



Principals' Soft Skills and Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.13014001>

Received: 15 December 2025; Accepted: 21 December 2025; Published: 29 January 2026

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out to investigate the relationship between principals' soft skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone. Five research questions and five null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Correlational survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of this study consisted of 21 principals and 354 teachers in all 21 public secondary schools in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State. A sample of 199 respondents, comprising 11 principals and 188 teachers from 11 public secondary schools in Ikom Local Government Area, were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. Principals' Soft Skills Questionnaire (PSSQ) and Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ) were used for data collection. Cronbach's Alpha Statistic was used for Principals' Soft Skills Questionnaire (PSSQ) and Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ) which yielded reliability coefficient indices of 0.88 and 0.79 respectively. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used in answering the research questions as well as testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that various aspects of principals' leadership skills have significant relationships with teachers' job performance. Specifically, emotional intelligence, communication and interpersonal skills showed moderate positive relationships, conflict resolution and teamwork had a high positive relationship with teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Local Government Area. Based on the findings, the following recommendations among other were made that school administrators should ensure a collaborative environment, encouraging teachers to work together to achieve common goals. Principals should receive training on effective conflict resolution strategies to manage disputes and promote a positive school culture.

Keywords: Soft skills, Job performance, Emotional Intelligence, Communication, Interpersonal Conflict Resolution and Teamwork

INTRODUCTION

Human resource in any organization determines to a great extent, the achievement of the organizational goal. This is because human resource plays an indispensable role in the manipulation of other resources towards achieving the organizational goal. In educational organization, especially public secondary schools' teachers are the human resources whose job performance determines the attainment of the school goals. Stressing the place of teachers in education, Nwaka and Ofojebe (2020) stated that teachers are the crucial resources for the effective implementation of the educational objectives at the classroom level. Teachers are the pillars of the society who help students grow and shoulder the responsibility of nation building.

Teachers' job performance refers to teachers' involvement in the achievement of the school goals. Mgbere and Andrew (2019) defined teachers' job performance as the sum total of a teacher's execution of tasks assigned to them. The authors further stressed that the success and quality of the school is closely tied to teachers' job performance with regards to professional qualification, teaching experience, knowledge of subject matter and quality of students produced being the output. Agu *et al.* (2021) noted that teachers' job

performance is the overall ability of teachers to exhibit the right attitude to work, be committed and dedicated to the teaching roles while making deliberate efforts toward the attainment of the educational goals and objectives. Nwanga and Amaikwu (2020) noted that teachers' job performance can be assessed through their regularity/punctuality in school, participation in staff meeting and co-curricular activities, lesson presentation, coverage of scheme of work, discipline of students, students' academic performance, preparation of lesson notes and plans, and execution of official duties delegated by the principals among others.

The principal being the head and chief executive of a secondary school utilizes human and material resources to achieve the school's set goals. According to Onyali *et al.* (2018), a principal is the chief executive of a secondary school who is in a vintage position to plan, coordinate, monitor and control both human and material resources for the delivery of quality education. Utebor *et al.* (2020) maintained that the school principal is the chief officer in charge of the daily management of secondary school. Continuing, Utebor *et al.* averred that some of the duties of the principal include: ensuring that funds entrusted on them is properly utilized; ensuring the provision and maintenance of physical facilities; ensuring that teachers are motivated for their total commitment and ensuring the supervision of instructional materials to ascertain effective teaching and learning. Principal as the leader in a secondary school influences and controls personnel to foster the attainment of predetermined objectives. Igoni (2020) described a principal as the administrative leader who is the coordinator of the entire secondary school activities to ensure the success of the entire school. The principal is the leader who exerts influence on members of staff to achieve set goals, while soft skills represent the essential abilities managers possess to effectively accomplish administrative tasks for the attainment of those goals.

Soft skills are known as common skills or core skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, mindsets, career attributes, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence quotients, among other things, that are sought after in all professions. Hard talents, on the other hand, are peculiar to each given career. In the late 1960s, the United States Army coined the term "soft skills." Any skill that does not require the use of machinery is referred to as this. The military understood that this category encompassed a wide range of critical activities, including the social skills required to lead groups, encourage soldiers, and win battles, which they had not yet cataloged or thoroughly examined. Soft skills are crucial job-related skills that need little or no machine contact and have a broad application on the job (Whitmore, 2018). In the context of this study principals' soft skills include, emotional Intelligence, communication skills, conflict resolution, teamwork and interpersonal skills.

