



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF BURNOUT AMONG PRINCIPALS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of burnout among principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. Six research questions guided the study, while six hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The population comprised 275 principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State, from which a sample of 165 principals was selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Principals' Emotional Intelligence Scale (PEIS) and the Principals' Burnout Scale (PBS). The instruments were validated by experts, while the reliability coefficients, determined using Cronbach's Alpha, were 0.908 for PEIS and 0.810 for PBS. Data were analysed using simple regression analysis, and hypotheses were tested using the p-value at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence and its dimensions significantly predicted burnout among principals, with self-regulation and empathy emerging as the strongest predictors. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the Anambra State Ministry of Education and the Post Primary Schools Service Commission should organise regular emotional intelligence development and stress management programmes to enhance principals' emotional competencies and reduce burnout.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, burnout, principals, secondary schools.

Introduction

School principals occupy a strategic position in the administration of secondary schools. They are responsible for coordinating teaching and learning, implementing educational policies, supervising staff, managing school resources, and maintaining effective relationships with parents,

communities, and education authorities. The successful execution of these responsibilities is fundamental to achieving educational objectives and improving school effectiveness. In Nigeria, particularly in public secondary schools, principals perform these responsibilities under increasingly demanding conditions that expose them to considerable occupational pressure (Nwagwu, 2017; Alimi & Akinfolarin, 2020).

The growing complexity of school administration has increased concern about the psychological well-being of principals. Besides providing instructional leadership, principals are expected to implement government reforms, manage inadequate resources, supervise teachers, respond to students' needs, and satisfy the expectations of parents and host communities. The combination of these responsibilities often results in prolonged work-related stress which may adversely affect their effectiveness and well-being (Angwaomaodoko, 2025; Nzoputa & Ikeh, 2025). Consequently, many principals may experience burnout, a psychological condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged occupational stress (Ozoemena & Agbaje, 2021). Burnout may reduce principals' commitment to administrative responsibilities, weaken interpersonal relationships within the school, and ultimately affect the quality of educational service delivery (Adeyemo & Ololube, 2019).

In recent years, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of personal psychological resources in helping employees cope with workplace demands. One such resource is emotional intelligence, which refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and appropriately utilize emotions in oneself and in relationships with others (Ololube, 2017; Olatunji, Idemudia, & Owoseni, 2021). Principals with high emotional intelligence are more likely to regulate their emotions effectively, manage conflicts constructively, motivate teachers, build positive interpersonal relationships, and maintain a supportive school climate. Such competencies are expected to reduce the likelihood of burnout and enhance professional effectiveness.

Emotional intelligence comprises dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation, and social skills, all of which have been linked to positive occupational outcomes. Self-awareness enables individuals to recognize their emotional states and respond appropriately to stressful situations (Opeyemi, 2018; Olatunji et al., 2021). Self-regulation helps principals control emotional reactions during challenging situations (Agbo & Chukwuma, 2019; Anyadike & Eze, 2020). Empathy promotes supportive relationships with teachers and students (Ugwu, Enwereuzor, & Ugwu, 2023; Okpara, 2024), while motivation and social skills strengthen resilience, collaboration, communication, and conflict resolution (Adeyemi & Olayinka, 2022; Olatunji et al., 2021).

Although several studies have associated emotional intelligence with improved psychological well-being and occupational adjustment, evidence regarding its predictive influence on burnout among school principals remains limited, particularly within the Nigerian educational

context. Most existing studies have focused on teachers or employees in other occupational settings, leaving limited empirical evidence on principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State. This gap in the literature makes it difficult to understand whether emotional intelligence serves as a significant predictor of burnout among school leaders in the study area.

It is against this background of increasing occupational demands on school principals, the growing concern over burnout, and the limited empirical evidence on the predictive role of emotional intelligence among principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State that this study was undertaken.

Statement of the Problem

Principals of public secondary schools occupy a strategic position in ensuring effective school administration and leadership. However, observations in public secondary schools in Anambra State suggest that many principals experience persistent emotional and work-related pressures arising from their administrative responsibilities. These pressures appear to manifest in emotional exhaustion, declining enthusiasm for leadership duties, reduced effectiveness in managing staff and students, and difficulty coping with the demands of school administration. This situation raises concern about the growing incidence of burnout among principals and its possible effect on school effectiveness.

