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ADMINISTRATORS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between administrators' emotional intelligence and teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on relationship management and empathy. The study was guided by two null hypotheses and employed a correlational research design. The population comprised all 92 teachers in the three special education schools across Cross River State—Calabar, Ikom, and Ogoja. Using the census method, all schools and teachers were included in the study. Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument, the Administrators' Emotional Intelligence and Teachers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (AEITJSQ), structured on a four-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated for face and content by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and yielded reliability coefficients ranging from 0.79 to 0.82 using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance with SPSS version 26. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between both administrators' relationship management and empathy and teachers' job satisfaction. These results indicate that principals' emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in creating a supportive and motivating work environment that enhances teachers' professional fulfillment and commitment. The study concludes that administrators' emotional intelligence significantly influences teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools, underscoring its importance for teacher well-being and overall school effectiveness. Based on the findings, it is recommended that educational policymakers integrate emotional intelligence competencies into the selection, evaluation, and promotion of school principals to improve teacher satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance instructional effectiveness in special education settings.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Relationship Management, Empathy, Teachers' Job Satisfaction, Special Education

Introduction

The implementation of inclusive education in Nigeria is aimed at ensuring equal learning opportunities for all children, including those with special needs. This approach is anchored on the principle of equity, which emphasizes access to quality education for every learner regardless of

physical, intellectual, emotional, or learning challenges. The growing emphasis on special education stems from the national commitment to promote holistic development and enable all learners to attain their full academic and personal potential. Scholars have consistently emphasized the importance of special education in achieving national educational objectives and fostering sustainable development in Nigeria (Ejom et al., 2024; Ngene et al., 2025; Obona et al., 2025).

Special education schools are therefore established to provide individualized instruction, adapted curricula, and specialized support services that address the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. These institutions are designed to enhance learners' academic achievement, social integration, and overall well-being, thereby enabling them to participate meaningfully in societal development (Akpan et al., 2025; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The effectiveness of these schools largely depends on the quality of instruction and support provided by teachers, who serve as the central agents in the teaching–learning process. Teachers are responsible not only for delivering subject content but also for implementing instructional adaptations and providing emotional and academic support to learners with special needs. In this regard, teachers' job satisfaction becomes a critical factor in the successful implementation of special education programmes.

Teachers' job satisfaction refers to the degree to which teachers feel fulfilled, motivated, and content with their professional roles and work environment. It reflects how teachers perceive their job in relation to their personal needs, expectations, and workplace conditions. Job satisfaction is achieved when teachers find their work meaningful and supportive of their professional growth, and it is influenced by both personal characteristics and organizational factors such as school climate, leadership, and working conditions (Noor & Akhter, 2010). In simple terms, it describes the level of happiness and fulfillment teachers derive from their teaching responsibilities. Teachers' job satisfaction is a critical determinant of educational quality and institutional effectiveness. Satisfied teachers tend to display higher levels of commitment, enthusiasm, and dedication to their duties, often extending effort beyond formal responsibilities to support students' learning and academic development. They also maintain positive relationships with colleagues, students, and school administrators, thereby fostering a collaborative and productive school environment. Additionally, job satisfaction is reflected in regular attendance, punctuality, and sustained motivation, all of which contribute significantly to effective teaching and learning outcomes.

Empirical studies have consistently linked high levels of job satisfaction to improved teacher performance, reduced turnover intentions, and enhanced student achievement (Kraft, Marinell, & Shen-Wei Yee, 2016; Toropova, Myrberg, & Johansson, 2021). Job satisfaction has also been found to positively influence teachers' emotional attachment to their profession, commitment to organizational goals, and willingness to remain in the profession (Yucel, 2012). Scholars further categorize job satisfaction into affective and cognitive dimensions, where the affective component relates to emotional attachment to the job,

while the cognitive component reflects satisfaction with tangible aspects such as salary, working conditions, promotion opportunities, and workload (Dave & Dharmesh, 2014). Similarly, key elements influencing teachers' job satisfaction include supervision, collegial relationships, remuneration, career advancement, and the nature of the job itself (Smith et al., 1983; Rachmawati & Suyatno, 2021).

