

Psychological Ownership, Hope, Resilience and Employee Work Engagement among Teachers in Selected Mission Schools

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Abstract

Since the quality of education in Nigeria has continued to progressively decline in standard, there has been a sustained public outcry and suggestions on the possible ways to save the Nigerian education from total collapse. As a result many schools, especially the post primary schools (public) have undergone transformation. Teachers' level of engagement has been suggested as one of the factors that may be responsible for this decline in education in Nigeria. The current study adopted the cross-sectional survey design to explore whether psychological ownership, hope and resilience could predict work engagement behaviour among teachers in selected mission schools. Contrary to speculation and in conflict with previous studies, results showed that psychological ownership did not predict work engagement behavior among teachers whereas hope and resilience significantly predicted work engagement behaviour among the teachers. The study's implications point to the fact that since psychological ownership is seen as a vital organisational behavior, managers should endeavor to build a culture that will promote such ownership for the good of the organisation.

Keywords: Psychological ownership, hope, resilience, employee work engagement

1. Introduction

To date few studies (e.g., Avey, Avolio, Crossley, & Luthans 2009; Youssef & Luthans 2007) have examined the impact of psychological ownership, hope and resilience as positive job behaviours, but extensive review of literature suggests that none has investigated the relationship between these variables and work engagement among Nigerian teachers, especially in schools that have undergone a significant administrative change. Teaching and education are intertwined and are often perceived as the fundamental of any meaningful and sustainable development. In fact, education plays different roles to different people and countries. For the developed countries, education may be perceived as a tool for economic, social and technological consolidation while for the developing nations, it may be a powerful tool for poverty reduction and transforming the misfortune of under development. It has been emphasized that a rapid development is a function of a well-organized and managed educational system (Famade 2012). Conversely, a badly managed and disorganized system of education portends grave consequences on the developmental efforts of any nation such as Nigeria.

Despite that education has been acclaimed to be the bedrock of every form of development, its' funding in Nigeria has been inadequate (Arong & Ogbadu 2010). There has been infrastructure deficit in virtually all the public schools. The issue of teacher motivation has vanished, their status waned and teaching has become an endangered profession (Famade 2012). Teachers' salaries as poor as it is, are not paid as and when due; and there is no incentive whatsoever that could spur them into action. This situation seems to have impeded the teachers' level of work engagement in public schools and has perhaps consequently led the educational sector to be on a continuous downward trend. As a result of this remarkable drop in work engagement level of teachers in public schools, the educational system has virtually become dysfunctional and there seems to be an erosion of ethics and moral decadence. All these challenges have resulted in growing illiteracy levels. However, there has been a sustained demand for significant reform programmes to save the system from total collapse and after the failure of some policies to salvage the system; it was thought that handing over schools especially post primary schools to the Missionaries could be a remedy for this break down. The return of many public schools to the Missionaries therefore has become the latest strategy to rid the system of moral decadence and to revamp the education system. This seems to have ushered in a new spirit, hope, optimism and desire on the part of the teachers to be more focused and engaged in their work because it is expected that such transformation will improve administration and well-being of teachers unlike what is obtainable in public schools. The aim of the current study was to explore whether psychological ownership, hope and resilience will predict employee work engagement behaviour among teachers in selected mission schools.

The concept of employee work engagement describes the extent to which workers are involved with, committed to, and passionate about their work. Kahn (1990) was the first scholar to define "personal

engagement” as the “...harnessing of organisation member’s selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances” (p. 694). Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) further defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that features vigor, dedication and absorption. According to them, vigor refers to high level of energy activation and mental resilience while working, the willingness to put in effort in one’s work, and perseverance in the face of difficulty; dedication refers to a sense of significance, being strongly involved, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge; while absorption refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in one’s work, whereby time tickles away quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Schaufeli, *et al.* 2002).

Work engagement has been linked to various performance indicator variables such as employees’ higher rating on in-role and extra role performances (Gorgievski, Bakker, & Schaufeli 2010), work performance (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli 2008), job satisfaction and intention to quit (Burke & El-kot, 2010), higher job resources (Bakker & Bal 2010), transformational leadership (Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa 2009), organisational justice (Inoue, Kawakami, Ishizaki, Shimazu, Tabata, Akiyama, *et al.* 2009), work interference with family (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino 2009), psychological contract fulfillment (Parcefall & Hakanen 2010) and self-efficacy (Roux & Dannhauser 2010).

