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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND WORK ENGAGEMENT AMONG NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY LECTURERS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL

Leonard N. Ezeh,

Ifenna D. Ezeanya

Ekeleme Ugochukwu Ukazu

Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Corresponding author: Ifenna D. Ezeanya

E-mail: id.ezeanya@unizik.edu.ng Mobile: +2348037937632

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement among Lecturers at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and the moderating role of psychological capital in this relationship. A total of 273 academic staff conveniently sampled from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, participated in the study. Correlational design and multiple regression statistics were adopted for the study. Work Engagement Scale, Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Psychological Capital Questionnaire were individually administered to the respondents. The findings showed that a significant positive relationship exist between emotional intelligence and work engagement suggesting that lecturers with higher levels of emotional intelligence tended to exhibit greater dedication, vigor, and absorption in their work. Also psychological capital had a significant relationship with work engagement and moderated relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. It was recommended that universities should prioritize creating a conducive work environment that supports academic staff through provision of adequate physical resources, ensuring fair workload distribution, and promoting a positive organizational culture.

Keywords: *Academic staff, Emotional intelligence, Psychological capital, Work engagement*

Introduction

The nature of work environment that exist in tertiary institutions may promote or hinder drive for engaged workforce, which can affect productivity. Ardo et al. (2020) noted that poor work environment like poor employee welfare package, as well as poor funding affects the quality of work engagement leading to poor quality academic input by workers. In Nigeria, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) over the years has embarked on strike in order to address challenges related to welfare and working conditions of its members. Despite these strikes, lecturers in Nigeria are yet to get their desired welfare package which may pose a serious threat to level of their engagement. Ngwane and Dachapalli (2022) opined that academics see their work engagements beyond job, as they embrace passion in their discharge of duties, despite disregard of their welfare and working conditions. In essence, engagement in work is a product of internal drive, notwithstanding other external elements capable of promoting engagement (Ali et al., 2021).

Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling work-related state of vigour, dedication, and absorption (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016, Garg et al., 2021, Schaufeli et al. 2006). Vigour is defined in line with exerting much energy in work activities both in good and odd work periods. Dedication is the proud feeling associated with engaging in work, as well as perception of importance and challenging aspect of one's job, which makes work inspiring and enthusiastic (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Absorption highlights high levels of commitment and devotions at work, rooted in human cognition (Demerouti et al., 2015), and these characteristics have effect on the employee and organization in their presence and absence. This simply means that engagement goes beyond just fulfilling work activities; it explores how well the individual fulfils it, and how immersed the individual is as it pertains to discharging work activities.

Abdullahi et al. (2021) observed that there is much motivation for employees with higher work engagement to be more effortful in their discharge of their duties, through connecting psychologically with their work, in order to yield more positive work outcome. This is done, through being aware and placing importance on their work responsibilities; thus, providing a mental and physical platform, through which they succeed in efficient service delivery (Luu, 2019). As such, engaged employees become active, show full concentration, and are committed in fulfilling their work demands (Demerouti et al., 2015). However, Allam (2017) posited that poorly engaged employees in their works are rather lazy, and give no room for creativity, which affects organizational growth, in ways related to low performance, low productivity, and poor customer service (Mone et al., 2011). Engaged lecturers demonstrate high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and immersion in their academic duties, which in turn enhances teaching quality, research output, and overall institutional performance (George et al., 2022b). In Nigerian universities, including Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, concerns have been raised about declining levels of staff engagement due to challenges such as inadequate resources, role overload, industrial disputes, and emotional exhaustion. Seeking how to mitigate these challenges motivated the researchers to consider emotional intelligence as psychological factors that can foster sustained engagement among lecturers.