Teachers' job satisfaction is a critical factor influencing their professional behaviour, instructional effectiveness, and commitment to educational goals, particularly within special education schools. In the context of special education, satisfied teachers are more likely to demonstrate dedication, creativity, patience, and resilience in meeting the diverse and complex needs of learners with disabilities. Conversely, low levels of job satisfaction among special education teachers may result in reduced motivation, emotional exhaustion, and ineffective instructional practices, which can negatively affect learners' academic and social development. Therefore, teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools remains a vital determinant of school productivity, quality instruction, and the successful attainment of inclusive education objectives.

Persistent job dissatisfaction among special education teachers has remained a major concern for education stakeholders and researchers in Nigeria (Obona, Udang, & Egwu, 2023). Studies indicate that many teachers fall short of expected professional standards, as evidenced by poor lesson preparation, irregular attendance, lateness, truancy, and inadequate coverage of the curriculum (Arop et al., 2019; Difoni et al., 2025). In some cases, teachers enter classrooms without prepared lesson notes, which further undermines instructional quality. Oluwaseun (2016) noted that weak teacher performance continues to pose a serious threat to students' academic achievement and the overall quality of leadership development in the country. Low job satisfaction has been linked to reduced commitment, negatively affecting students' learning outcomes and academic progress. Nwogbo and Ugwuoke (2021) and Okudo (2024) described this situation as a critical challenge confronting the Nigerian education system. The consequences are evident in students' poor literacy levels, weak academic performance, inability to complete assignments, and difficulty adhering to school rules and expectations (Etor et al., 2019).

This study is motivated by growing concerns over declining job satisfaction among teachers in special education secondary schools in Cross River State. Observations reveal frequent lateness, early departure from school, poor lesson preparation, limited classroom engagement, and increased involvement in personal activities during school hours, all of which reflect low commitment to teaching duties. Teacher–student interactions are often marked by frustration and emotional detachment, suggesting low morale linked to inadequate remuneration, heavy workload, limited professional support, and lack of recognition. These conditions negatively affect instructional quality, students' academic performance, discipline, and overall engagement. Consequently, there is an urgent need to examine teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools, as improving it is essential for to improving instructional

quality and achieving the objectives of inclusive and special education in the state and country at large.

Various institutional factors can influence the job satisfaction level of the teachers. One of which is the emotional intelligence (EI) of the school administrators. As used in this context' emotional intelligence refers to the ability of school administrators such as principals to first of all recognize, understand, regulate, and influence their own emotions and then those of the teachers. According to Uzu et al. (2025), it the ability of the principal to understand, manage, and influence emotions, both their own and those of others. This includes interactions with teachers, students, and staff in a way that promotes a healthy school climate. Mayer and Salovey (1997) describe it as the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Similarly, Salami (2010) conceptualizes emotional intelligence as an individual's capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions in oneself and others, which is essential for personal well-being, effective communication, and positive interpersonal relationships within educational settings (Uzu et al., 2025).

Emotionally intelligent school leadership plays a vital role in enhancing teachers' psychological well-being, organizational commitment, and overall school climate. Research shows that principals who demonstrate emotional intelligence foster supportive environments that improve teacher motivation, engagement, and professional commitment (Teli & Baba, 2017; Li, Cheng, & Liu, 2024). Such leadership is particularly important in special education settings, where teachers face greater emotional and professional demands. When administrators create inclusive and emotionally supportive environments, teachers experience reduced stress, improved morale, and stronger job satisfaction, leading to better instructional effectiveness and commitment to school goals (Uzu et al., 2025; Okudo 2021; Khokhar et al., 2023). Principals' abilities to manage emotions, build relationships, resolve conflicts, and show empathy are therefore essential to sustaining teacher satisfaction and performance. Consequently, this study examines administrators' relationship management and empathy as key dimensions of emotional intelligence influencing teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Relationship management and empathy are key dimensions of principals' emotional intelligence that influence teachers' job satisfaction. In this study, relationship management involves building positive interactions with teachers, students, and stakeholders through effective communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, and shared decision-making, fostering a collaborative school culture and enhancing teacher morale and commitment. Empathy on the other hand entails understanding and responding to teachers' emotions, needs, and challenges through active listening, emotional support, and sensitivity, which reduces stress, builds trust, and strengthens professional fulfillment. Empathetic and relational leadership has been shown to improve teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and performance (Iroegbulam, 2021; Akinnubi & Adeoye, 2021). Understanding how these

leadership practices impact teachers provides valuable insights for leadership training and policy development aimed at enhancing teacher retention, motivation, and effectiveness in schools.