1.1 Psychological ownership and work engagement

Existing literature suggest that recently work engagement has emerged as one of the hottest constructs among organisational researchers and thus has been linked with numerous antecedents and consequences. One variable that may drive work engagement, but which has received little empirical attention from researchers is psychological ownership. Creating a feeling of ownership for the organisation has increasingly received scholarly attention (Avey, *et al.* 2009; Brown, Lawrence, & Robinsons 2005; Pierce, Jussila, & Cummings 2009; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks 2001; Van Dyne & Pierce 2004). These feelings of ownership which is psychological have been conceptually defined as a certain state of mind “in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of it is “theirs” (i.e., ‘It is MINE!’)” (Pierce *et al.* 2001, p. 299). Notable indicators are a strong feeling of possessiveness for and a high degree of psychological attachment to the target. Such feelings are believed to cause individuals to protect their object, to take care of it, to nourish it and to seek more information about it (Pierce, *et al.* 2003). In addition, several studies have empirically supported the existence of employees’ ownership feelings in the absence of formal or legal ownership rights (Mayhew, Ashkanasy, Bramble, & Gardner 2007). In organisational contexts, it is often argued that psychological ownership can be an important predictor of employee attitudes, behaviours and performance (Pierce, *et al.* 2003, Van Dyne & Pierce 2004).

Researchers have described psychological ownership as a potentially important predictor of employee attitudes and behaviours (Mayhew *et al.* 2007; Dirks, Cummings, & Pierce 1996; Pierce, Rubinfeld, & Morgan 1991; Pierce *et al.* 2001; VandeWalle, Van Dyne, & Kostova 1995). For instance, Vandewalle *et al.* (1995) found extra role behaviour of student housing residents that experience feelings of ownership. Wood (2003) demonstrated enhanced student learning and satisfaction with group work by creating a sense of ownership in the minds of students. Wagner, Parker and Christianson (2003) indicated that ownership beliefs are positively related to ownership behaviour and ownership behaviour is positively related to financial performance. Van Dyne and Pierce (2004) demonstrated positive links between psychological ownership of the organisation and organisational commitment, job satisfaction, organisation-based self-esteem, performance and organisational citizenship behaviour. In another study, Asatryan (2006) found that people who have possessed property, objects, and relationships develop strong attitudes towards the relationships built based on such feelings, which translate into achieving a long-term financial performance. It is therefore postulated that:

Hypothesis 1: Psychological ownership will significantly predict work engagement behaviour among teachers from selected mission schools.

1.1.1 Hope and work engagement

Following Seligman’s (1998) introduction of positive psychology and its offshoot that “what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention” (Peterson 2006, p.4), represents the core of positive organisational behaviour (POB). Positive psychology, and its application to the workplace as POB, is simply not to replace, but attempts to give a renewed emphasis to the importance of a positive approach. While positive psychology does not pretend to have discovered the importance of positivity to people, POB recognizes that over the years there have been many positive constructs in organisational research such as positive affectivity, procedural justice, and organisational citizenship behaviours, hope, resilience and many others.

Luthans (2002) defines POB as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (p. 59). According to Luthans and Youssef (2007), hope and resilience are among the four key psychological resource capacities that best meet the operationally defined inclusion criteria for POB, which enhances managing effectiveness and organisational performance. Extensive review of literature reveals that among these four psychological resource capacities, self-efficacy and optimism have attracted more empirical research attention. In the current paper, therefore hope and resilience were the focus and both of them specifically meet the above definition of POB.

If there is any construct that has eluded the attention of organisational researchers, it may be the hope construct. Although researchers’ interest has shifted to positive psychology since its introduction in 1998, hope has been profoundly ignored. Previously, scholars have defined hope as a unidimensional construct involving an overall perception that goals can be met (Stotland 1969). Expanding on this unidimensional model of hope, Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, Sympson, Ybasco, Borders, Babyak, & Higgins 1996; Snyder 2000) have demonstrated that hope is a multidimensional construct comprised of both an individual’s determination to set for and maintain effort toward goals and that individual’s ability to recognize alternative courses of action to attain those goals. Snyder, Irving and Anderson (1991) defined it as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal-directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (p. 287).

Although the definitions of hope may differ from various authors, there are some factors that feature in all the definitions of hope. First, there is agentic thinking, which taps thoughts aimed at initiating and sustaining movement along one’s chosen pathways toward a desired goal. Second, there is pathways thinking, which reflects the person’s capacity to conceptualize one or more avenues by which to arrive at the desired goal. In turn, hope reflects the sum of pathways and agentic thinking. With the hope to achieve certain goals, employees have the sense of agency, energy or perseverance to accomplish their goals. They would also be able to create and use alternative pathways and contingency plans to achieve their set targets and subdue obstacles in the process. Hope creates the enablement to accomplish challenging goals.