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to someone's ability to understand and manage emotions, empathize with others, communicate well, and build strong relationships. It involves being aware of emotions, controlling them, understanding others' feelings, managing relationships adeptly, and navigating social situations effectively. Ismail *et al.* (2020) described emotional intelligence as the mental capacity related to perceiving and regulating emotions, as well as utilizing emotions to guide, motivate, and influence others. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to make sound decisions, communicate more clearly, develop better relationships, and cope with challenges in a more adaptive way. Owala *et al.* (2016) highlighted that principals with high emotional intelligence can foster a supportive and inclusive school environment, grasp the needs of students, teachers, and staff, resolve conflicts, and provide effective leadership. Hollingworth *et al.* (2018) observed that teachers' performance can be positively affected when school principals are enthusiastic about meeting teachers' needs and ensuring those needs are met effectively. Improving Nigeria's education system for global competitiveness requires principals, as the chief administrators of their schools, to carry out a range of tasks to achieve their school's objectives. The overall school enhancement requires a balanced combination of emotional intelligence and strong communication skills to foster a positive school culture, motivate teachers, and promote student achievement. Nosike *et al.* (2022) found that self-control and empathy, both components of EI, have a statistically significant impact on employee creativity and commitment in secondary schools. Similarly, Akhter *et al.* (2021) in their studies discovered that EI has a substantial and beneficial influence on bank workers' job satisfaction, with a beta value of 0.510. Other factors like emotional expression (EE) and cultural intelligence (CQ) also played significant roles in predicting work satisfaction. Moreover, Munira and Azamb (2017) observed a notable improvement in EI scores and performance ratings after EI training, suggesting that developing emotional intelligence can lead to better job performance.

Communication skills according to Manafe (2018) refer to the competency to transmit information exactly, clearly and as intended. Continuing Manafe stated that the ability of the school manager to perform her functions effectively depends on their communication skills. In the context of this study, a communication skill refers to those skills applied by the school principals in presenting their ideas appropriately to the teachers in the school. Manijeh (2019) revealed three communication skills that can be used in the secondary schools; verbal skill, listening skill and feedback skill. The author further stressed that the above mentioned three communication skills are most widely used together by the principals for effective management in public secondary school. Egboka and Alike (2018), who found a significant influence of dialogue strategy on teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Similarly, Obilor (2020) discovered that teachers' communication skills, including speaking, listening, gestures, and facial expressions, significantly impact students' academic achievement. Omotayo and Richard (2023) also found a significant relationship between communication and mathematics teachers' job performance. Furthermore, Suleman *et al.* (2021) identified communication skills as one of the six sub-dimensions of soft skills that significantly predict job performance, highlighting the importance of effective communication in educational settings.

Soft skills will enable principals to understand what is expected of teachers to achieve work's objectives. Soft skills also help principals to know how certain problems encountered in workplace could be handled without negatively affecting staff emotion. Soft skills make principals versatile in gaining knowledge through teamwork learning approaches among others benefits. Critical observations have shown that many principals in Ikom Education Zone lack soft skills and as such they are not performing good job. This in turn have recorded a poor academic performance in the aspects of students since their academic performance depends on the performance of teachers in the classroom. Therefore, the researcher carried out this study to consider how soft skills such as emotional intelligence and communication skills adaptability relate to teachers' Job performance in Public Secondary Schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers' job performance is a multifaceted task that ensures determining the quality of education in secondary schools. It encompasses various aspects, including students' counselling, instructional delivery, classroom management, student assessment and continuous career development. Teachers' job performance becomes essential in achieving academic excellence, improving student academic performance and enhancing the overall educational progress. When teachers perform their jobs effectively, students are more likely to achieve better academic outcomes, develop positive attitudes towards learning, and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for successful life career. However, teachers are not active in their duties. They feel reluctant to manage students effectively. Teachers seem to choose their private business to their job. No proper instructional delivery, classroom assessment and counselling to students.

Despite its importance, teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone has been a subject of concern. It is believed that principals' soft skills, such as emotional intelligence and communication could play a significant role in influencing teachers' job performance. However, there is a dearth of research on the specific relationship between principals' soft skills and teachers' job performance in the context of Ikom Education Zone. This study aims to bridge this research gap by investigating the relationship of principals' soft skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Purpose of the Study

Generally, this study was to determine the relationship between principals' soft skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. Determine the relationship between principals' emotional intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone
- ii. Assess the relationship between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this would be of immense benefit to Cross River State government, State Secondary Education Board (SSEB), school principals, teachers and prospective researchers who may wish to conduct similar research.

