (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

In spite of the above submissions, it still remains to be known if felt competence or self-efficacy could effectively increase work engagement among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. this study intends to fill this gap by examining the relationship between competence and work engagement among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State seems to be demonstrating low levels of employee engagement and this negatively affect overall student outcomes and dampens the whole learning environment. However, research had shown that teachers who display engagement maintain elevated levels of job satisfaction and motivation as well as improve student outcomes (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Hakanen et al., 2006). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) shows that teacher work engagement continues to decrease because teachers handle increasing workloads with rare opportunities for professional growth alongside inadequate support from their schools. The result is an increase in disengagement among teachers thereby creating serious problems for schools in the area of teacher retention.

Teacher engagement depends strongly on how well professionals trust they can perform their job according to their competency perceptions. Deci and Ryan, (2000) shows that competence stands as a principal psychological requirement which shapes motivational levels and engages people in their activities. The level of perceived competence among teachers leads them to maintain higher job satisfaction in addition to greater resilience and professional commitment (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). People who view themselves as inadequate or insufficiently prepared to their role face higher stress levels combined with burnout while engagement suffers which impacts their delivery outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Research on the relationship between competence and engagement exhibits limited findings especially in public secondary schools. The majority of research either examines teacher self-efficacy universally (Zee & Koomen, 2016) or investigates how schools generally engage their staff members (Saks, 2006). There is need, therefore to understand how competence impact on work engagement among teachers. This research aims to extend current understandings of the link between competence teacher work engagement to offer practical insights to motivate teachers, combat burnout and improve classroom experiences in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between felt competence and employee engagement among post primary school teachers in Bayelsa State. The specific objectives, however, are to:

1. Find out whether competence relates with Vigor among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.
2. Find out whether competence relates with dedication among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.
3. Find out whether competence relates with absorption among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study:

1. To what extent does competence relate with Vigor among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?
2. What is the relationship between competence and dedication among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?
3. How does competence relate with absorption among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null forms are formulated:

1. Competence does not relate with Vigor among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.
2. Competence does not relate with dedication among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.
3. Competence does not relate with absorption among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Competence

Competence, which is the conviction in one's capacity to perform tasks efficiently, has been identified as a substantial predictor of employee engagement in a variety of industries. Organisational success is contingent upon employee engagement, which is frequently defined by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Engaged employees are more committed, innovative, and fruitful in their work.

The relationship between employee engagement and competence is based on self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are more likely to be engaged in their work when their need for competence is met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In this context, competence is the sensation of being effective in one's interactions with the environment, which cultivates a sense of mastery and accomplishment. Intrinsic motivation, which is a critical factor in engagement, is more likely to be experienced by employees when they perceive themselves as competent (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

2.2 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement continues to be the focus of organizational studies because it determines many performance factors at work. The research examines both employee engagement along with its motivational elements and the positive aspects of workplace dedication. It is a positive mental state which gratifies people and manifest as vigor, dedication and absorption. Employee engagement drives employees to generate high levels of energy and dedication along with full absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These three essential elements of engagement results in performance improvements employee well-being (Saks, 2006).

Multiple internal and external factors function as essential drivers that encourage workplace engagement among employees. An organization's leadership effectiveness together with direct employee communication stands essential for employee engagement. Empowered workers become strongly dedicated to organizational goals through leader-provided clear direction and motivational support and constructive feedback (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

For meaningful employee engagement to occur employees need to strike a balance between their professional life and personal life. The workplace flexibility of organizations promotes employee engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2015). Through training and professional opportunities employees develop increased devotion toward their personal progression (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Many strengths emerge from employee involvement within the workplace environment. Organizations experience success with better business competition when employees demonstrate high engagement levels according to Bakker and Bal (2010). Based on his study Halbesleben (2010) documented that both organizational commitment and employee-organization relationships serve to minimize employee turnover intentions. When employees embrace engagement fully, they surpass their work requirements and create collegial interactions in teams (Saks, 2006).

Organisations can enhance both work performance results and employee satisfaction by understanding various employee engagement styles and their performance motivators. High-performing employees emerge from top leadership and appropriate work-life management along with career development prospects.