Emotional intelligence is the psychological capacity of an individual to understand and interpret emotions, express emotions, and effectively manage information requiring emotional reactions (Mayer et al., 2016, Meisler (2014). Scholars have viewed emotional intelligence as an important factor for employees and organizations, through their impact on organizational productivity (Miao et al., 2020, Navas & Vijayakumar, 2018, Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Managers and employees benefit well from incidence of high emotional intelligence (Drigas & Papousti, 2019). Relating to this, management of emotions results in high emotional intelligence, which foster positive emotions and creativity (Langley, 2018), job satisfaction, and good work relationship (Bakker et al., 2012). Backing this, Kin and Qu (2019) stated that individuals with good emotional intelligence are able to deal with challenging work situations; thus, they are able to engage in positive work behaviours. More so, these individuals show less frustration with challenging situations, as they possess high emotional control, and good social relations, which

helps them take charge when faced with frustrating situations (Cohen & Abdallah, 2015, Tensay & Singh, 2020). In addition, high emotional intelligence fosters self-efficacy and commitment (Hameli & Ordun, 2022), as well as work engagement (Alwali & Alwalu, 2022). Positive emotions influence emotional intelligence, which then increases work productivity, work efficiency, motivation and commitment (Desti & Shanthi, 2015, Jouany & Makipaa, 2020), which are all related to components and outcomes of work engagement. From the literature, Yan et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Similarly, George et al. (2022a) showed a positive effect of emotional intelligence on work engagement among civil servants. Lestari and Sawitri (2017) also found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement among teachers.

In spite of positive association between emotional intelligence and work engagement, it may not fully explain variation among lecturers. This has led the researchers to consider psychological capital as an important personal resources that may affect the relationship. Psychological capital is a collection of four healthy psychological states (i.e. self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience) that enhance well-being and performance (Chikezie et al., 2013, Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Self-efficacy refers to a sense of confidence in one's ability to successfully follow a path forward to accomplish goals. Optimism refers to a way of thinking about life that tends to attribute positive events to you or your team's own skills and abilities, while attributing negative events to temporary, external circumstances. Hope is the ability to see a potential path forward to a better future. It involves having goals and the willpower to achieve them. Resilience is one's ability to return to baseline, or even come back stronger, after experiencing emotionally challenging life events, including stressful work situations. According to Khusanova et al. (2021) the four psychological states contribute more than the sum of their parts in shaping individuals ability to deal with challenges.

In the workplace, individual employees can build psychological capital to enhance their personal performance and employers can build psychological capital to enhance organizational performance across teams and entire workforces. (Luthans & Broad, 2022). This means that lecturers with high psychological capital are more likely to remain engaged despite institutional constraints, work pressure, and career uncertainties. Playing the role of moderator means that psychological capital can strengthen or weaken the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. That is, lecturers who possess both high emotional intelligence and strong psychological capital may exhibit higher levels of work engagement compared to those with emotional intelligence but low psychological capital. Psychological capital may therefore enhance the effective utilization of emotional intelligence in fostering sustained engagement at work. Previous studies have suggested a positive relationship between psychological capital and work engagement (e.g. Biswal et al., 2023; Gao et al., 2023; Giancaspro et al., 2022).

The interplay between emotional intelligence and psychological capital is also garnering scholarly attention. Cohen and Abedallah (2015) posited that emotionally intelligent individuals may build stronger psychological resources, as emotional intelligence enhances coping strategies

and self-regulatory capacities that underlie the components of psychological capital. Furthermore, job demands–resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) offered theoretical rationales for discussing this interplay. Based on the assumption of job demands–resources model personal resources (i.e. emotional intelligence and psychological capital) may help individuals manage job demands and translate internal strengths into positive work outcomes like work engagement. For university lecturers, emotional demands arising from teaching, research pressures, administrative responsibilities, and student interactions can be mitigated by emotional intelligence and psychological capital.

Despite the growing interest among scholars on emotional intelligence, work engagement, and psychological capital, empirical studies examining their combined influence within Nigerian public universities is limited. Addressing this gap is critical because university lecturers encounter a lot of challenges that require not only emotional regulation but also psychological resilience, hopefulness, and optimism to maintain engagement, job satisfaction, and professional effectiveness. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement among lecturers at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, while exploring whether psychological capital moderates this relationship, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in organisational and educational psychology.

