



PRINCIPALS' WORK AUTONOMY AND SAFETY STANDARDS AS PREDICTORS OF TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated principals' work autonomy and safety standards as predictors of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 7,027 teachers from the 267 public secondary schools in Anambra State. The sample for this study comprised 703 teachers, selected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The researcher developed instruments, namely "Principals' Work Autonomy and Safety Standard Questionnaire (PWASSQ) and Teachers' Job Satisfaction Scale (TJSS)" were used for data collection. The face validation of the instruments was determined by three experts, of which two were from the Department of Educational Management and Policy, and one was in the Measurement and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Educational Foundations, all from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instruments, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.79 and 0.81 for the two Clusters of PWASSQ, and 0.81 for TJSS. The researchers, together with four research assistants, collected data for the study using the direct approach, and a 98% return was recorded. Simple regression was used to answer the research questions and test hypotheses. The study's findings revealed that work autonomy and safety standards are strong and significant predictors of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that principals grant teachers work autonomy to enable them to exercise personal control over their duties and improve their job satisfaction.

Keywords: Principals, Work Autonomy, Safety, Teacher, Job Satisfaction

1.1 Introduction

Education is a veritable tool for building individuals' confidence and equipping them with the skills and sound knowledge to navigate life's challenges. It also fosters healthy lifestyles and creates opportunities for good job prospects, thereby improving people's living standards. Duru

and Osegbue (2025) opined that education has been universally acknowledged as a potent and dynamic instrument for national development and societal transformation. It is an important instrument for the development of the individual and society, as it serves as a weapon against poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Teachers are among the key players who instruct, inspire, and guide students in educational institutions.

Teachers are professionals who impart skills, enhance knowledge, and shape students' attitudes in secondary schools. Enwezor and Odimegwu (2025) stated that teachers are responsible for delivering instruction to help learners gain skills, expand their knowledge, and shape their behavior. This helps students align with society's norms and values. Teachers also offer support, mentorship, and guidance. These actions foster students' academic, social, and emotional development. Teachers may be granted freedom to decide how to carry out their duties through work autonomy.

Work autonomy is the degree of independence and freedom of choice given to staff in performing their duties. It means liberty to decide on job scheduling and how to execute tasks at work. Akhtar and Ali (2023) opined that staff with work autonomy require little control. This leads to better innovative work behaviour. The authors also noted that staff with greater job autonomy are more likely to depart from traditional methods. They explore new approaches to improve productivity. DeJonge, as cited in Onuegbu, Waribugo, and Kalu (2022), described job autonomy as the freedom to choose work techniques, schedule, pace, workspace, assessment methods, working hours, objectives, priorities, and criteria within an organization. Work autonomy can boost teachers' creativity, help them feel valued, and motivate them to work hard for higher productivity. Highly productive teachers may be recognized with a reward.

Safety means ensuring the work environment is free of threats and hazards. When teachers are protected from accidents and injuries, they are more likely to attend work regularly and less likely to be late. Safety standards are precautionary measures designed to protect the school from dangers, injuries, or threats to staff and property. Olanipekun and Jiboku (2021) explained that safety standards prevent work-related injuries and diseases. They promote workers' well-being, prevent accidents, and ensure smooth workflow. This can boost workers' morale and performance. Safety standards are maintained by regularly inspecting the school to identify needs and by buying security equipment. Onuorah and Eziamaka (2020) stated that school safety standards could include fencing, alarms, motion-sensitive lighting, CCTV cameras, warning signs, locks, burglar-proof windows, security staff, and access control systems. When teachers feel safe at work, they can focus on their duties and take every chance to grow their careers.