One therefore wonders what may be responsible for the differences in the level of burnout experienced by school principals. Could it be that some principals lack the emotional intelligence required to recognise and regulate their emotions, manage interpersonal relationships, and cope effectively with occupational stress? Although studies have examined emotional intelligence and burnout in different occupational settings, limited empirical evidence exists on the predictive role of emotional intelligence among principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State. It is against this background that this study investigated emotional intelligence as a predictor of burnout among principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study examined emotional intelligence and workload as predictors of burnout among principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined:

1. The predictive value of self-awareness on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
2. The predictive value of self-regulation on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

3. The predictive value of motivation on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
4. The predictive value of empathy on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
5. The predictive value of social skills on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
6. The predictive value of emotional intelligence on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the predictive value of self-awareness on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?
2. What is the predictive value of self-regulation on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?
3. What is the predictive value of motivation on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?
4. What is the predictive value of empathy on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?
5. What is the predictive value of social skills on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?
6. What is the predictive value of emotional intelligence on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. Self-awareness has no significant predictive value on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
2. Self-regulation has no significant predictive value on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
3. Motivation has no significant predictive value on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
4. Empathy has no significant predictive value on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.
5. Social skills have no significant predictive value on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

6. Emotional intelligence has no significant predictive value on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State

Methods

This study adopted a correlational survey research design to examine emotional intelligence as a predictor of burnout among principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. Six research questions and six null hypotheses guided the study. The study was conducted in the six education zones of Anambra State, namely Aguata, Awka, Nnewi, Ogidi, Onitsha, and Otuocha. The population comprised 275 principals of public secondary schools in the state, from which a sample of 165 principals was selected using the simple random sampling technique. Two adapted standardized instruments were used for data collection: The Principals' Emotional Intelligence Scale (PEIS), adapted from the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), and the Principals' Burnout Scale (PBS), adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The PEIS contained 33 items measuring self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, while the PBS comprised 22 items measuring emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Both instruments were structured on a four-point rating scale. The instruments were validated by three experts, while their internal consistency was established through a pilot study using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The overall reliability coefficients obtained were 0.908 for the PEIS and 0.810 for the PBS, indicating satisfactory reliability. Simple regression analysis was used to answer the six research questions and determine the predictive value of emotional intelligence on burnout, while the p-value was used to test the six null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the predictive value of self-awareness and burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Table 1. Summary Table of Simple Regression Analysis with Self Awareness as Predictor of Burnout Among Public Secondary School Principals in Anambra State

	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	B	SE B	β
Constant				23.55	3.66	
Self-Awareness	.68	.46	.46	2.01	.17	.68

The summary of the simple regression analysis shown in the above table indicates that self-awareness is a strong predictor of burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State. This is shown by the regression coefficient ($R = .68$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .46$) which indicates that self-awareness explained 46% of the variance in burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

Research Question 2: What is the predictive value of self-regulation on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Table 2. Summary Table of Simple Regression Analysis with Self-regulation as Predictor of Burnout Among Public Secondary School Principals in Anambra State

	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	B	SE B	β
Constant				16.57	2.41	
	.85	.72	.72			.85
Self-regulation				2.71	.133	

The summary of the simple regression analysis shown in Table 2 indicates that self-regulation is a very strong predictor of burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State. This is shown by the regression coefficient ($R = .85$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .72$) which indicates that self-regulation application explained 72% of the variance in burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

Research Question 3: What is the predictive value of motivation on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Table 3. Summary Table of Simple Regression Analysis with Motivation as Predictor of Burnout Among Public Secondary School Principals in Anambra State

	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	B	SE B	β
Constant				33.22	3.33	
	.62	.38	.38			.62
Motivation				1.57	.16	

Table 3 indicates that motivation is a strong predictor of burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State. This is shown by the regression coefficient ($R = .62$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .38$) which indicates that motivation explained 38% of the variance in burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

Research Question 4: What is the predictive value of empathy on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Table 4. Summary Table of Simple Regression Analysis with Empathy as Predictor of Burnout Among Public Secondary School Principals in Anambra State

	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	B	SE B	β
Constant				13.14	2.90	
	.83	.68	.68			.83
Empathy				2.19	.12	

The summary of the simple regression analysis shown in Table 4 indicates that empathy is a very strong predictor of burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State. This is shown by the regression coefficient ($R = .83$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .68$) which indicates that empathy explained 68% of the variance in burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

Research Question 5: What is the predictive value of social skills on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Table 5. Summary Table of Simple Regression Analysis with Social Skill as Predictor of Burnout Among Public Secondary School Principals in Anambra State

	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	B	SE B	β
Constant				22.69	3.34	
	.72	.52	.52			.72
Social Skill				2.83	.22	

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 5 indicates that social skills is a strong predictor of burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State. This is shown by the regression coefficient ($R = .72$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .52$) which indicates that social skills explained 52% of the variance in burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State.

Research Question 6: What is the predictive value of emotional intelligence on burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State?