First, the Cross River State government, through the findings of this study, would consider it pertinent to make provision for training of principals in areas of soft skills and updating them on effective skills and knowledge needed for school administration. Also, Cross River State government would realize the necessity re-training school principals regularly and constantly through school-based workshops, conferences and seminars on effective soft skills in order to enhance teachers job performance.

Second, the Cross River State Secondary Education Board, through the findings of this study, may find it needful to organize public lectures to school principals on the various soft skills that may be utilized to sustain motivate staff that could lead to teachers' effectiveness.

Third, principals of secondary schools may through the study findings; consider it crucial to sensitize the teachers on the various interpersonal skills that are essential which enhances effective job performance. The school principals may also be cautious of not allowing their personal interest and inclination to affect their actions and behaviours towards the staff.

Fourth, secondary school teachers may also benefit from this study, as the research findings would enlighten them on the soft skills and maintain appropriate behavioural disposition to work. Finally, this research work may therefore serve as a source of information to prospective researchers, especially those in education-related areas who may conduct researches on related area of study.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were posed.

- i. What is the relationship between principals' emotional Intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone?
- ii. To what extent does principals' communication skills relate with teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses which were tested at 0.05 probability level ($P < 0.5$) were formulated to guide the study.

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between principals' emotional Intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Scope of the Study

The geographical setting of the study covered all secondary school principals and teachers in Ikom Education Zone. The study focused on principals' soft skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools. The study specifically investigated the relationship between principals' soft skills (emotional intelligence, communication skills, conflict resolution, teamwork and interpersonal skills) and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.



METHODOLOGY

The study employed a correlation survey design to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables, recognizing its role as a prerequisite for causation and its ability to test alternative explanations (Bushman & Anderson, 2015). Conducted in Ikom Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, which covers 1,861.926 square kilometers and lies between latitudes 4°32' to 5°33' N and longitudes 7°25' to 8°25' E, the research targeted all 21 principals and 354 teachers across public secondary schools. Using a multi-stage sampling procedure, a sample of 199 respondents (11 principals and 188 teachers) from 11 schools was selected. Data were gathered through two researcher-developed instruments: the Principals' Soft Skills Questionnaire (PSSQ), completed by teachers, and the Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ), completed by principals, both using a four-point Likert scale. The instruments underwent face validity assessment by experts from the University of Uyo and demonstrated strong reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.88 and 0.79, respectively. Data analysis utilized Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 significance level, with Cohen's criteria applied to interpret the strength and direction of relationships, ranging from no relationship to perfect relationship based on correlation coefficients.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One

What is the relationship between principals' emotional Intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone?

Table 1: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Principals' Emotional Intelligence and Teachers' Job Performance in public secondary schools

| Variables | ΣX | ΣX^2 | ΣXY | r | Decision |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|--------|-----------------------|
| | ΣY | ΣY^2 | | | |
| Principals' Emotional Intelligence | 2464 | 33396 | 3834 | +0.620 | Moderate Relationship |
| Teachers' Job Performance | 321 | 10025 | | | |

Result on Table 1 shows the correlation coefficients of the relationship between principals' emotional Intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone. The result showed that the correlation between principals' emotional intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone was 0.620. This means that there was a moderate positive relationship between principals' emotional Intelligence and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between principals' communication skills and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone?

Table 2: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Principals’ Communication Skills and Teachers’ Job Performance in public secondary schools (n=199)

| Variables | ΣX ΣY | ΣX^2 ΣY^2 | ΣXY | r | Decision |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|--------|-----------------------|
| Principals’ Communication Skills | 2646 | 77233 | 3802 | +0.419 | Moderate Relationship |
| Teachers’ Job Performance | 321 | 10025 | | | |

Result on Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients of the relationship between principals’ communication skills and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone. The result showed that the correlation between principals’ communication skills and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone was 0.419. This means there was a moderate positive relationship between principals’ communication skills and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between principals’ emotional Intelligence and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Table 6: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Significant Relationship between Principals’ Emotional Intelligence and Teachers’ Job Performance in public secondary schools (n=199)

| Variables | ΣX ΣY | ΣX^2 ΣY^2 | ΣXY | r-cal. | r-crit. | Decision |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|--------|---------|-----------------|
| Principals’ Emotional Intelligence | 2464 | 33396 | 3834 | 0.620 | 0.159 | Reject H_{01} |
| Teachers’ Job Performance | 321 | 10025 | | | | |

$\alpha = 0.05$

The result presented in Table 6 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.620 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.159 at .05 level of significance with 197 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis one is rejected. This implies that says there is a significant relationship between principals’ emotional intelligence and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between principals’ communication skills and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone.