Some teachers seem discouraged from using their initiative in their duties. These teachers are expected to follow bureaucratic procedures, which can limit autonomy, creativity, and innovation in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Teachers who are restricted may feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied with their jobs. There are also issues such as cultism among students and a lack of security measures, including CCTV and fire alarm systems. These conditions can make teachers feel unsafe in secondary schools in Anambra State. Prolonged exposure to poor work environments can cause poor social life, high stress, depression, and low well-being. This

may harm their work quality and job satisfaction. As a result, teachers seem unhappy with their work, shown by frequent absenteeism, lateness, and misconduct. Based on these issues, the study investigated how principals' work autonomy and safety standards predict teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate principals' work autonomy and safety standards as predictors of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. Work autonomy as a predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Safety standards as a predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the predictive value of work autonomy on teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of safety standards on teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. Work autonomy is not a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. Safety standards is not a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

2. Methods

A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The study population comprised 7,027 teachers from 267 public secondary schools in Anambra State. The sample of the study included 703 teachers, selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Researchers designed and used two questionnaires, titled "Principals' Work Autonomy and Safety Standard Questionnaire (PWASSQ)" and "Teachers' Job Satisfaction Scale (TJSS)," for data collection. Both instruments were developed based on an extensive literature review and expert consultation. PWASSQ collects information on work autonomy and safety standards. It consists of Clusters A and B, with Cluster A containing 10 items on work autonomy and Cluster B containing 11 items on safety standards. PWASSQ has 21 items, each using a four-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD), with weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. TJSS measures teachers' job satisfaction with 22 items, using a four-point scale (SA, A, D, or SD) and weighting them at 4, 3, 2, and 1.

Three experts conducted face validation of the instruments. Two were from the Department of Educational Management and Policy, and one from the Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation Unit), all at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The researcher gave the study's title, purpose, research questions, hypotheses, and both instruments to the experts. They examined the items for content, relevance, clarity, suitability, and coverage. The experts made several corrections, such as avoiding double-barreled items, shortening some items, and moving items to their proper clusters. Their suggestions were added to the final instruments. Instrument reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha. This yielded coefficients of 0.79 and 0.81 for Clusters A and B of PWASSQ, and an overall coefficient of 0.80 for TJSS.

The researchers collected data directly with four research assistants who are secondary school teachers in Anambra State. They distributed 703 copies of the instruments. Of these, 691 questionnaires were properly completed and returned, resulting in a 98 percent return rate. Completed and retrieved questionnaires were used for data analysis. Simple regression answered research questions and hypotheses 1-5. Multiple regression was used for research question 6 and hypothesis 6. For decisions on research questions, the coefficient r and prediction size were interpreted using Senthilnathan (2019)'s predictive values:

Coefficient	Prediction
.00- .19	Very weak prediction
.20- .35	Weak prediction
.36- .50	Moderate prediction
.51- .70	Strong prediction
-.71- .99	Very strong prediction
1	Perfect

In taking decisions on the null hypotheses, if the p -value is equal to or less ($\leq$) than the significant level of .05, the null hypothesis was rejected, but if the p -value is greater than ($>$), the significant level of .05, the null hypothesis was accepted.

3. Results

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of work autonomy on teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Autonomy as a Predictor of Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Model	N	R	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
Work Autonomy	691	.638	.408	.407	.22270	Strong

As shown on Table 1, the predictive value between work autonomy and teachers' job satisfaction is 0.638 with a coefficient of determination of 0.408. This shows work autonomy makes 40.8% contributions to teachers' job satisfaction. The regression coefficient r of 0.638 indicated that work autonomy is a strong predictor teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis One: Work autonomy is not a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 2: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Autonomy as not a Significant Predictor of Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Predictor	n	R	r^2	F	P-value	Remark
Work Autonomy	691	.638	.408	474.134	.000	*S

*Significant

Table 2 indicated that the simple regression coefficient (r) of work autonomy as not a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction is 0.638, while the r^2 is 0.408. This shows that work autonomy could explain 40.8% changes in teachers' job satisfaction. The $F(1/691) = 474.134$ and the p -value of 0.000 is less than .05. Therefore, since the p -value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, work autonomy is a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What is the predictive value of safety standard on teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 3: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Safety Standard as a Predictor of Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Model	N	R	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
Safety Standard	691	.547	.300	.299	.24217	Strong

