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Influence of Psychological Empowerment on Employee Competence in Nigerian Universal Basic Education System: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the mediating role of work engagement (WE) on the link between psychological empowerment and employee competence (EC). The Ability Motivation Theory (AMO) stress the importance of practices that are capable of enhancing individual’s competence towards the achievement of organizational objectives. While considering psychological empowerment as one of the best practices influencing employee competence in an organization, some previous studies only considered other internal resources such like human resource practices. Studies that attempt to investigate the effect of psychological empowerment on EC and the mechanism through which it influences employee’s competence seem to be scarce in the existing literature. In this paper, work engagement is considered as mediator variable in explaining relationship between psychological empowerment and EC and also establish the link between the two variables. The paper applied AMO theory in highlighting the importance of practices that are capable of enhancing employee’s competence towards achievement of organizational objectives. Quantitative survey technique was utilized, and data was collected from the Nigerian universal basic education system administration (UBESA) in six states (Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara) of the North Western region of the country. A total of 428 questionnaires were analyze using SPSS-AMOS software version 24. The statistical findings revealed that WE mediate the relationship between psychological empowerment and EC. The study also made some suggestions for future research.

Keywords: psychological empowerment, employee competence, work engagement, Nigeria, universal basic education system


Introduction

This is an empirical paper that tend to examines mediating effect of work engagement in the connection between psychological empowerment and employee competence (EC) in Nigerian Universal Basic Education system administration. Employee competence have been defined critically by different scholars. According to Tao et al., (2016), competence can be theorized as job skills, knowledge and attitudes. Moore et al., (2002) defines competency as the underlying aspect of an individual which includes job skills, knowledge and attitudes that makes them to
become competent in discharging their job-related activities. Employee competence has also been considered as an important factor which contribute greatly to the achievement of organizational objectives (Vathanophas, 2007). For the past few decades, increasing employee competence has been the major concern of the public sector organizations all over the world (Al-Dhaafri et al., 2016). Largely, governments consider striving for the best methods of improving employee’s competence towards ensuring avoiding unethical behaviors in the public sector organizations (Ashour, 2004).

In different system, public organizations are characterized by different factors and challenges in the competitive world. For instance, employee’s incompetency has always been a great challenge in most of the public sector organization than in the private sector organizations (Sabi’u, 2017). Considering the level of incompetency among the public sector organization and the inability to compete with other sectors globally provides an opportunity for many researchers to intensify investigation on why public sector organizations are been characterized with incompetency in terms of ethical conducts among its employees, specifically in the public education system administration (Osborne et al., 2013). Even though, public education system administration serves as a machinery for the educational policy formulation and implementation, still the sector is faced with some challenges. In Nigerian, the Universal Basic Education system administration (UBESA) was introduced with the sole aim to provide free and compulsory basic education to school aged children across the country. However, the rate at which children attend school remains very low especially in the North western region of the country due to unethical conducts characterized by corruption, embezzlement, miss-management and inefficiency within the system (Anthony, 2020; Nwaokugha & Ezeugwu, 2017; Sammuel, 2018). Other problems include poor planning, lack of skilled personnel and inadequate knowledge by most of the employees to accomplish their job responsibilities and poor communication withing the organizational structure (Aja et al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2019; Zeti, 2021). Several studies were carried out differently in different context to investigate factors capable of influencing employee’s competency. For instance, human resource practices (Alshibli, 2019; Nana & Otoo, 2018), human resource flexibility (Akhtar et al., 2016), organizational culture (Rantesalu et al., 2016) among others related studies.

Largely, all the studies mentioned earlier tried to direct us towards understanding those factors that are capable of influence employee’s competence (EC). However, literature have clearly shown that research that tend to examine the link between psychological empowerment and EC appears to be scarce. Based on that, this research work empirically investigated the role of work engagement (WE) as mediating mechanism between the two given variables (psychological empowerment and EC) and also confirm the argument of AMO view on the importance of practices that are capable of enhancing employee competence towards the achievement of organizational objectives (Lawshe, 1945). The variable work engagement (WE) have been discussed in the previous studies (Karatepe, 2013). WE can be defined as the satisfying and productive work-related disposition essentially characterized by absorption, vigor and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In the same vein, Meng & Sun, (2019), stress that, psychological empowerment can influence WE in order to inject an authoritative space to recognize the importance of high level of WE towards ensuring organizational success. Still, studies on these relationship (psychological empowerment, WE and EC) appears to be scarce in the existing literature. This call for further exploration to re-confirm the imperative consequence of WE in the connection between psychological empowerment and EC. Thus, seeing WE as a mediator
variable in this study would have substantial policy implication in enhancing EC, particularly in the Nigerian Universal Basic Education System Administration (UBESA).