Table 7: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Significant Relationship between Principals’ Communication Skills and Teachers’ Job Performance in public secondary schools (n=199)

| Variables | ΣX ΣY | ΣX^2 ΣY^2 | ΣXY | r-cal. | r-crit. | Decision |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|--------|---------|---------------------------|
| Principals’ Communication Skills | 2646 | 77233 | 3802 | 0.419 | 0.159 | Reject H ₀₂ |
| Teachers’ Job Performance | 321 | 10025 | | | | |

$\alpha = 0.05$

The result presented in Table 7 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.419 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.159 at .05 level of significance with 197 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis two is rejected. This implies that says there is a significant relationship between principals’ communication skills and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result from the analysis of research question and hypothesis one revealed a moderate positive and significant relationship between principals’ emotional Intelligence and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone. This finding id true because effective emotional intelligence in school principals can enhance teachers' productivity and overall performance. This relationship implies that when principals exhibit high emotional intelligence, they are better equipped to understand and manage their own emotions and those of their teachers, creating a more supportive and motivating work environment. As a result, teachers are likely to feel more valued, understood, and supported, which can lead to improved job satisfaction, reduced stress, and increased commitment to their work, ultimately translating into better job performance. This finding underscores the importance of emotional intelligence in school leadership and its potential impact on teacher effectiveness and school success.

The finding of this study align with existing research that highlights the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in workplace performance. For instance, Nosike *et al.* (2022) found that self-control and empathy, both components of EI, have a statistically significant impact on employee creativity and commitment in secondary schools. Similarly, Akhter, Karim, and Islam (2021) discovered that EI has a substantial and beneficial influence on bank workers' job satisfaction, with a beta value of 0.510. Other factors like emotional expression (EE) and cultural intelligence (CQ) also played significant roles in predicting work satisfaction. Moreover, Munira and Azamb (2017) observed a notable improvement in EI scores and performance ratings after EI training, suggesting that developing emotional intelligence can lead to better job performance. These studies collectively underscore the importance of EI in enhancing workplace outcomes, supporting the current study's findings.

The summary of data analysis for research question two indicates that there is a moderate positive and significant relationship between principals’ communication skills and teachers’ job performance in public secondary schools in Ikom Education Zone. This finding is possible because effective communication is crucial for enhancing teacher productivity. When principals possess strong communication skills, they can clearly articulate expectations, provide constructive feedback, and foster an open and supportive environment. This, in turn, enables teachers to understand their roles better, feel valued, and be more motivated to perform their duties efficiently. The positive relationship indicates that as principals improve their communication skills, teachers' job performance is likely to increase, underscoring the importance of communication in school leadership for achieving better educational outcomes.

The findings of the study are supported by existing research, including Egboka and Alike (2018), who found a significant influence of dialogue strategy on teachers' job performance in secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Similarly, Obilor (2020) discovered that teachers' communication skills, including speaking, listening, gestures, and facial expressions, significantly impact students' academic achievement. Omotayo and Richard (2023) also found a significant relationship between communication and mathematics teachers' job performance. Furthermore, Suleman *et al.* (2021) identified communication skills as one of the six sub-dimensions of soft skills that significantly predict job performance, highlighting the importance of effective communication in educational settings.

Based on the findings, it was concluded that the study highlights the critical role of principals' leadership skills in enhancing teachers' job performance in public secondary schools. The findings implies that effective leadership, particularly in areas such as emotional intelligence and communication is essential for promoting teacher productivity and overall school success. Therefore, it is imperative for school administrators and policymakers to prioritize the development of these leadership skills among principals to improve teacher job performance and ultimately achieve better educational outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. School administrators should foster a collaborative environment, encouraging teachers to work together to achieve common goals.
- ii. Principals should receive training on effective conflict resolution strategies to manage disputes and promote a positive school culture.
- iii. Principals should develop their emotional intelligence and communication skills to better understand and support teachers' needs.
- iv. Principals should build strong relationships with teachers, promoting trust, empathy, and open communication.
- v. School administrators and policymakers should provide training and development opportunities for principals to enhance their leadership skills, particularly in areas such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- i. Similar studies in other zones on the relationship between principals' leadership skills and teachers' job performance should be conducted.
- ii. Investigate the relationship between principals' leadership skills and teachers' variables as correlates of teachers' job performance.

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