There are emerging researches that reveal the impact of hope on performance and work attitudes (Youssef & Luthans 2007) as well as organisational and unit profitability (Peterson & Luthans 2003). Hopeful people have the desire or agency to achieve goals and have the capability to develop various pathways or strategies toward goal accomplishment (Shahnawaz & Jafri 2009). However, a number of researches have linked hope with work engagement. For instance, Othman and Nasurdin (2011) found that hope and resilience are positively related to work engagement. In their diary study, Ouweneel, Le Blanc, Schaufeli and Waihe (2012) observed that the experience of positive emotions had an indirect effect on the level of vigour, dedication, and absorption through hope across days.

Emerging research supports the significance of hope to the workplace and the impact it has on performance outcomes. For example, recent empirical studies support a positive relationship between employees’ hope and performance and work attitudes (Youssef & Luthans 2007) and organisational profitability (Adams, *et al.* 2002), between entrepreneurs’ hope and their satisfaction with business ownership (Jensen & Luthans 2002), between organisational leader’s hope and the productivity of their units and the satisfaction and retention of their employees (Peterson & Luthans 2003) and between Chinese factory worker’s hope and their supervisor rated performance and merit salary (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman 2007). To date, very few studies have investigated the impact of hope on work engagement. Hope can give teachers from mission schools the agency and pathways to perceive their new image as an opportunity for strengthening their belief in a bright future and higher determination to find innovative ways to capitalize on such an opportunity such as being engaged with their work. It could therefore be adduced from the foregoing that teachers in mission schools may be hopeful due to the prevailing circumstances bedeviling public schools and it is speculated that the huge expectations of these teachers from mission schools is likely to cause them to focus more on their work. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Hope will significantly predict work engagement behaviour among teachers from selected mission schools.

1.1.2 Resilience and work engagement

Even though resilience is just emerging in the organisational behaviour literature, there has been a remarkable growth on the resilience research during the last decade, particularly within the fields of developmental psychology, family psychology, rehabilitation and clinical psychology (Othman & Nasurdin 2011). This rapid

growth may be due to the proven impact of resilience on recovery and well-being its imposing presence on pathology with a focus on protective mechanisms and positive adaptation. Resilient individuals possess a 'staunch acceptance of reality, a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful and an uncanny ability to improvise' (Coutu 2002). It has been suggested that resilient people are dogged people and can thrive and grow through setbacks and difficulties. It is construed as preservation of good functioning and outcome despite exposure to serious trauma or long-term adversity, but also as a precursor process that make successful adaptation and maintenance of competence possible (Masten, Best, & Garmezy 1990). Resilience is not merely passive adaptation to a stressor, a life threatening challenge or a traumatic incidence (Bonanno, 2004); it typically refers to the tendency to recharge or spring back from adversity, failure or even seeming overwhelming positive changes such as increased responsibility (Luthans, 2002).

Luthans and Youssef (2007) proposed that resiliency in workplace also embraces a proactive dimension that promotes discrepancy creation even in the absence of external threats. In that case resiliency in workplace allows employees to view adversities and setbacks as opportunities for learning, growth, and development. It also enables employees to come up with creative and flexible adaptive means, guided by ethical values and strong belief systems, toward the achievement of personally and organisationally meaningful goals. This type of resilience has been supported as a predictor of work-related outcomes (Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li 2005; Waite & Richardson 2004). Bakker, Gieveland and Van Rijswijk (2006) examined the impact of resilience on work engagement. The results of their study among female school principals found that principals with high personal resources which include resilience, self-efficacy and optimism scored highest in work engagement.

Also resilience has been linked to workplace performance (Luthans, *et al.* 2005; Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester 2006; Waite & Richardson 2004). For instance, Luthans, Lebsack and Lebsack (2008) argued that employees who possess personal resources, such as optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience and active coping style will assist them to control their work environment and to achieve career success. Similarly therefore, it is postulated that:

Hypothesis 3: Resilience will significantly predict work engagement behaviour among teachers from selected mission schools.

2. Method

2.1 Participants and procedure

The multistage stage sampling technique was adopted to select three post primary schools in Nsukka metropolis, Enugu, South-East Nigeria and 179 teachers that participated in the study. These schools are those that have been returned to the Missionaries for administrative effectiveness. Both genders were represented in the study. The participants included 122 (68.16%) female teachers. Their ages ranged from 28 to 53 years, with a mean age of 37.48 years. Their highest and lowest academic qualifications are Master's degree and Ordinary National Diploma (OND) respectively. They are predominantly Igbos and were all volunteers. A total of 211 copies of the scales each were administered together to the respondents in their workplaces. Out of this number, only 199 were completed and returned representing 94.3% response rate. Out of this number also, 20 (10.1%) copies were discarded due to improper completion and 179 (89.9%) only were considered for analysis.