**Literature Review**

**Psychological Empowerment and WE**

Psychological empowerment is considered as the crucial theme of related leadership and management practices which is agreed upon for ensuring competitive advantage in organizational set up (Schein, 2010). It is also seen as an approach utilized in developing a flexible firms that possess the capacity for withstanding changes that may come from the external environment (Doughty, 2014). Hence, empowered employees are said to be more efficient and effective in discharging their work-related activities in any modern organization (Indradevi, 2012). Similarly, Rawat, (2011) argued that empowered employees are believed to be more productive in ensuring the attainment of organizational success. Several studies have been carried out to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement differently in terms of context and sample size. For example, the study carried out by Moura et al., (2015) in a Portuguese hotel industry with 152 employees as respondents. The findings reveal a positive significant relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Another study was also conducted by Meng & Sun, (2019) in an attempt to investigate the influence of psychological empowerment on work engagement in a university located in China using 162 employees as sample size. In the same vein, a study was also carried out by Odunayo & Ayodeji, (2017) in Nigerian immigration service organization with 225 employees as respondents. The result also shows a significant positive relationship between psychological empowerment and work engagement. Hence, the current study hypothesized that:

- **H1**: There is positive relationship between psychological empowerment and WE

**Work Engagement and EC**

Work engagement (WE) is seen as the point to which employees in a given organization relate to their work and other tasks a part of their whole life. This means that, employees who display a high level engagement in discharging their duties are always identified with their work and they are always thinking about their work and what affect the work even when they are not at work (Cesário, 2017). WE, has always been conceptualized as a multidimensional motivational concept which involves the immediate investment of individual’s physical energy and cognitive emotion in an active work performance(Kahn, 1990). Many empirical studies have revealed the vital role of work engagement in enhancing employee competence in different context. For instance, Seema, (2016) in her study on the influence of managerial competencies on work engagement in an Indian IT sector, revealed a significant relationship between work engagement and managerial competencies. Similarly, another study was conducted by Nawangsari & Sutawidjaya, (2019) to analyze the impact of employee competence and talent management as well as motivation towards work engagement with a sample of 101 employees from a small and medium enterprise located in Malang, Indonesia. The result revealed a positive relationship between employee engagement and competencies. In the same vein, the study of Wei et al., (2018) investigated the effect of authentic leadership and competency and employee
performance through work engagement, the study also shows a significant relationship between work engagement and leaders competence. Likewise, the current study hypothesized that:

- \textbf{H}_2: There is positive relationship between WE and EC

\textit{Psychological Empowerment and EC}

Psychological empowerment is seen as a strategy utilized in developing a flexible organization that has the capacity of withstanding or adopting to changes that may arise from external environment (Doughty, 2014). Thus, employees who are psychologically empowered are tend to be more competent in discharging their given responsibilities (Indradevi, 2012). It has been suggested that, employees who are highly empowered are said to be more effective in ensuring service delivery towards the achievement of organizational goals (Rawat, 2011). Numerous studies have been carried out in the quest to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee competence (EC). For instance, Degago, (2014) conducted a study in an Ethiopian medium scale enterprises sector using 125 respondents among the employees. The result shows a significant positive relationship between psychological empowerment and EC. Again, another study was carried out by Kong & Sun, (2016) in a China’s hospitality industry to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and EC in 12 hotels using 458 respondents among generation Y employees. The findings also reveal a significant relationship between psychological empowerment and EC. Despite the literature reviewed, studies of this nature appear to be scarce in African context and UBESA in particular. Hence, the current study hypothesizes that:

- \textbf{H}_3: There is significant relationship between psychological empowerment and EC

\textit{Mediating Role of Work Engagement on Psychological Empowerment-EC Link}

Work engagement is seen as the productive job-related placing basically categorized by absorption, vigor and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It has been considered as a direct motivational factor towards enhancing individual competence and achievement of the organizational set objectives (Karatepe, 2014). In spite of this, studies that examine the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and EC in one model appears to be scarce in the bulk of literature. In light of this, the present study makes use of work engagement to serve as mediator in examining the relationship between the two variables. However, literature have established that the challenges facing the Nigerian universal basic education system is characterized by employees’ incompetency towards ensuring the attainment of the set objectives of the system (Sammuel, 2018). Therefore, disregarding high level of work engagement within the organizational may lead to decrease in the level of employee competency as well as ineffectiveness and inefficient service delivery (Cesário, 2017).