2.3 Empirical Review

Mazzetti et al. (2022) conducted a study that investigated the correlation between employee engagement and perceived competence in a sample of healthcare professionals. Higher levels of perceived competence were significantly correlated with increased levels of engagement, notably in terms of Vigor and dedication, according to the study. The authors proposed that employees are more inclined to invest energy and enthusiasm in their work when they feel competent, which results in increased engagement.

Seibert et al. (2023) conducted a meta-analysis to investigate the correlation between employee engagement and psychological empowerment, which encompasses competence. The results suggested that throughout a variety of job contexts, competence was a robust predictor of engagement. The research also demonstrated that employees who perceived themselves as competent and empowered were more inclined to participate in proactive behaviours, including the pursuit of novel challenges and the promotion of organisational objectives.

Petrou et al. (2021) conducted a study to investigate the impact of competence on job crafting behaviours and subsequent employee engagement. The researchers discovered that employees who regarded themselves as competent were more inclined to participate in job crafting, which involves actively modifying their employment to better align with their strengths and interests. In turn, this proactive behaviour increased their engagement, particularly in terms of assimilation and dedication.

Albrecht et al. (2023) investigated the inverse relationship between competence and burnout, a condition of emotional exhaustion that adversely affects engagement. According to the investigation, employees who reported higher levels of perceived competence were less likely to experience fatigue and more likely to report higher levels of engagement. The authors underscored the significance of competence in sustaining employee engagement and mitigating the adverse effects of job demands.

Lee et al. (2023) conducted research that investigated the impact of continuous professional development on the engagement and competence of educators. Teachers who engaged in professional development activities reported higher levels of competence, which substantially predicted their engagement, particularly in terms of Vigor and dedication, according to the study. The results emphasise the importance of initiatives that promote competence in the development of long-term engagement.

A study conducted by Bakker and Demerouti (2022) reported that employees who perceived themselves as competent were more likely to experience high levels of engagement, which were defined by vigor, dedication, and absorption. The research emphasised that competence increases self-efficacy, which in turn promotes a more profound emotional investment in one's work.

In the same vein, Hakanen et al. (2023) conducted a study that revealed a positive correlation between employee engagement and perceived competence, particularly in high demand work environments. The researchers noted that employees who perceived themselves as competent in their positions demonstrated higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement, indicating that competence is a substantial predictor of engagement outcomes.

The empirical literature indicates a strong correlation between competence and employee engagement with competence functioning as a substantial predictor of a variety of engagement outcomes. Competence increases the confidence and efficacy of employees, resulting in increased levels of Vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. Furthermore, the relationship is fortified by investments in training and development, as well as organisational support. However, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that employee engagement among teachers in public secondary institutions in Bayelsa State could be significantly influenced by competence. An additional critical gap that the present investigation endeavours to address.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. Data for the study were generated through a well-structured questionnaire. The variables for the study were measured using scales that were adapted from literature. The scales for perceived competence were drawn from Sppreitzer (1995) while the employee engagement scales were adapted from the ultra-short measures for work engagement (UWES-17) scales created by Schaufelli et al. (2017). The respondents to the questionnaires involved 312 secondary school teachers out of 363 teachers drawn from 144 public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The scales were tested for reliability. The results of these tests are presented in the next section. Data generated were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis.

4.0 RESULTS

The findings of the study are presented in the table below.

Table 4.1 Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation outcomes of the studied variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4
Competence	3.8558	.65765	**.88**			
Vigor	3.6442	1.16695	.782**	**.85**		
Dedication	3.5865	1.03580	.620**	.460**	**.86**	
Absorption	4.0417	.60133	.554**	.453**	.622**	**.87**

Source: Survey Data, 2024

Table 1 presents the mean scores of the study variables, standard deviation values, reliability coefficients and correlation results of the hypotheses tested in the study reflecting the relationship between the perceived job autonomy and the three measures of employee engagement. As shown in the table, all reliability coefficients are above the Nunally (1978) bench mark of .70 which suggested that the scales are reliable. Again, all mean scores are above the mid-point value of 3.0. This is suggestive of a general agreement amongst respondents to the statements measuring competence and the three indicators of employee engagement. The low standard deviation scores further reveal that there are minimal variations among responses as the data clusters around the mean. It follows that teachers in public secondary schools believe they are competent and actively engaged.

