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WORK AUTONOMY AS CORRELATE OF TEACHERS' JOB EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated work autonomy as correlate of Teachers' Job Effectiveness in Public Secondary Schools in Imo State. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 5,314 teachers of public secondary schools in Imo state while 2,560 teachers were randomly selected as the sample size of the study. The instrument used for data collection comprised 15-item structured questionnaire titled, "Work Autonomy as Correlate of Teachers' Job Effectiveness Questionnaire (WACTJEQ)". The instrument was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy and one from the Department of Educational Foundations. The reliability of the instrument was obtained through Cronbach Alpha with an average of 0.82 which was considered high enough for the study. The instrument consisted of two clusters. Cluster A was concerned with the results of work autonomy while cluster B dealt with the constraints against work autonomy. T-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level while mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question. A hypothesis was accepted when p-value was equal or higher than the alpha value but rejected when it was otherwise.

Keywords: Work Autonomy, Job Effectiveness, Public Secondary Schools

Introduction

Work autonomy can be defined as the freedom a worker has to make his personal or independent contribution to the technology of his work. It is not necessarily the freedom to do work by a worker. It is the chance an employee has to decide how to do his work. It is not an opportunity to deviate from job design, it is the opportunity to add to the method of doing the job assigned to him while not altering or changing the job design (Chung, 2017).

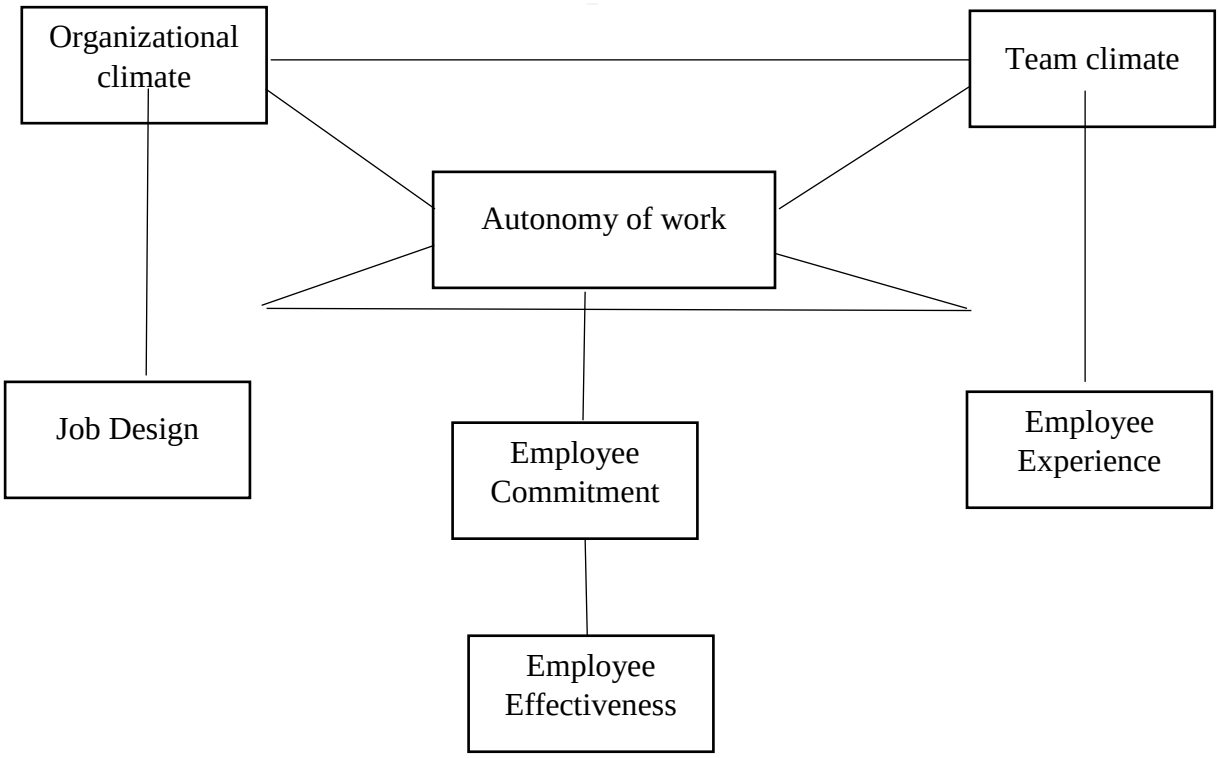
Typologically, work autonomy or autonomy at work (as generically called) has to do with the quality of freedom workers have to do or perform the tasks assigned to them. It relates to how work is completed, the order of completeness and an employee's freedom to do his job without undue or mechanistic supervision by super-ordinates. The concept puts paid to the idea of work rules in an organization or school. This is because as workers are free to do their work without undue close monitoring, the need to impose

rules in the work setting becomes unwarranted (Jun and Lee, 2012).