Based on the above discussion, high level of WE can stand in a better position in ensuring increase in the level of EC as well as ensures the attainment of organizational goals (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016). Though, the link between psychological empowerment and EC has been empirically tested, the procedures in which psychological empowerment and EC relate needs to be clearly stated. Therefore, to make this clear, there is a need to develop as well as test the mediating machinery through which psychological empowerment can lead to increase in EC.
Prior research works revealed that WE have positive connection to EC. For example, the research conducted by Seema, (2016) to investigate the influence of employee competence on work engagement in an IT industry in Asian context, the result reveals a significant positive relationship between WE and EC. Again, another study was carried out by Nawangsari & Sutawidjaya, (2019) to investigate the effect of work engagement on EC in a small and medium enterprise located in Malang, Indonesia with a sample of 101 employees. The result shows a positive relationship between WE and EC. In line with the above stated argument, work engagement has the capability of enhancing EC towards ensuring the achievement of organizational goals (Salman & Ganie, 2020). In spite bulk of literature, there is also a need for more empirical exploration on the connection between psychological empowerment, WE and EC. Previous hypotheses have underscored the linkages among psychological empowerment, WE and EC. Incidentally, the argument proposes that psychological empowerment affect EC through the influence of WE. Thus, organizations can practice the application of psychological empowerment to promote work engagement which in turn leads to increase in the level of EC. Hence, the current study argue that WE may play the role of mediator in examining the connection between psychological empowerment and EC. In a more official manner, the current study confirmed the influence of WE in mediating the connection between psychological empowerment and EC, explicitly in the context of Nigerian UBESA. Thus, subsequent hypotheses were developed;

- **H$_4$**: WE mediate the relationship between psychological empowerment and EC.

**Research Questions**

- Does Psychological Empowerment relate to WE?
- Does WE relate to EC?
- Does Psychological Empowerment relate to EC?
- Does WE mediate the relationship between Psychological Empowerment and EC?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the mediating role of work engagement in the connection between Psychological Empowerment and Employee Competence in Nigerian Universal Basic Education system.

**Research Model**

The model including psychological empowerment, work engagement and employee competence was assessed using two-step approach such as measurement model and structural model (Hair et al., 2010).

**Figure 1: Research Framework**
Research Methods

The current exploration is a survey research work which is cross-sectional in nature. The data utilized for the purpose of this study was collected through the use of questionnaire that was self-administered to seven states UBESA in the North Western region of Nigeria (Kano State, Kaduna State, Katsina State, Sokoto State, Jigawa State, and Zamfara State). While Kebbi State UBESA was excluded from the sampling frame because of its smallest number of employees which was utilized for the purpose of pilot study to enable the researcher assess the appropriateness of the instruments intend to use for the study and other procedures concerning data collection (Ary et al., 2012). For the purpose of estimating the inter-relationship among constructs, the study utilized the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique (SPSS-AMOS-24).

Sampling and Data Collection Technique

The present study selected 455 respondents among Non-Managerial employees in the selected UBESA’S using a simple random technique from the sampling frame. This method ensures the randomness and suitable representation of the entire sample size on the targeted study population. Hence, the process has met the necessary requirement for conducting various statistical analysis in this research work. Likewise, respondents were all provided with the self-administered questionnaire to provide answers at their own convenient time so as to avoid mistakes while responding to the questionnaire. After collecting the data, a total number of 341 questionnaires were found completed and usable which represent 75% response rate.

Instrument Measurement

The major constructs in this study are psychological empowerment, work engagement and employee competence. Psychological empowerment is operationalized as cognitions which are usually shaped by different organizations. It occurs when individual feels they exercise some certain level of control over their complete work lives (Spreitzer, 1995). In this study, Psychological empowerment is measured based on Psychological Empowerment Scale (PES) which was developed by Spreitzer, (1995). Through twelve (12) items scale comprising four dimensions which includes: meaning, competence, self-determination, impact so as to represent the entire empowerment score. The researcher adapts this measuring tool for this study because of its high level of validity and reliability. For example, it has been validated in Asian context (Li et al., 2006). In recent times, it has also been tested in African context. Specifically, it has been tested in the Nigerian public educational sector and achieved suitable results (Mabekoje et al., 2017). Work engagement is operationalized as the productive and satisfying work related disposition basically categorized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Work engagement is measured based on Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES) through 17 items comprising of three dimensions developed by Schaufeli & Bakker, (2003).