Method

Participants

A total of 273 academic staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka participated in the study through online survey method. Online survey is considered to be suitable for the current study because it is the best method to collect primary data across the population that cannot be easily reach. The questionnaire was created in Google Docs and posted on various WhatsApp group of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The participants comprised of 193 male (72.97%) and 80 female (27.03%). The age range of the participants is 25 and 67 years of age, with a mean age of 34.70 and a standard deviation of 11.07.

Instruments

The following instruments were used for data collection.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale is a 9-items scale developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) to measure the level of employee work engagement through adopting a positive work-mind state. It has the following dimensions: vigour, dedication, and absorption. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 - (Never) to 6 (Always). The test is represented by a sample of items in each dimension, and they are “At work, I feel like bursting with energy”, “I am enthusiastic about my job”, “I get carried away while I am working”. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) reported an initial Cronbach’s alpha of .85 for the scale.

Researchers found a Cronbach's alpha of .87 to establish the internal consistency or the reliability of the scale. Specifically, vigour yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .73, dedication yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .75, and absorption yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .72.

Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test

This is a 33-items scale developed by Schutte et al. (1998). This scale measures emotional intelligence under 4 dimensions; perception of emotions, managing own emotions, managing others emotions and utilization of emotions. Participants responded on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from 1-5 (1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neither Disagree nor Agree, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree). Some of the items in the scale include “Emotions are some of the things that make my life worth living”, “By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing”, “Some of the major events of my live have made me to re-evaluate what is important and not important”. Schutte et al. (1998) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .90. Researchers then found a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire-Short Form

Psychological capital questionnaire was developed by Luthans et al. (2007). It is a 12-items questionnaire that measures four dimensions of psychological capital: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Self-efficacy was measured by 3 items, hope was measured by 4 items, resilience was measured by 3 items, and optimism was measured by 2 items. Each participant responded on a 6-point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- somewhat disagree, 4- somewhat agree, 5- agree, 6- strongly agree). Some of the items in the scale include: “I can get through difficult times at work because I have experienced difficulty before”, “If I could find myself in a jam of work, I could think of many ways to get out of it”, “I'm optimistic about what will happen to me in the future as it pertains my work”. Luthans et al. (2007) reported Cronbach's alpha at .81, while the researchers found a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Procedure

To have the representative sample of lecturers of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, an online survey was used. Online survey is considered to be suitable for the current study because it is the best method to collect primary data across the population that cannot be easily reach through direct contact. Secondly, it is an economical and quick way of collecting data. The questionnaire was created in Google Docs and posted on various and posted on various WhatsApp group of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The lecturers were free to participate at their own discretion by filling the online Google form which lasted for five days. No monetary or any other incentives are offered to the respondents. Respondents were informed that the data will only be used for academic purpose. To reduce the possibility of a respondent participating in the survey more than once, each respondent is required to provide his/her name and e-mail address in the survey. Additionally, the study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Design/Statistics

A correlational design was adopted in this study. Correlational design was adopted because the objective of the study was to establish relationship among study variables. Multiple linear regression, using the Hayes (2018) process macro, was adopted for data analysis. The choice of was based on its wide acceptance in testing moderation hypothesis.

Results

Based on the analysis, the following findings were made.

Mean, standard deviation and inter-correlation among variables (n = 273)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Work Engagement	28.32	6.67	-	-	-
2. Emotional Intelligence	111.58	20.68	.14*	-	-
3. Psychological Capital	40.21	9.53	.12*	.24**	-

Note: SD = Standard Deviation, ** = $p < .001$, * = $p < .05$,

The result from the table showed that emotional intelligence was positively related to work engagement ($r = .14, p < .05$), psychological capital was related to work engagement ($r = .12, p < .05$), emotional intelligence was positively related to psychological capital ($r = .24, p < .001$), and gender was positively related to emotional intelligence ($r = .18, p < .001$).