Result in Table 3 indicates that the predictive value between safety standard and teachers' job satisfaction is 0.547 with a coefficient of determination of 0.300. This shows 30.0% variation in teachers' job satisfaction could be explained by safety standard. The regression coefficient r of 0.547 indicated that safety standard is a strong predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypothesis Two: Safety standard is not a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table 4: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Safety Standard as not a Significant Predictor of Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Predictor	N	R	r ²	F	P-value	Remark
Work Autonomy	691	.547	.300	294.615	.000	*S

*Significant

It is shown in Table 4 indicated that the simple regression coefficient (r) of safety standard as not a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction is 0.547, while the r^2 is 0.300. This shows that safety standard could be responsible for 30.0% changes in teachers' job satisfaction. The F (1/691) =294.615 and the p -value of 0.000 is less than 0.05. Therefore, since the p -value is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, safety standard is a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

4. Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study revealed that work autonomy is a strong predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The possible explanation for this finding is that work autonomy, which gives teachers personal control over their task decisions and execution, makes them feel valued and trusted, which strongly contributes to their job satisfaction. This agreed with the findings of Nnebedum, Oshia, Nzewi, and Nwanne (2023), which showed that work autonomy was a strong predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education. This also supported the findings of Uwannah, Egwuonwu, and James (2022), which showed a strong relationship between work autonomy and job satisfaction among university staff. This agreement between the findings could be attributed to the fact that the studies were conducted in educational institutions. This is contrary to the findings of Zychova, Fejfarova, and Jindrova (2023), which showed a positive, moderate correlation between work autonomy and employees' job satisfaction. Differences in the organizations in which the studies were conducted may account for the disagreement between the findings. Teachers who are granted freedom to control their work processes can be motivated and satisfied in carrying out their jobs. Work autonomy builds a culture of trust and encourages the use of initiatives to carry out tasks, leading to better results and stronger job satisfaction.

The study also found that work autonomy significantly predicts teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This supports Nnebedum, Oshia, Nzewi, and Nwanne (2023), who found similar results for lecturers' job satisfaction, possibly due to shared geographic location. In contrast, Annual, Zamri, Zakaria, and Abdulkarim (2023) found no significant relationship in a different location, suggesting geography may influence outcomes. Work autonomy likely predicts job satisfaction because it allows teachers to schedule and manage their responsibilities, giving them a sense of belonging.

The study found that the safety standard is a strong predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Safety standards reduce the risk of accidents, which may predict teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The comfort level of teachers in a safe environment can strongly predict their job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This is in line with the findings of Mehmet (2021), which showed a strong relationship between staff safety and job satisfaction. The similarity between the

findings could be attributed to the related research design and participants of the studies. This is in disagreement with Minwalkulet's (2019) finding, which indicated a moderate relationship between safety and employees' job satisfaction. This also contradicts the findings of Ghoudarzi, Vameghi, Hosseini, Khammar, Poursadeqiyan, and Kavari (2019), which indicated a moderate relationship between safety and employees' job satisfaction. The approximately 5-year time lag could lead to changes in research findings. Safety standards put in place enable teachers to carry out their work activities without having to worry about potential harm or threats and thereby strongly improve their job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Further results indicated that the safety standard is a significant predictor of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This is in consonance with the findings of Mehmet (2021), which showed a significant relationship between safety and staff job satisfaction. Safety standards make teachers feel more confident in doing their daily work without injuries, which significantly predicts their job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that Principals' work autonomy and safety standards are positive and significant predictors of teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Work autonomy and safety standards encourage creativity and create an atmosphere in which teachers carry out their daily instructional activities without fear of injury and danger.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals should grant teachers autonomy over their work to enable them to exercise personal control over their duties and improve their job satisfaction.
2. Principals should organize periodic interactive sessions with staff to discuss security matters that can improve safety standards and enhance teachers' job satisfaction.

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