The table further reveals the correlation results of hypotheses 1 to 3 indicating the relationship between the competence and the three measures of EE. As indicated in the table, correlation between competence and vigor is positive and strong @ r = .782 which is significant @ p = .000 < .05. This results implies that competence is significantly related to employees' Vigor. Given this finding, the null hypothesis (Ho_1) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The results for hypothesis five (Ho_2) as displayed in the table reveal that correlation between competence and dedication is positive and moderately strong at r = .620 which is significant @ p = .000 < .05. This results implies that competence is significantly related to employees' dedication. Given this finding, the null hypothesis (Ho_2) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

The results for hypothesis six (Ho_3) as displayed in the table above reveal that correlation between competence and absorption is positive and moderately weak @ r = .554 which is significant @ p = .000 < .05. This results implies that competence is significantly related to employees' absorption. Given this finding, the null hypothesis (Ho_3) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

4.1. Discussions and Conclusion

Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 examined the relationship between the competence cognition of PE and the three measures of EE. The results of the three tests revealed positive and significant correlations between the variables. Hypothesis 1 tested the relationship between competence and Vigor. The results revealed a strong correlation of r = .782 that is significant @ p = .000. this means that competence significantly influences vigor and this result is supported by Setiawan (2021) that competence influences several positive employee outcomes. This is because psychological competence offers the employee feelings of proficiency in undertaking certain tasks.

Competence is the attribute of possessing knowledge, abilities, conduct, and experience that enable an individual to proficiently execute a specific profession or assume a particular role. Competence thus makes employees to display the right attitude about the job and accompanying tasks. It makes the employee to trust in himself and believes he/she has what it takes to effectively and efficiently complete tasks. As a result, employees are willing to exert more effort in completing tasks. More so, the level of expertise required by the employee to execute work is a function of his abilities, skills and experience. Augustian et al. (2018) also supported this finding by showing that competence is a prerequisite for effective job performance and that it positively influences Vigor. Mujiatun (2015) also found that competence is fundamental for exceptional performance. Thus, with positive perceptions of competence, employees display engagement by being ready to Vigorously perform tasks. This is because, individuals with a high sense of competence demonstrate a combination of knowledge, proficiencies, and the motivation to effectively carry out their responsibilities with vigor. This agrees with Viitala et al. (2020) that the experience of competence stimulates engagement. Teachers of the studied public secondary schools have such competency perceptions which may have prompted them to demonstrate engagement by being vigorous in the performance of their duties.

Hypothesis 2 examined the link between competence and dedication. The result again revealed a moderately positive correlation of r = .620 that is significant @ p = .000. this again indicate that there is a statistical significant link between competence and dedication. This finding again is true as competence is found to be significantly linked to varying positive employee outcomes at work (Setiawan (2021). Such perceptions of efficacy thus have this compelling force to keep employees dedicated. This dedication is a way to show that they have the wherewithal to effectively carry out their duties. They do not only have the knowledge; they also possess the required skills and aptitudes as well as the experience to complete tasks. This is what Kurniawan (2022) asserted that when an individual possesses a strong sense of efficacy, he demonstrates it by combining knowledge, abilities, skills and readiness to complete assignments with dedication. Competence thus accords with a positive image rather than only a sense of self-assurance with an appropriate mindset that enables them to be actively engaged in their profession and enhance their self-worth. This agrees with Viitala et al. (2020) that the experience of competence inspires engagement.