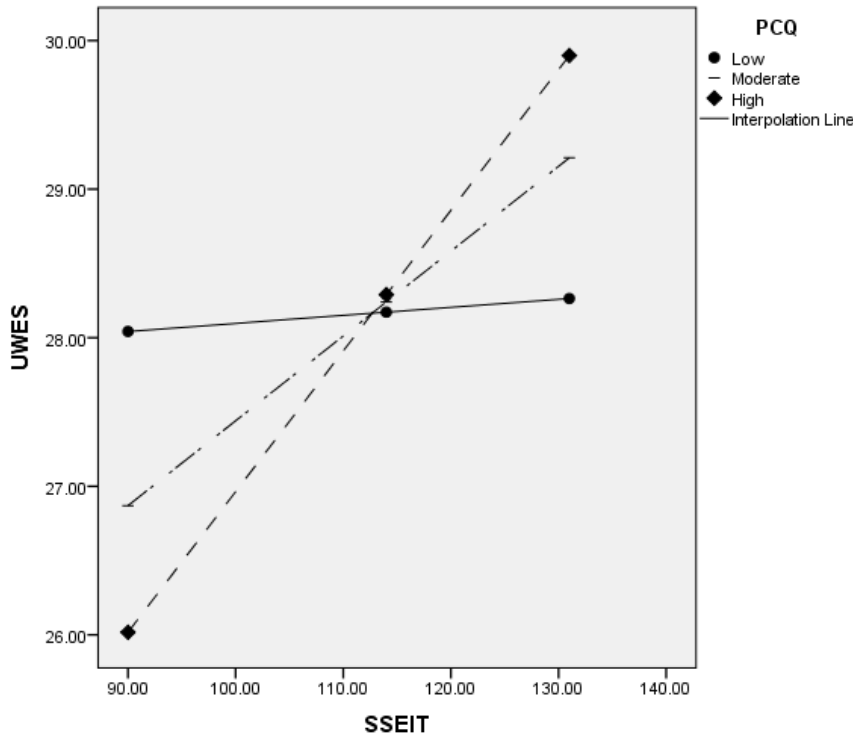
Moderating Effect of Psychological Capital on the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement

Model	B	SE	t	p	95% CI	R ²
Emotional Intelligence	.13	.07	1.86	.05	[.00; .00]	.04
Psychological Capital	.52	.20	2.58	.01	[.09; .12]	
EI x PC	.01	.00	2.61	.01	[.00; .00]	

Note: B = Regression coefficient; SE = Standard Error; t = Population t value; p = Probability level; CI = Upper & Lower Confidence Interval, EI = Emotional Intelligence, PC = Psychological Capital

The result showed a significant model fit for the predictor variables on the outcome variable $R^2 = 4.09, p < .001$ means that EI and PC accounted for 4% of the total variance in work engagement. Independently, psychological capital ($B = .52, t = 2.58, 95\% CI [.09, .12], p < .05$), and emotional intelligence significantly and positively predicted work engagement ($B = .13, t = 1.86, 95\% CI [.00, .00], p > .05$). Furthermore, the result showed that psychological capital positively moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement ($B = .01, t = 2.61, 95\% CI [.00, .00], p < .001$), meaning that the interaction effect between emotional intelligence and psychological capital on work engagement was significant.

Slope of interaction effect between psychological capital and emotional intelligence on work engagement



The slope of conditional effect between emotional intelligence and psychological capital showed that at the higher level of psychological capital, emotional intelligence positively predicted work engagement ($B = .09, t = 3.45, 95\% CI [.04, .14], p < .001$). However, lower level of psychological capital, emotional intelligence did not predicted work engagement ($B = .01, t = .21, 95\% CI [.04, .05], p > .05$).