The idea of autonomy at work sprang from the crises created from Fredrick Taylor's scientific management. Then, work was very mechanistic and the average worker was reduced to a robot. Creating rules in the work place can calibrate the process of creative thinking. It stifles creativity and results in unnecessary performance pressure. There is therefore the need for management at the organization including the school to allow employees in this case, teachers to put their intelligibility to work. This according to Lin (2011) moves the human elements in the work setting away from mere machines.

Beyond is the fact that human beings have different approaches to issues. At the place of job performance, workers cannot do the same job the same way. Work autonomy creates the chance for workers to execute their tasks in different ways. No two teachers teach with the same method. Work autonomy is that freedom that makes teachers teach the same topic with different styles or methods and produce good or acceptable results. Saha (2016) stated that it is that consciousness created by employers of labour to ascertain the resourcefulness of workers as they interface with their task and to measure the qualitative deployment of their ingenuity. This measurement he added is explained by the degree of acceptability of their services by clients.

The conceptual framework of the study



The above diagram is a structural representation or conceptual framework of autonomy of work, the models and the outcome. One of the factors that make work autonomy possible is organizational climate. It can be explained as the collegiality of a school. It is the totality of the culture, attitude to work and the dynamics of relationships between the human elements that work in a school as an organization (Ogunsanya, 2012). In a highly organic work setting, workers are free to exercise themselves at work. They make their inputs on what they do and there seem to be unannounced competition for excellency. Workers are trusted and enjoined to make their independent contribution to the method or process of doing their work. In a school setting, teachers are allowed to execute the contents of the curriculum in the best professional way deemed possible (Ajayi, 2015). There could be supervision of work but it is with same latitude allowed and this is because they have done the work overtime and have generated new ideas to make results better.

Team climate is equally important in creating work autonomy. By definition, it is the atmosphere that exists within a group as they execute their task at unit or group level. Informal groups or units exist in every school or organization. Informal groups consist of workers of like mind that share ideas of what they do and how to do their work. This facilitates job performance in terms of quality and quantity. Naque (2013) is of the opinion that organizational climate does not at the same time translate to team climate. If the relationship that exist within the members of the group is not friendly, the atmosphere might be tensed and this can affect ingenuity or productive reasonableness.

Job design is another critical factor in discussing work autonomy. The extent a work can exercise his freedom at work can be determined by job design. Job design according to Ogunsanya (2012) is the content of a job. It consists of the activities and responsibilities that make up the job. Jobs should be designed with explicitly so that workers can know what and how to make their contributions. In addition to that, the description of the job design should be in a language that is understandable to the workers doing the job. For the teachers, the contents of the curriculum should be broken into specifics so that the teacher can explain it to students one step at a time.

One other thing that makes work autonomy possible is employee's experience. No worker can make a personal contribution to the technology of the work if he does not have the necessary experience. Possessing experience according to Ogunsanya (2012) means that the worker has done the work over and over. The question about experience can be resolved during interview and selection process. Where a worker has the job specifications but lacks the composite experience, training and retraining could be used to help the worker. Equally important is allowing the worker to do the same job over and over. Repetition according to Ayayi (2015) is the law of deep and lasting impression.

The need for autonomy at work cannot be over emphasized. Primarily, itleads to workers' commitment and enables workers to contribute their knowledge to work. Mahimwska (2017) noted that it is an effective solution in the absence of workplace engagement. When workers are given the freedom to make input to work technology, they feel engaged, trusted and they feel psychologically connected to the work.

Work autonomy reduces pressure of work. This is because workers are at liberty to do their work at their own pace in so far as target realization is not at risk. Senagili (2011) stated that it makes workers develop confidence in themselves and in the organization. This in turn results in job satisfaction among workers which leads to low staff turnover and employee job effectiveness. Ogunsanya (2012) speaking on this, added that work autonomy is a corollary to work engagement. In other words, workers feel engaged with the work and organization as they are given the freedom to make input to work.

Work autonomy can equally lead to employee self-motivation. This is because, workers are free to make decisions on their jobs without undue interference of super-ordinates. As indicated earlier, it helps an organization or a school in employee retention. This is because workers are happy about their jobs and with their employing organization. Sarimah, Akbar and Prasadja (2018) submitted that workers in an organic work setting as this, do not see the need to look for alternative opportunities elsewhere, so there is high employee retention rate which results in reduced workplace disruption.