Statement of the problem

Teachers' job satisfaction in special education secondary schools can be reflected through indicators such as teachers' commitment to instructional duties, timely lesson preparation, regular attendance, effective classroom engagement, positive teacher–student interactions, and overall enthusiasm for teaching. When teachers are satisfied with their jobs, they are more likely to demonstrate dedication, patience, and creativity in addressing the unique needs of students with special educational challenges, which in turn contributes to improved student outcomes and the development of a positive school climate.

However, field observations by the researcher, coupled with complaints from parents and students in Cross River State, reveal concerning trends that suggest declining teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools. For instance, many teachers frequently arrive late, leave early, or exhibit limited attention to classroom instruction, often prioritizing personal business over teaching duties. In some schools, lesson preparation is inadequate, and teacher–student interactions are characterized by frustration, impatience, and emotional detachment. Parents have expressed concerns over students' slow academic progress, poor literacy skills, and low engagement, while students report feeling neglected or unsupported. These conditions negatively affect instructional effectiveness, student performance, and may even contribute to broader societal implications such as the emergence of inadequately prepared individuals unable to fully participate in national development.

Despite interventions such as government-led professional development programs, performance monitoring, and the provision of incentives for teachers, the problem persists. Various researchers have also recommended improved remuneration, workload adjustment, and enhanced professional support, yet challenges remain. It is therefore proposed that the emotional intelligence of school administrators may play a critical role in addressing these issues. This situation raises the vital question: What is the relationship between administrators' emotional intelligence and teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State? The need to answer this question forms the basis of the present study, with the ultimate aim of identifying strategies to improve teachers' satisfaction, professional effectiveness, and student outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates administrators' emotional intelligence and teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out the relationship between:

1. Administrators' relationship management and teachers job satisfaction in special education schools.
2. Administrators' empathy and teachers job satisfaction in special education schools.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. Administrators' relationship management does not significantly relate to teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools.
2. Administrators' empathy does not significantly relate to teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools.

Theoretical review

The study adopts the Emotional Intelligence Theory by Daniel Goleman (1995) Emotional Intelligence Theory, proposed by Daniel Goleman (1995), underscores the importance of recognizing and managing one's own emotions and those of others as central to effective leadership. The theory highlights five key components—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—and assumes that these abilities can be developed through learning and practice. In the context of special education schools, principals who demonstrate high emotional intelligence are able to manage interpersonal relationships effectively, communicate with empathy, resolve conflicts constructively, and build trust among staff. Such emotionally intelligent leadership fosters a supportive and inclusive school environment, where teachers feel valued, motivated, and psychologically secure. This positive climate enhances teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, and professional performance, which are critical for improving instructional effectiveness and student outcomes. Therefore, the application of Emotional Intelligence Theory provides a theoretical basis for understanding how principals' self-awareness, relationship management, and empathy can directly influence teachers' job satisfaction in special education secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria, forming the conceptual foundation for this study.

Literature review

Administrators' relationship management and teachers job satisfaction

Relationship management, a core component of emotional intelligence, refers to a principal's ability to handle interpersonal relationships empathetically and constructively, fostering a positive school climate that supports teacher well-being. Principals who excel in this area enhance communication, build trust, encourage collaboration, and provide constructive feedback, all of which contribute to higher levels of teachers' job satisfaction. Empirical studies consistently highlight the importance of this leadership skill. For example, Uzu et al. (2025) found a significant positive relationship between principals' emotional intelligence—particularly self-awareness and relationship management—and teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Similarly, Suyatno (2021) reported that principals' interpersonal competencies, including effective communication and relationship management, significantly influenced teachers' job satisfaction and commitment.