3. Instruments

3.1 Psychological ownership

Psychological Ownership Scale (POS) developed by Dyne and Pierce (2004) was used to measure psychological ownership. It is a 7-item instrument with a 5-point Likert type response format that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Sample items of the instrument include: "This is my organisation" and "I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this organisation". Cronbach alpha of the instrument for the present study is .72

3.1.1 Hope

Hope was measured with Snyder *et al.*'s (1996) 6-item scale where respondents rate how accurately each item describes them generally on an 8-point Likert scale (1 = definitely false, 2 = mostly false, 3 = somewhat false, 4 = slightly false, 5 = slightly true, 6 = somewhat true, 7 = mostly true, 8 = definitely true). Examples of scale items include "At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my goals" (agency) and "If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of many ways to get out of it" (pathways). Hope score reflects the sum of the agency and pathways items. The scales Cronbach's alpha in the present study is 0.73.

3.1.2 Resilience

The Connor and Davidson's (CD-RISC) (2003) Scale was used to measure resilience. CD-RISC is a brief, self-rated measure of resilience that has sound psychometric properties (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The CD-RISC contains 25 items, all of which carry a 5-point range of responses, as follows: not true at all (0), rarely true (1),

sometimes true (2), often true (3), and true nearly all of the time (4). Sample items of the Scale include: “Able to adapt to change”, “When things look hopeless, I don’t give up”. The scale is rated based on how the subject has felt over the past month. The total score ranges from 0–100, with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. The scale’s Cronbach’s alpha for the present study is 0.81.

3.1.3 Work engagement

The short version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli, *et al.* (2002) was used to measure work engagement. It is a self-report scale with a 5-point Likert type response format ranging from 0) = never to 4) = always. It captures the three dimensions of work engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption. Sample items for the 3 dimensions include: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”, “I am enthusiastic about my job”, “I feel happy when I am working intensely” respectively. Cronbach’s alpha of 0.83 was obtained for the instrument in the present study.

4. Control variables

There are variables that have proven relationship with work engagement and some of such variables are entered as control variables in the present study. For example, researchers have shown that gender predicts behavioural engagement (Fan & Williams 2010; Green, Rhodes, Hirsch, Suárez-Orozco, Camic 2008). Age, marital status, job tenure, organisational tenure, education and work experience predict work and behavioural engagement (Adekola 2011; Otwori & Xiangping 2010). It is therefore reasoned that controlling for these variables in the current analyses would help understand the incremental effects of other predictor variables after determining the contributions of the control variables.

5. Results

Table 1: Means, standard deviation and inter-correlation among study variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Engagement	24.98	2.63	-							
2. Age	37.48	5.65	-.06	-						
3. Gender	1.42	.49	-.15*	.06	-					
4. Marital status	1.49	.50	.17*	-.07	-.29**	-				
5. Education	1.41	.49	.20*	-.02	.13*	.18*	-			
6. Psy. Ownership	23.82	3.19	.09	-.16*	.14*	.07	-.05	-		
7. Hope	32.72	3.66	.26**	.12	-.20*	-.07	.07	-.10	-	
8. Resilience	61.24	7.94	.38**	.10	.03	.07	-.11	.07	.13*	-

Key: * = $p < .01$; ** = $p < .001$

Note: A total of 179 teachers completed the survey. Gender (1 = Male, 2 = Female), Marital status (1 = Married, 2 = Single), Education (1 = high, 2 = Low). Psychological ownership, hope and resilience were coded, such that higher scores indicated higher psychological ownership, hope and resilience

Table 2: Hierarchical regression analysis results

Variables	1	2	3	4
Age	-.04	-.02	-.05	-.08
Gender	-.15*	-.18	-.11	-.15*
Marital status	.09	.07	.11	.05
Education	.20**	.21**	.18**	.24**
Psych. Ownership		.12	.13	.10
Hope			.25**	.18**
Resilience				.38***
R ² (adjusted)	.06	.07	.12	.26
ΔR ²	.08	.01	.06	.14
ΔF	3.72	2.57	11.19	32.82
F Value	3.72	3.52	4.97	9.74

Note: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

The results of the analyses showed that among the control variables studied, it was only gender and education that were significant; gender ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$), education ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$). The control variables studied accounted for 5.8% of the variance in work engagement. The results equally showed that although psychological ownership contributed 6.6% of the variance in employee work engagement, it is not statistically significant as the regression equation model indicated. The results equally revealed that hope is statistically related with employee work engagement behaviour. In the regression equation model, hope was statistically significant on work engagement ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$). Hope accounted for 11.8% of the variance in work engagement behaviour above and beyond the control variables and psychological ownership.

