



Assessing the Nexus between School Management Variables and Teacher's Job Performance in Special Education Centres in Cross River State

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Abstract

This study assessed the nexus between school-management variables and teachers' job performance in special education centres in Cross River State, specifically focusing on the relationship between school leadership, professional development, and teachers' job performance. The study employed a correlational research design and involved a population of 192 teachers from 27 special education centres in the state, using a census method. A questionnaire, titled "School Management Variables and Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (SMVTJPQ)," was used for data collection. The instrument comprised two sections: Section A gathered demographic data, while Section B assessed school management variables and teachers' job performance. The questionnaire was based on a four-point Likert scale, and its validity was confirmed by experts from the Department of Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation at the University of Calabar. Reliability was established through a trial test on 30 educators outside the study area, yielding a high Cronbach Alpha coefficient ranging from 79 to 83. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between school leadership, professional development and teachers' job performance in special education centres. The study concludes that effective school leadership and continuous professional development are critical drivers of teachers' performance. Strong and supportive leadership creates an enabling environment that motivates teachers, fosters accountability, and promotes professional growth. Likewise, participation in relevant and structured professional development programs enhances teachers' instructional competence, classroom management skills, and overall effectiveness. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education should support school authorities to organize regular leadership training programs for administrators to equip them with effective administrative and interpersonal skills. This will foster a more supportive and productive working environment, which can significantly enhance teachers' motivation and job performance.

Keywords: Management Variables, School leadership, Professional Development, Teachers' Job Performance, Special Education Centres

Introduction

Worldwide, education is broadly acknowledged as an essential instrument for advancing individual growth and national progress (Ebele, Obioma, & Iyiegbuniwe, 2025) ^[13]. As stated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) ^[16], the goals of special education in Nigeria focus on granting all children regardless of their physical, mental, sensory, or emotional challenges equal access to quality education. The policy emphasizes the need to incorporate individuals with special needs into regular societal activities, develop suitable curricula tailored to their needs, and provide essential resources such as

trained staff, appropriate facilities, and learning materials. Additionally, it advocates for inclusive education, increased public enlightenment on the abilities and rights of persons with special needs, and their empowerment for independence and active contribution to national progress.

Special education centres are specially designed institutions that cater to learners with disabilities or learning challenges by offering tailored teaching methods, specialized resources, and comprehensive support systems. These centres aim to prepare learners for further education, vocational opportunities, and well-rounded personal development, thereby underscoring the critical importance of special education (Ejom *et al.*, 2024; Ngene *et al.*, 2025) ^[15, 23]. Staffed with professionals such as special education teachers and counselors, these centres address the diverse needs of students with physical, intellectual, emotional, and sensory impairments. The central aim is to create an inclusive learning environment that fosters academic success, social interaction, and personal growth, while equipping students with essential life skills for independence and societal integration. Achieving these objectives largely depends on how effectively teachers carry out their responsibilities (Obona *et al.*, 2025) ^[11].

In this study, teachers' job performance refers to the commitment, competence, and quality with which teachers fulfill their duties to meet the varying needs of students with disabilities. Difoni *et al.* (2024) ^[12] define it as the responsibilities, tasks, and actions undertaken by teachers to execute their roles within the educational system. According to (Ekpoh and Eze 2015, as cited in Madukwe *et al.*, 2024) ^[20], it involves teachers' participation in the school's overall operation toward the realization of institutional goals. It encompasses the delivery of educational services that address students' cognitive, emotional, and physical needs. This aligns with Madukwe *et al.* (2024) ^[21], who highlight that job performance involves executing assigned duties to meet specific learning objectives. Similarly, (Koko and Nabie 2019, as cited in Obona *et al.*, 2023) ^[24] view it as carrying out assigned roles within a set timeframe. Ayoro, Onyeike, and Jack (2023) ^[8] further stress that it reflects a teacher's contribution to the achievement of school objectives. Effective job performance thus extends beyond teaching to include the creation of a responsive, inclusive, and equitable learning environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, can thrive. Inclusive education is essential in combating illiteracy and underdevelopment, ensuring every citizen can contribute to national progress (Difoni *et al.*, 2024) ^[12].

The evaluation of teachers' job performance may be based on several indicators, such as the development of individualized education plans that align with each student's unique learning profile, the adoption of adaptive teaching strategies, and the integration of technology to support diverse learning needs. These approaches not only enhance academic achievement but also foster emotional and social development, promoting equity and long-term success for students with disabilities (Garcia & Patel, 2023) ^[17]. Moreover, giving focused attention to students with special needs in classroom settings remains a vital component of effective teaching (Difoni *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. As observed by Onaolapo, Olajiga, and Onaolapo (2019) ^[29], the effectiveness of service delivery is ultimately judged by how well educational objectives are achieved. Madukwe *et al.* (2024) ^[20] also argue that competent teachers

demonstrate effective performance through individualized instruction, sound classroom management, student discipline, and academic and social support.