The relevance of relationship management is particularly pronounced in special education contexts. Bakar and Nordin (2024) observed that principals who demonstrated strong relational skills and high emotional intelligence contributed to greater job satisfaction among special education teachers. Likewise, Akinnubi and Adeoye (2024) found that principals'

intellectual stimulation—encouraging innovation and critical thinking—positively affected teacher satisfaction by fostering a collaborative and respectful work culture. Transformational leadership practices, including individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, have also been associated with higher teacher satisfaction across various studies (Obonyo, 2023; Zaman, Alwi, & Shaiq, 2020). Collectively, these findings underscore that effective relationship management by principals is critical for creating supportive school environments, enhancing teacher morale, and promoting instructional effectiveness across diverse educational settings.

Administrators' empathy and teachers job satisfaction

A school administrator's ability to demonstrate empathy significantly contributes to a supportive and understanding work environment, positively influencing teachers' job satisfaction, emotional well-being, and professional performance. Empathetic principals foster a positive school climate by validating teachers' feelings, recognizing their efforts, and providing constructive feedback, which enhances morale, reduces stress, and promotes trust and mutual respect. Omeke and Onah (2012) and Okudo (2022) noted that teachers preferred democratic leadership, which inherently involves empathetic interactions, over autocratic or laissez-faire styles, highlighting the value of empathy in fostering a sense of belonging and professional value. Similarly, Iroegbulam (2021) and Akinnubi and Adeoye (2021) emphasized that individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and personalized support from principals significantly enhance teacher motivation, satisfaction, and commitment to school goals.

Empirical studies consistently reinforce the importance of principals' empathy in improving teachers' job satisfaction across diverse educational contexts. Akpan et al. (2025) found a significant positive relationship between administrative management practices—including job supervision—and instructional delivery among special education teachers in Cross River State. In Abia State, Iroegbulam (2021) reported that principals' transformational leadership practices, particularly individualized consideration, positively influenced teachers' satisfaction and commitment. Similarly, Akinnubi and Adeoye (2021) observed that principals who encouraged innovation and recognized teachers' contributions enhanced professional fulfillment and job satisfaction. Further evidence from the Nnewi Education Zone in Anambra State showed that teachers preferred democratic leadership styles characterized by empathy, inclusive decision-making, and understanding of professional challenges, which were associated with higher job satisfaction (Jideofor, 2020). Expanding the perspective internationally, Panagopoulos et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership in Greek primary schools—marked by empathy and support—significantly enhanced teachers' job satisfaction. Collectively, these studies indicate that empathetic leadership is a critical factor in creating supportive work environments, improving teacher morale, and promoting professional commitment, making it a key consideration for school administration and policy development.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design, which is particularly appropriate for examining the nature and strength of relationships between variables without manipulating them. This design is valuable for identifying patterns and making predictions about future outcomes using data collection methods such as surveys, naturalistic observation, or archival records (Isangedighi, 2012). The choice of this design was considered suitable for the present study, as it sought to investigate the relationship between principals' emotional intelligence and teachers' job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The population included all nine-two (92) teachers in all the three (3) special schools in Cross River State. The study made use of census technique to include all the schools in the population which include Good Shepherd School for special education Ogoja, St. Joseph's school for the visually handicapped, Obudu and Ministry of Education special education center, old Ikang Road, Calabar, all in Cross River State. Hence, nine-two (92) teachers constituted the subjects for this study.