Hypothesis 3 examined the relationship between competence and absorption. Again, the correlation was moderate and positive @ r = .554 which is significant @ p = .000. The implication of this result is that any increase in competency perceptions of employees will result in a corresponding increase in absorption. Absorption is the desire of the employee to be fully immersed in his job. Hence, when employees display engagement by absorption, they take little or no notice of time and it becomes so difficult for them to separate themselves from the work. The result is showing that competence is effective in inspiring absorption among teachers in public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. This result is supported by Kurniawan (2022) and Viitala et al. (2020). They showed that competence can positively and significantly enhance EE through absorption. When the competency perceptions of the employee increases, the desire to complete tasks also significantly increases. This desire is what keeps the employee immersed in the job due to his level of expertise and positive attitudes characterised by exerting diligent efforts to complete task. Setiawan (2021) reported that competence plays a pivotal role in swaying EE stating that there is a reciprocal relationship between competence and EE. This is true as it sure is difficult for one to be actively engaged and immersed in a job he/she lacks the skills, professional expertise

and know-how to perform. Such lack of experience for a job could keep the employee disjointed from the job, hence, rather than being an exciting experience, performing job duties would become boring and disheartening. However, feelings of competence and efficacy can turn things around for the employee and keep such an employee fully absorbed. Consequently, to ensure that employees are fully absorbed and actively engaged in their jobs, the organisation should put in place certain mechanisms to improve the competency perceptions of their staff. Competence or self-efficacy, as described by De Neve et al. (2015) is a person's belief in their ability to persist, exercise self-control, achieve goals, handle challenging situations, and overcome obstacles. Mastenbroek et al. (2014) suggest that self-efficacy can be measured by considering attitude (such as extroversion and emotional stability) and circumstances (such as self-esteem, optimism, and hope) at the cognitive level. These elements influence an individual's perception of a situation, shaping their behavioral reaction, in this case, the behavioural response is absorption.

Recent empirical research has consistently shown a positive and substantial correlation between employee engagement and competence. Engagement has been demonstrated to be significantly influenced by competence, which is frequently defined as employees' assessment of their abilities and skills to effectively execute their duties. This discussion emphasises the most significant discoveries from recent research that clarify this relationship and its implications for organisational practices. Research has demonstrated that employees who perceive themselves as competent in their positions demonstrate increased levels of enthusiasm and vigor. Employees are considerably more motivated and enthusiastic about their occupations when they perceive that they have the requisite expertise and expertise (Sonnentag, 2022). Confidence is bolstered by competence, which results in more proactive and engaged behaviour.

Employees' commitment to their positions is positively correlated with their proficiency. Employees who regard themselves as competent are considerably more dedicated to their occupations and exhibit a robust sense of purpose. This commitment is associated with increased levels of job satisfaction and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). The degree of absorption, which is the extent to which employees are wholly engaged and focused on their responsibilities, is also influenced by competence. It is more probable that employees will experience profound concentration and flow in their work when they feel competent, which in turn leads to increased engagement levels (Hakanen, et al. 2023). Competence improves the efficiency and efficacy of job resources, including feedback and social support, thereby increasing employee engagement. Employees who have a sense of competence are more likely to engage with their work proactively and are better equipped to utilise available resources (Bakker et al., 2023).

Not only does the positive correlation between employee engagement and competence improve individual performance, but it also contributes to improved organisational outcomes. Salanova et al. (2023) have found that employees who are engaged and feel competent are more likely to exhibit increased productivity, reduced turnover rates, and higher levels of innovation. The significance of cultivating an environment in which employees perceive themselves as competent and capable is underscored by the positive and substantial correlation between competence and employee engagement. Competence is the driving force behind critical components of engagement, such as Vigor, dedication, and assimilation, which collectively improve job satisfaction and performance. Organisations that allocate resources to the development of employees' competencies and the provision of sufficient support can anticipate enhanced engagement and improved overall results.

5.0 Recommendations

1. To get employees to be more vigorous in their assignments, administrators of public secondary schools should stimulate their staff to believing that they have what it takes to be successful in their careers. This could be done through face-to-face conversations and through recommendations. If this is done staff would be able to take on even challenging tasks and demonstrate vigor in completing such tasks.
2. School administrators should enhance engagement by making their staff to be dedicated through enhancing their feelings of competence.
3. School administrators should put in place mechanisms that will drive competence among their staff by helping them to heighten their levels of self-esteem, optimism and hope as these would encourage absorption.

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