Table 6. Summary Table of Simple Regression Analysis with Emotional Intelligence as Predictor of Burnout Among Public Secondary School Principals in Anambra State

	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	B	SE B	β
Constant				4.48	2.63	
	.88	.77	.77			.88
Emotional Intelligence				.62	.02	

The summary of the simple regression analysis shown in the above table indicates that emotional intelligence is a very strong predictor of burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State. This is shown by the regression coefficient ($R = .88$) and the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .77$) which indicates that emotional intelligence explained 77% of the variance in burnout among public secondary school principals in Anambra State

Discussion

The findings revealed that self-awareness is a strong and significant predictor of burnout ($R = 0.68$; $R^2 = 0.46$; $F = 132.58$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that 46% of the variance in burnout is explained by self-awareness. This finding suggests that principals who possess greater awareness

of their emotions are better able to recognise emotional triggers, respond appropriately to stressful situations, and adopt effective coping strategies, thereby reducing their susceptibility to burnout. The finding supports the position of Opeyemi (2018) and Olatunji et al. (2021), who maintained that self-awareness enables individuals to understand their emotional states and regulate their responses to workplace demands. The result further reinforces the view that emotional self-awareness is an important personal resource for maintaining psychological well-being among school leaders.

The study also found that self-regulation is a very strong and significant predictor of burnout ($R = 0.85$; $R^2 = 0.72$; $F = 415.02$; $p < 0.05$), explaining 72% of the variance in burnout. This implies that principals who effectively regulate their emotions are more capable of controlling negative emotional reactions during challenging situations, thereby reducing emotional exhaustion and other manifestations of burnout. This finding agrees with Agbo and Chukwuma (2019) and Anyadike and Eze (2020), who reported that emotional regulation enables educational leaders to remain composed, make rational decisions, and cope effectively with workplace stress. The finding further supports the argument that self-regulation is a critical component of emotional intelligence that promotes resilience in demanding work environments.

The findings further revealed that motivation is a strong and significant predictor of burnout ($R = 0.62$; $R^2 = 0.38$; $F = 95.81$; $p < 0.05$), accounting for 38% of the variance in burnout. This indicates that principals who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to remain committed to their professional responsibilities despite workplace challenges, thereby reducing the likelihood of burnout. This finding is consistent with Opeyemi (2018) and Adeyemi and Olayinka (2022), who observed that motivated school leaders demonstrate greater perseverance, resilience, and commitment to organisational goals even under stressful conditions.

The study equally established that empathy is a very strong and significant predictor of burnout ($R = 0.83$; $R^2 = 0.68$; $F = 328.17$; $p < 0.05$), explaining 68% of the variance in burnout. This suggests that principals who demonstrate empathy are more likely to build supportive relationships with teachers, students, and other stakeholders, thereby reducing interpersonal conflicts and emotional strain associated with school administration. The finding corroborates Ugwu, Enwereuzor, and Ugwu (2023) and Okpara (2024), who reported that empathy strengthens interpersonal relationships, promotes supportive work environments, and contributes positively to employees' psychological well-being.

Similarly, social skills emerged as a strong and significant predictor of burnout ($R = 0.72$; $R^2 = 0.52$; $F = 166.11$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that social skills explained 52% of the variance in burnout among principals. Effective communication, collaboration, relationship management, and conflict resolution associated with strong social skills may reduce occupational stress and improve organisational climate. This finding supports Olatunji et al. (2021), who argued that social competence enhances workplace relationships and facilitates effective leadership, and Agbo and

Chukwuma (2019), who emphasized that interpersonal competence enables educational leaders to manage workplace challenges more effectively.

Finally, the findings revealed that emotional intelligence is a very strong and significant predictor of burnout among principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State ($R = 0.88$; $R^2 = 0.77$; $F = 522.78$; $p < 0.05$). This indicates that emotional intelligence explained 77% of the variance in burnout, suggesting that principals with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to experience burnout. The finding lends support to Ololube (2017), who identified emotional intelligence as an important psychological resource for improving occupational adjustment and professional effectiveness. It also agrees with Olatunji et. al. (2021), who reported that emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to recognise, regulate, and appropriately utilise emotions to cope with workplace demands. The finding further validates the assertion that emotional intelligence enhances resilience, promotes positive interpersonal relationships, and protects school leaders from the adverse effects of prolonged occupational stress.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that emotional intelligence is a very strong and statistically significant predictor of burnout among principals of public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the dimensions of emotional intelligence including, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, were all found to significantly predict burnout, although with varying degrees of predictive strength. These findings demonstrate that principals with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to cope with the emotional and interpersonal demands of school leadership, thereby reducing their susceptibility to burnout. The study therefore concludes that strengthening emotional intelligence competencies among school principals is essential for promoting psychological well-being, enhancing leadership effectiveness and sustaining quality administration in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Recommendations

1. Government and educational stakeholders should organize regular training and workshops on emotional intelligence for school principals to enhance their ability to manage stress and interpersonal relationships effectively
2. School authorities should adopt stress management and wellness programmes aimed at promoting principals' mental health and reducing burnout.
3. Principals should be encouraged to develop personal coping strategies such as time management, delegation, and emotional regulation techniques.
4. Educational planners should incorporate emotional intelligence competencies into criteria for the selection and promotion of school leaders.

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