The instrument used for this study was the researchers' developed questionnaire titled "Administrators' Emotional Intelligence and Teachers' Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (AEITJSQ). The instrument was preceded by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, assuring respondents of confidentiality, and encouraging objective responses. The instrument was made up of two sections. Section A dealt with demographic variables such as name of school, sex and academic qualifications. Section B was designed to elicit information on items measuring two sub-variables of administrators' relationship management, and administrators' empathy with 6 items per sub-variable. Section C: Included 6 items assessing teachers' job satisfaction. The items were structured using a 4-point modified Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). It was validated by experts in measure and evaluation unit, university of Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted on 50 teachers in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, which is outside the study area. The responses were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient, which yielded a reliability index ranging from 0.79 to 0.82, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

The questionnaire was administered with the help of ten trained and motivated research assistants. Prior to administration, the assistants were oriented on the objectives of the study and how to handle the distribution process. Verbal permission was sought from the respective school principals. Respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. They were given adequate time to complete the questionnaire. Following the retrieval of the questionnaires, there were carefully screened for completeness. The items were then sorted according to the constructs they measured, and a coding schedule was prepared. Responses were scored based on the Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The scores of the negatively worded items were reversed accordingly. Data were analyzed using Pearson's Product-Moment

Correlation Coefficient (r) at the 0.05 significance level with the help of SPSS version 27. The result is presented in tables.

Results

Hypothesis one

Administrators' relationship management does not significantly relate to teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools. The two variables in this hypothesis are administrators' relationship management and teachers' job satisfaction. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 1. Table 1 showed the correlation coefficients between administrators' relationship management and teachers' job satisfaction. The correlation coefficient was statistically significant for teachers' job satisfaction (r = .75, p<.05). Since p (.000) is less than p (.05), hypothesis two is rejected in terms of teachers' job satisfaction. The result of the analysis implied that there is a statistically significant relationship between administrators' relationship management and teachers job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State.

Table 1: Summary of correlation between administrators' relationship management and teachers job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State. (n=92)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	S.D	r	Sig.
Administrators' relationship management	18.85	4.30		
Teachers job satisfaction	18.20	3.01	.75*	.000

*Significant at p<.05 df=90

Hypothesis two

Administrators' empathy does not significantly relate to teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools. The two variables in this hypothesis are administrators' empathy and teachers' job satisfaction. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 2. Table 2 showed the correlation coefficients between administrators' empathy and teachers' job satisfaction. The correlation coefficient was statistically significant for teachers' job satisfaction (r = .81, p<.05). Since p (.000) is less than p (.05), hypothesis two is rejected in terms of teachers' job satisfaction. The result of the analysis implied that there is a statistically significant relationship between administrators' empathy and teachers job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State.

Table 2: Summary of correlation between administrators' empathy and teachers job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State. (n=92)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	S.D	r	Sig.
Administrators' empathy	19.55	3.30		
Teachers job satisfaction	18.20	3.01	.81*	.000

*Significant at p<.05 df=90

Discussion of findings

Hypothesis one, which stated that administrators' relationship management does not significantly relate to teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, was rejected. This

finding aligns with expectations, as principals who demonstrate effective relationship management—such as building trust, resolving conflicts constructively, providing emotional support, and fostering collaboration—tend to create a more supportive and engaging work environment for teachers. Such practices enhance workplace harmony, boost teacher morale, and reduce stress and burnout, all of which are critical contributors to job satisfaction. In schools where principals actively nurture positive interpersonal relationships and acknowledge teachers' contributions, educators are more likely to feel valued, motivated, and professionally fulfilled. The implication of this result is that administrators' relationship management is a significant determinant of teachers' job satisfaction, which in turn positively influences teacher performance, retention, and the overall quality of education delivery in special education schools.

This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies that underscore the importance of principals' relationship management in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction. For example, Suyatno (2021) reported that principals' interpersonal competencies, including effective communication and relationship management, significantly influenced teachers' job satisfaction and commitment, highlighting the central role of strong interpersonal skills in school leadership. Similarly, Bakar and Nordin (2024) found that principals with high emotional intelligence, particularly in managing relationships, positively impacted job satisfaction among special education integration teachers, emphasizing the value of emotional competence in school administration.

In addition, Akinnubi and Adeoye (2024) demonstrated that principals who intellectually stimulated teachers by encouraging innovation and critical thinking enhanced teachers' job satisfaction, illustrating how strategic relationship management fosters a collaborative and supportive school climate. Zaman, Alwi, and Shaiq (2020) also observed that transformational leadership, characterized by effective relationship management, was strongly associated with higher teacher satisfaction across diverse educational contexts. Collectively, these studies reinforce the critical role of relationship management as a key dimension of effective school leadership, highlighting its contribution to teacher satisfaction, professional fulfillment, and overall institutional performance.