The questions are appropriate for assessing employee engagement in organizations. These items were tested in most recent times in the same context and achieved suitable result (Gadi et al., 2020). In this study, the researcher adapts these items because of its suitability. Employee competence is operationalized as combination of related ethical attitude, job skills, tacit and explicit knowledge which provides employees the potential to accomplish their responsibilities.
in a more effective and efficient manner (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006). In this study, competence is measured based on self-competence scale developed by Tafarodi & Swann, (1995), Team competence scale developed by Eby & Dobbins, (1997), Communication competence scale developed by Wiemann, (1977) as well as ethical competency scale which was developed by (Rest, 1994). Thus, employee competency is measured based on 17 items. The questions are relevant in determining the ethical standard and moral behavior of employees in an organization. These items were tested and achieved significant result (Nana & Otoo, 2018). Hence, all these constructs utilizes 10-point scale as it has been considered more suitable because of its high level accuracy in terms of measurement and it also provides more variance in determining the variables (Awang et al., 2015).

**Pretesting and Pilot Test of the Study Instruments**

As the instruments were adapted from previous studies and modified in order to suit the current study, the researcher sent the modified instruments to the expert in the same field and three employees from UBESA to ensure the content and face validity (Shkeer & Awang, 2019). After receiving the instruments back, the researcher made all the necessary modifications in accordance with the comments made by the respective experts. Thus, the researcher conducted pilot study with 100 self-administered questionnaires among Non-Managerial employees in Kebbi State UBESA. After collecting the data from pilot study, the researcher conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) procedure so as to explore the usefulness of the items measuring their respective constructs in the study (Shkeer & Awang, 2019). With the use of data discovered from the pilot study, the researcher carried out the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to explore the usefulness of the items measuring each construct in the study (Shkeer & Awang, 2019).

**The Study Respondents Demographic Profile**

The respondents were requested to provide their personal information such like age, gender, marital status, position, work experience, educational qualification and monthly income level. The researcher computed the demographic profile of the respondents based on percentage and responses.

**Findings**

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)**

Preceding implementing the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as well as displaying the structural model, the entire variables involved in the study will be subjected to undergo the CFA procedure in order to prove the measurement model of the study (Aziz et al., 2016; Yusof et al., 2017). The CFA process is carried out to enable the researcher to assess the constructs validity, reliability, unidimensionality and normality distribution in the study. These required validities are termed as construct validity. The validity is normally examined by the use of Fitness Index (FI), and the Discriminant Validity (DV) which is also determined by the summary of the Discriminant Validity Index. Hence, the convergent validity is determined by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), the construct reliability (CR) is determined through computing the CR value of each construct in the study (Awang et al., 2018). The CFA procedure is shown in
Figure 2. Accordingly, the CFA result indicates the following fitness indices; RMSEA is 0.075. CFI is 0.921, ChiSq/df is 2.745 which all of the measurements have met the required threshold value (Awang, 2015). Again, the AVE values for the whole construct is clearly shown in Table 1 which have exceeded the threshold value of 0.5. Consequently, the result displayed above have clearly confirmed convergent validity of the study constructs. In addition, the revealed values in Figure 2 clearly indicated that the factor loading which believed to indicate the unidimensionality of measure among the study construct have exceeded the required value of 0.60 which is excellent (Asnawi et al., 2019; Rahlin et al., 2019; Majid et al., 2019). The next step is to examine the discriminant validity of all the latent constructs. In this case, the discriminant validity was determined through the validity index summary as indicated in Table. Hence, the validity of all the study constructs was achieved since the diagonal values have exceeded the values in its row and column (Awang et al., 2015; 2018).

Figure 2: The CFA Result

![CFA Diagram](image)

Table 1: Discriminant Validity Index Summary of the Study Constructs, the Construct Reliability and Average Variance Extracted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>PE</th>
<th>WE</th>
<th>EC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>.779</td>
<td>-.143</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>.643</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the composite reliability, the CR value of all the constructs appeared to be higher than 0.6, which suggest that the measurement model of the entire constructs have achieved the requirement for the composite reliability (Yusof et al., 2017,2018; Mahfouz et al., 2019). For the purpose of assessing the normality distribution of the dataset, the value of the skewness and Kurtosis of all the items involved in the study constructs were used. The result indicated that the skewness of all the items in the constructs ranges between -1.438 – 0.992. For the Kurtosis, it
ranges between -0.852 – 2.214 respectively. Hence, the measures have clearly indicated that the data did not separate from the normality distribution. In this regard, the result has met the assumption for making use of the parametric statistical analysis in the study (Afthanorhan et al., 2018; Mohamad et al., 2016).

**Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)**

As soon as the construct achieved the requirement for reliability, validity normality as well as the unidimensionality, the study can proceed to form the study structural model and also execute SEM procedure so as to test the already proposed research hypotheses. According, Figure 3 present the result which was achieved from SEM procedure;

![Figure 3: The Regression Path Coefficient Among the Constructs in the Study Model](image)

**Data Analysis**

The SEM process was carried out using (SPSS-AMOS-24). The execution of SEM involves some crucial points such as assessing the connectivity among the latent constructs shown by indicator variables, the correlation among the measurement error in the study constructs as well as measuring the current link between the study constructs.

**Results**

The content of the result in this study was derived through the execution of SEM process as demonstrated in Table 2. Thus, direct influence of psychological empowerment on work engagement was clearly shown to be positive and statistically significant. As such, H1 is supported. Apart from the direct impact of WE, it was also seen to be significantly and positively related to EC. Likewise, H2 was also significant and supported. Suggesting that, the direct
Influence of psychological empowerment on EC was also observed to be positive as well as significant. As such, H3 is as well supported.

**Table 2: The Regression Path Coefficient and Its Significance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>C.R.</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WE</td>
<td>&lt;--</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>5.965</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>&lt;--</td>
<td>WE</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>1.683</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>&lt;--</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>3.214</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the fact that, all the indirect effects are seen to be statistically significant and positively related. Therefore, the current study concluded that a mediation has occurred in the study model and the type of mediation is called “partial mediation”.

**Discussions and Conclusions**

In this research work, the first hypothesis recommends that psychological empowerment has a significant as well as direct influence on WE. The later examination also supported this hypothesis that psychological empowerment has a significant and direct effect on WE. All the more obviously, the Nigerian UBESA employees who are effectively psychologically empowered, in general, tend to be highly engaged in discharging their respective responsibilities. This result was furthermore upheld by the previous examinations conducted in different context suggested that psychological empowerment as a study variable is capable of enhancing WE. The second hypothesis have the believe that WE have a significant and direct link with EC. The findings were also supported by the previous investigations in different settings which holds the view that WE could be one of the mechanism that increases EC (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016; Nawangsari & Sutawidjaya, 2019; Salman & Ganie, 2020; Seema, 2016). These studies have uncovered that WE enhance EC towards ensuring the attainment of organizational objectives. The third hypothesis proposes that psychological empowerment has a direct and significant influence on EC. The result in the current research work have supported the hypothesis which state that psychological empowerment has a direct and significant influence on EC among employees in the Nigerian UBESA. This result is in line with the findings of the previous study (Doughty, 2014; Indradevi, 2012).

The last hypothesis in this research work reflects the indirect linkage between psychological empowerment and EC by considering the mediating effect of WE. Findings of this investigation reveals that WE mediate the connection between psychological empowerment and EC. Specifically, employees from Nigerian UBESA who are highly empowered tend to be more competent in discharging their responsibilities. More significantly, the findings in the investigation reveal that WE happen to be a partial mediator in explaining the link between psychological empowerment and EC. Consequently, this shows that psychological empowerment is well equipped towards influencing EC directly as well as indirectly through the influence of WE.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies**

In spite some of the practical and theoretical consequences provided by this assessment, there are couple of limitations that will also provide delightful risks for further research contributions. Firstly, considering the focus of the current investigation is on Nigerian Universal Basic
Education system, the assumption of the findings to different context is obliged. Hence, the future research work may consider testing the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee competence in different countries in a comparable area. Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the examination can also stand as another study limitation. Moreover, investigation utilizing a longitudinal procedure watches out for the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee competence through alternative mediator variable. Thus, considering the mediating effect of WE in the link between psychological empowerment and EC would strengthen the management of the Nigerian UBESA for well understanding of the contribution of psychological empowerment on WE and by extension on EC. Likewise, the discoveries also provide a pragmatic direction to the management/directors in the Nigerian UBESA.

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