Autonomy of work makes for creativity and innovation. As Wheathy (2017) puts it workers are made to think out of the box. It reduces complacency at work and brings in innovation whichmakes an organization evolving and developing with the dynamics of market competition. It makes room for free thinking the absence of which can lead to organizational stagnancy. When workers are at liberty to think, they come up with periodic brainstorming sessions and the result of this is that new ideas are birthed.

Work autonomy also leads to employee efficiency. Efficiency can be defined as achieving results or targets with minimal resources. As employees evolve new ideas and additional methods of doing their jobs, cost effectiveness in ensured. Sanagih (2011) indicated that workers are the ones that use organizational materials to work and as such know the most effective ways of combining the resources to achieve targets without incurring additional or excessive costs.

Job effectiveness can simply be defined as working with result. It is the process of achieving set targets within the stipulated period of time. One of the benefits of work autonomy is that it makes workers effective in the performance of their jobs (Wheatly, 2017). The process of making independent contributions to the technology of their work entails evolving means of doing their jobs effectively. As indicated earlier, job effectiveness is producing quality result

within the specified period with little or no error.

It also makes for workers' job commitment. Commitment can be expressed in terms of being available and performing one's task with diligence. Chang (2017) explained job commitment as taking responsibilities and doing one's job with skill, prudence and dexterity. Job commitment is a component of job autonomy indicators. It takes a worker that is committed to his job to contribute to the technology of the work.

The argument against work autonomy is that it can result in the abuse of the freedom. There could be the tendency for workers to indulge in laxity abandoning their work. Others opined that it can lead to low productivity, difficulty in meeting targets and breakdown of work ethics. Research has shown that if there is thorough monitoring through supervision by superior officers, work autonomy may not degenerate to laxity of workers.

Statement of the Problem

Autonomy of work is the freedom workers have to make contributions to the technology of the work assigned to them to do. It is the opportunity given to a worker to contribute or add to the method of doing or executing the task given to him. Work autonomy has models or components such as organizational climate, team climate, jobs design and of course the workers' experience. It is a deviation from the usual mechanistic approach enunciated by the old scientific work pattern. The advantages of work autonomy are numerous and they include, increasing workers' creativity, high level of imagination on the part of workers, self-motivation and high job or worker retention among others. However, it does appear that the concept of work autonomy is novel. This is because most institutional organizations consciously or otherwise practice the mechanistic work pattern through undue regular and close supervision of workers by super-ordinates. This presupposes that most schools especially in the study area seem to be ignorant of the gains of work autonomy. It is this gap that this study is intended to fill.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How does work autonomy influence teachers' job effectiveness?
2. What are the constraints against work autonomy of teachers in the school system?

Hypotheses

The study is aided by the following hypotheses;

1. There is no significant relationship between work autonomy and teachers' job effectiveness.
2. There are no constraints to teachers' work autonomy in the school system.

Research Method

The study investigated work autonomy as correlate of Teachers' Job Effectiveness in Public Secondary Schools in Imo State. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 5,314 teachers of public secondary schools in Imo state while 2,560

teachers were randomly selected as the sample size of the study. The instrument used for data collection comprised 15-item structured questionnaire titled, "Work Autonomy as Correlate of Teachers' Job Effectiveness Questionnaire (WACTJEQ)", and consisted of two clusters; A and B. Cluster A was concerned with the results of work autonomy while cluster B dealt with the constraints against work autonomy. The instrument was structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). It was validated by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy and one from the Department of Educational Foundations. The reliability of the instrument was obtained through Cronbach Alpha with an average of 0.82 which was considered high enough for the study. T-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 significant level while mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity in opinions of the respondents. The decision is that a null hypothesis was accepted when p-value was equal or higher than the alpha value but rejected when otherwise.

Presentation of Result

Research Question 1: How does work autonomy influence teachers' job effectiveness?