Hypothesis two, which stated that principals' empathy does not significantly relate to teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, was rejected. This finding is consistent with the context of Cross River State, where teachers often face challenges such as inadequate teaching materials, poor infrastructure, and delayed salaries. In such environments, the emotional support and understanding provided by empathetic principals serve as a vital buffer against dissatisfaction. Furthermore, in many public secondary schools, formal reward systems may be limited, making principals' empathetic behaviors a key source of motivation and job satisfaction. The implication of this result is that empathy, as a relational skill, plays a significant role in building trust, reducing teacher stress, and fostering a cooperative and emotionally healthy school climate. This underscores the importance of principals' interpersonal

and emotional behaviors in shaping teachers' daily work experiences, enhancing their satisfaction, and ultimately improving educational outcomes.

The finding of this study aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of empathy in educational leadership. Omeke and Onah (2012) observed that teachers tend to prefer democratic leadership styles, which inherently involve empathetic engagement, over autocratic or laissez-faire approaches. This preference highlights the crucial role of empathy in fostering a sense of inclusion, respect, and appreciation among teachers. Accordingly, cultivating empathetic leadership practices among school principals is a key strategy for enhancing teacher job satisfaction and overall school performance.

Supporting this view, Iroegbulam (2021) noted that empathetic leadership not only improves teachers' emotional well-being but also strengthens their commitment to institutional goals. Likewise, Akinnubi and Adeoye (2021) reported that principals who provide intellectual stimulation and personalized support significantly boost teacher motivation and satisfaction. Similarly, Jideofor (2020) found that democratic leadership—characterized by empathy and shared decision-making—was associated with higher levels of teacher satisfaction, as educators felt valued, respected, and supported in addressing professional challenges. Panagopoulos et al. (2023), in a study conducted in Greece, revealed that transformational leadership, marked by empathy, individualized attention, and support, significantly enhanced teachers' job satisfaction. Collectively, these studies suggest that empathetic leadership practices contribute positively to teacher well-being and professional fulfillment, not only in Nigeria but also across diverse educational systems.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between administrators' emotional intelligence and teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, Nigeria, with a focus on the dimensions of relationship management and empathy. The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between both administrators' relationship management and empathy and teachers' job satisfaction. These results indicate that principals' emotional intelligence is pivotal in creating a supportive and motivating work environment that enhances teachers' professional fulfillment and commitment. Consequently, the study concludes that administrators' emotional intelligence significantly influences and strengthens teachers' job satisfaction in special education schools in Cross River State, highlighting its critical role in promoting teacher well-being and improving overall school effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Ministry of Education and school management authorities should organize regular training and professional development programs to enhance the emotional intelligence of school administrators, with particular emphasis on relationship management and empathy. These skills will enable principals to create more supportive, inclusive, and motivating work environments, thereby improving teachers' job

satisfaction and school performance.

2. School administrators should establish structured mentorship and support systems that encourage positive interactions between principals and teachers. This will assist administrators to promote trust, reduce stress, and enhance teacher morale and commitment in special education schools.
3. Educational policymakers should integrate emotional intelligence competencies into the criteria for selecting, evaluating, and promoting school principals. Emphasizing relationship management and empathy as core leadership qualities will ensure that administrators are better equipped to enhance teachers' job satisfaction, reduce staff turnover, and improve instructional effectiveness in special education settings.

Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by empirically demonstrating the significant role of school administrators' emotional intelligence—particularly relationship management and empathy—in enhancing teachers' job satisfaction in special education secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. While previous research has often examined teacher satisfaction or leadership styles in general education settings, this study specifically highlights how principals' emotional competencies influence teacher well-being and professional commitment in the context of special education. By establishing a clear link between administrators' emotional intelligence and teacher satisfaction, the study provides valuable insights for educational leadership, policy formulation, and professional development programs, emphasizing the need for emotionally intelligent leadership practices to improve teacher retention, motivation, and school effectiveness.

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