Discussion

The present study investigated the moderating role of psychological capital on the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. Three study hypotheses were tested. The first finding showed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted lecturers work engagement. This may be drawn from the premise that being self-aware, and better able to understand one’s emotions and those of others may help interpret workplace stressors constructively, maintain interpersonal harmony, and remain engaged even in challenging work environments. The findings also showed that ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions is a key personal resource that enhances employees’ capacity to cope with job demands and respond positively to organizational conditions which in turn foster engagement. In a nutshell, emotional intelligence equips lecturers with the psychological tools to manage workplace demands, maintain motivation, collaborate effectively, and remain committed to their tasks. This finding is in support of the findings of other scholars like Lestari and Sawitri (2017); Yan et al. (2018); George et al. (2022a), who earlier found positive relationship between

employee emotional intelligence and their levels of work engagement. It also added to the framework of job-demand resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), as the presence of personal resources in emotional intelligence would help in managing effectively the demands posed on the job; thereby, increasing engagement.

The second finding showed that psychological capital significantly predicted lecturers work engagement. This means that despite physical workload, institutional constraints, and work pressure, lecturers can foster higher engagement through self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience. The result suggests that creating atmosphere where lecturers can boost their psychological states will help maintain engagement, job satisfaction, and professional effectiveness. This finding is in line with findings of Biswal et al. (2023); Giancaspro et al., 2022; Gao et al., (2023), as they earlier found significant relationship between employee psychological capital and work engagement.

The third finding showed that psychological capital moderated the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement. It means that emotional intelligence boosted by hope and resilience supports lecturers' adaptability in demanding work environments. Such high level of resilience strengthens emotional competencies and in turn sustained engagement. Zhu et al. (2021) affirmed that individual's psychological state, as well as their emotions are regulated by the presence of psychological capital, which then influences positive reactions to changes in work environment, as well as adoption of positive work attitudes. This will be an addition in management and practices of human resources in our university system.

The findings of this study has theoretical, empirical and policy implications. The study emphasizes the importance of internal drives for work engagement, contributing to the existing theoretical understanding of work motivation and engagement. It extends the job demand-resources (JD-R) theory by highlighting the role of personal resources, such as emotional intelligence and psychological capital, in enhancing work engagement. Empirical evidence reveals that components of psychological capital (resilience, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy) influence individuals' emotional intelligence and in turn work engagement. This strengthens believe that a healthy working environment nurtures and sustains internal drives for work engagement, which can be particularly beneficial in the context of Nigerian universities. The findings also serves as a policy framework in management and practice of human resources in our academic institutions. It challenges university management to prioritize work engagement by providing a conducive work environment that supports academic prowess and maintains high levels of engagement. It further heightens the need for organising regular training programs that will foster emotional intelligence and psychological capital among academic staff.

One major limitation of this study is using only single sources of data collection, as such data may lead to deflation and inflation research findings, due to the presence of common method variance associated with a single source of data. Secondly, using only university lecturers makes difficult to generalization the findings to other category of workers in the university system. It is

now suggested that future research should include other university workers so as to give greater of how other university workers are affected.

In line with the findings, this study recommends that university management should organise professional development programmes that should be aimed at building both emotional and psychological resources for their lecturers in order to enhance lecturer productivity and institutional outcomes. Such program should tilt towards promoting how to be aware of the self, how to regulate emotions, how to understand emotions for self and others, as this will engender work engagement among lecturers and also improve students learning outcomes. Secondly, they should provide a better organisational culture and work environment that increases internal drive and enhances productivity and efficiency among lecturers. Lastly, the findings from this study should be considered by policy-makers towards developing policies that would ensure better human resource administration in our universities.

In conclusion, this study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement among lecturers, with a particular focus on the moderating role of psychological capital. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence is a significant positive predictor of work engagement, suggesting that lecturers who are more emotionally intelligent are better equipped to manage their emotions, establish good interpersonal relationships, and maintain motivation in their professional roles. It further revealed that relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement can then be strengthen through psychological capital indicating that psychological capital enhances the beneficial effects of emotional intelligence in the academic work environment. These findings underscore the importance of fostering both emotional intelligence and psychological capital within academic institutions, which will help promote greater engagement, well-being, and productivity among lecturers.

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