Furthermore, the results of the analyses revealed that resilience was significantly related with employee work engagement behaviour. It accounted for 25.6% of the variance in employee work engagement behaviour above and beyond that of the control variables, psychological ownership and hope. In the regression equation model, resilience was equally statistically significant on employee work engagement ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$).

6. Discussion

This study examined the relationships between psychological ownership, hope, resilience and employee work engagement behaviour among teachers in selected mission schools. Contrary to the first hypothesis and in disagreement with most previous studies, psychological ownership is not related with employee work engagement behaviour. The reason for this result might be due to long years of maltreatment of teachers in the course of discharging their duties such as non-payment of salaries and in fact absence of any form of incentives has eaten deep into their emotion and have consequently created distrust and to disengage from their work. This result is inconsistent with some earlier studies (Van Dyne & Pierce 2004; Asatryan 2006; Wood 2003) which found that psychological ownership is significantly related to work attitudes and behaviours, financial performance and satisfaction which are consequences of engagement.

The results of the present study equally showed that hope is significantly related with employee work engagement behaviour. This result could be explained that handing over of colleges to the Missionaries ushers in a new chapter and due to the fact that history recorded that Nigerian schools seem to have fared better when they were administered by these missionaries returning these schools to them gives hope and enthusiasm to these teachers that these schools may once again be revamped. This result is consistent with the results obtained by Youssef and Luthans (2007), Adams *et al.* (2002), Othman and Nasurdin (2011) which found that hope is positively related to employee work engagement behaviour.

The present study equally revealed that resilience is significantly related to employee work engagement. Resilience has been referred to as the tendency to recharge or spring back from adversity and failure. It has been said to be a precursor process that make successful adaptation and maintenance of competence possible. Therefore, judging from the foregoing description of resilience, it is not surprising that it is significantly related to work engagement in the current study. Despite the negative feelings teachers have developed under government administered schools, resilient ones still have the resources to surge on. This result is therefore consistent with the study of Luthans *et al.* (2006) which found that resilience is a predictor of work-related

outcomes such as work performance. The present result is also in agreement with Bakker *et al.* (2006) which found that high personal resources which include resilience scored highest in work engagement.

6.1 Implications of the Study

The results of the current study have some implications. For example, since psychological ownership did not relate to work engagement, it presupposes that psychological ownership seems to be diminished in organisations that are not very supportive to their employees. Employees in such organisations may develop apathy rather than feelings of ownership which will likely hamper the success of the organisation. Reverse might be the case when organisations build an atmosphere that encourages and/or promotes feelings of ownership. Such ownership will likely have its attendant positive influence on the organisation. And because previous studies have highlighted the importance of psychological ownership to the overall organisational success, organisations should endeavor to treat workers in such a way that will make them feel as co-owners of the business which will automatically translate to improved performance to the credit of the organisation. Also, since great expectations drive individuals into maintaining positive attitudes about work, there is the need for management to always fashion out or design programmes that is capable of assisting workers to see the organisation in a positive light. This is because when employees are hopeful they will be more likely engage in positive job behaviours and can even go the extra mile to help colleagues in work related issues. Resilience does not allow individuals to exceed elastic limits but enables them to bounce back and continue to function. Thus, resilience is a virtue which managers of organisation should encourage their employees to pursue and acquire for the benefit of both the employees and the organisation.

6.1.1 Limitations of the Study

Despite what this study claims to have achieved, it has a number of limitations that may threaten a concrete generalizability of the results. First among the limitations is that study is a cross-sectional design and like any other study of this kind, the issue of causality was not established. To establish causality, experimental or longitudinal study needed to be conducted. Besides the limitation associated with the design of the present study, the problem associated with common method bias may also be a limitation in the study. Data were collected through a self-report questionnaire and the participants may have responded in a socially desirable way. It would have been necessary to collect data from multiple sources such as supervisor and co-worker ratings of engagement. This has the potential to adjust any bogus scores that might have arisen from biases.

Conclusively therefore, since it has been observed that teachers, especially in public schools are no longer respected and that teaching has become endangered profession; it could be advocated in line with the findings of the current study that if public schools are handed over to the Missionaries there is every likelihood that they will develop the capacity to cause teachers to be more engaged in their work, which may translate to job improved performance. This current findings implies that many schools be taken over by the missionaries to ensure optimum and a wider teacher attention and commitment for the ultimate turn around we all desire for the Nigerian schools.

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