Table 1: respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on influence of work autonomy on teachers' job effectiveness

S/N	Items	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remarks
1.	Work autonomy is freedom for teachers to contribute to work technology	3.20	.67	Agree
2.	It makes teachers creative	3.64	.61	Strongly Agree
3.	It increases the confidence of teachers	2.84	.84	Agree
4.	It makes for self-motivation of teachers	3.10	.91	Agree
5.	It helps an organization in worker retention	3.94	.74	Strongly Agree
6.	It helps teachers to work at their pace	3.02	.77	Agree
7.	It also makes teachers meet targets	2.86	68	Agree
8.	It increases teachers' job commitment	3.04	.51	Agree
9.	It leads to teachers' job effectiveness	3.56	.92	Strongly Agree
10.	It is a deviation from the mechanistic approach to work.	2.86	.71	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.21**		**Agree**

Data in Table 1 shows that items 2, 5 and 9 with mean scores ranged from 3.56 to 3.94 are strongly agreed by teachers as part of work autonomy that influence theirs job effectiveness while teachers agree that the remaining seven items (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7,

8 and 10) with mean scores ranged from 2.86 to 3.20 are aspects of work autonomy that influence their job effectiveness. The cluster mean score of 3.21 shows that on the whole, teachers in secondary schools in Imo State agree that work autonomy results to their job effectiveness. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range indicating that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Research Question 2: What are the constraints to work autonomy in public secondary schools in Imo State?

Table 2: Respondents' men ratings and standard deviation on constraints to work autonomy in public secondary schools

S/N	Items	$\overline{X}$	SD	Remarks
11.	Abuse of work freedom by workers is possible	3.88	.91	Strongly Agree
12.	This can lead to low productivity	3.02	.84	Agree
13.	It can lead to difficulty in meeting targets	2.92	.63	Agree
14.	It can result in breakdown in work ethics	3.87	.69	Strongly Agree
15.	It can lead to poor supervision of teachers	3.74	.87	Strongly Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.49**		**Agree**

Analysis of data in table 2 indicate that teachers strongly agree that possible abuse of work freedom, breakdown of work ethics, and poor supervision of teachers with mean scores ranged between 3.74 and 3.88 are constraints to work autonomy while they agree that possible low productivity and difficulty in meeting targets with mean scores ranged between 2.92 and 3.02 are constraints to work autonomy. The cluster man score of 3.49 shows that on the whole, secondary school teachers agree that all the items listed are constrains to work autonomy in public secondary schools in Imo State. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range indicating that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of work autonomy on teachers' job effectiveness.
Table 3: summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings on the significant influence of work autonomy on teachers' job effectiveness

Variables X	SD	df	$\overline{t}$-value	P-value	Decision
work autonomy	2.83	.85			
2,421.26	.00	Significant			
teachers' job effectiveness	3.48	.77			

Table 3 shows that the t - value of .26 with p-value of .00 is less than the level of significance of.05 (.00< .05) at 2,421 degree of freedom. This means that there is a significant influence of work autonomy on teachers' job effectiveness. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There are no constraints to teachers' work autonomy in the school system.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings on the constraints to teachers work autonomy

Variables X	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Constraints to work autonomy	3.00.61				
2,421.14	.03	Significant			
Teachers' work autonomy	2.91.72				

Analysis of data in shows that the t - value of .14with p-value of .03 is less than the level of significance of.05 (.03< .05) at 2,421 degree of freedom. This means that there are constraints to teachers' work autonomy in the school system. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 shows a high degree of positive responses that affirm that there is a significant relationship between work autonomy and teachers' effectiveness. The respondents agreed that all the items point to the fact that work autonomy can enhance or make for teachers' job effectiveness. As Juin (2012) pointed out, the most creative period of a teacher's is when he is allowed to exercise some level of intuitivity. That is the moment teachers become creative and ingenous. As indicated earlier in the study, it makes teachers innovative and gives them a sense of engagement. By contributing to the technology of work, teachers by extension are involved in decision making and they come to know how to make things work.

Table 2 tries to show that there are constraints against work autonomy in the work place. These constraints are in the form of fears that it could lead to abuse of freedom, low productivity, difficulty in meeting targets and poor supervision of teachers' work, among others. However, as Nagai (2013) puts it, workers become committed and dedicated to work when organization has shown committed in their relationship with workers. The school setting is not different. Ajayi (2015) in agreement with this submission stated that abuse of the freedom provided by job autonomy could have been resulted from management abuse of workers' welfare and other conditions of service critical to their job commitment and job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The gains desirable from work autonomy cannot be over emphasized. It is of double fold benefit, that is, it is beneficial to the worker and it is beneficial to the organization or school. One thing however is certain and that is, management should supervise and monitor the use of the

freedom at work with a view to curbing excesses when it is dictated.

Recommendations

In view of the above, it is hereby recommended that,

1. Workers should be supervised or monitored in their use of the freedom in the work place.
2. Targets should be set for workers to avoid low productivity.
3. Discipline should be maintained in the workplace to avoid a breakdown of work ethics.

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