In Nigeria, inclusive education practices are increasingly being implemented in schools, supported by government policies and laws aimed at ensuring appropriate education for children with special needs based on their abilities. The concept of inclusive education has gained considerable traction as a progressive approach to teaching and learning. It focuses on fostering inclusive school cultures, establishing enabling policies, and crafting practical strategies to encourage the active participation of all learners (Angeloska Galevska & Ilic Pesic, 2018) ^[4].

Given the significance of teachers' job performance in meeting the needs of students with special education needs, concerns have emerged regarding the declining quality of this performance. This issue has attracted the attention of researchers and stakeholders (Ayoro, Onyeike, & Jack, 2023; Onaolapo *et al.*, 2019; Okoye, 2017; Obona *et al.*, 2023; Difoni *et al.*, 2025) ^[8, 29, 28, 24, 11]. Assessing the academic progress of students with disabilities remains a major challenge, and teachers often seek guidance on effective assessment methods in inclusive settings (Angeloska Galevska & Ilic Pesic, 2018) ^[4]. Special education teachers, in particular, encounter obstacles such as poor administrative support, inadequate resources, and low professional morale. Aiyaleso (2016) ^[2] highlights systemic challenges within Nigeria's special education framework, including underfunding, deteriorating infrastructure, subpar working conditions, and lack of motivation for teachers.

These challenges are evident in special education centres in Cross River State, where teacher commitment is reportedly low. Many teachers arrive late, miss work and classes regularly, and fail to build healthy professional relationships with students. Complaints from students also reveal that some teachers prioritize personal business during work hours at the expense of their teaching duties. These behaviors signify a decline in job performance, with negative implications for the quality of graduates from these institutions. This deterioration has contributed to rising youth unemployment, moral decline, disrespect for authority, increased substance abuse, and excessive dependence on foreign nations (Babalola, 2007 as cited in Odigwe, 2019; Oluwaseun, 2016) ^[26]. Moreover, such unprofessional conduct undermines the quality of educational service delivery and alarms stakeholders. These inefficiencies demoralize staff, increase absenteeism, and hinder the development of future leaders critical to national advancement (Luthans, 2002 as cited in Obona *et al.*, 2023; Kinyua & Munyi, 2018; Oluwaseun, 2016 as cited in Obona *et al.*, 2023) ^[24, 19]. Immediate and strategic interventions are therefore needed to prevent further decline in the quality of special education in the state.

Recognizing the critical role of job performance in achieving educational objectives necessitates identifying factors that positively influence teachers' effectiveness. One such factor is the effective management of school variables. Research shows that teachers perform better in environments where working conditions are conducive (Obona *et al.*, 2023) ^[24]. This highlights the importance of managing institutional variables effectively to improve instruction and service quality in special education centres throughout Cross River State. School management variables refer to the key organizational and administrative components within a

school that impact its performance and overall efficiency. Arop, Ekpang, and Owan (2018) ^[7] describe school management variables as distinctive attributes that set schools apart and influence teacher effectiveness. These variables, which must be carefully studied and managed, are categorized by Oregano (2020) ^[30] into extrinsic (pull) factors which are external incentives like better salaries, job security, and leadership as well as intrinsic (push) factors which refers to internal dissatisfactions such as stress, poor management, and bureaucracy. Barnard and Rodgers (2018) emphasized that push factors often result from frustration with internal conditions. Proper management of these variables, including leadership, work environment, administrative support, communication, staff development, and motivation, is crucial for achieving overall school effectiveness and sustainability. These variables collectively shape the teaching and learning environment and significantly impact teachers' motivation, performance, and instructional delivery. However, this study will examine school leadership and professional development.

School leadership and teachers job performance

School leadership style refers to the techniques and approaches that school administrators use to guide, support, and influence their teaching staff. Armstrong (2021) ^[6] defines leadership as the capacity to motivate and steer individuals toward goal attainment, while Daft (2018) ^[10] frames it as an influence-based relationship between leaders and followers aimed at realizing common objectives. Leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire can significantly affect teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. When leaders adopt effective styles, they foster a positive work climate, bolster teacher retention, and improve overall school performance.

Empirical research highlights the link between leadership behaviors and teacher outcomes. Eğribayun (2019) ^[14] surveyed 352 teachers across 18 schools in Izmir, Turkey, using purposive sampling and confirmed the measurement scales' validity via confirmatory factor analysis. Results showed a moderate, positive correlation between transactional leadership and teacher motivation ($r = .383, p < .01$), underscoring how specific administrative practices can enhance educators' drive. In another study, Gul, Ahmad, Rehman, Shabir, and Razzaq (2012) ^[12] explored how different leadership styles relate to organizational commitment and turnover intentions among insurance sector employees in Pakistan. With 121 usable responses out of 170 distributed questionnaires (71.2% response rate), their SPSS-based analysis (Version 20) revealed that both transactional and transformational leadership styles were inversely but not significantly related to turnover intentions. Moreover, organizational commitment emerged as a mediator, suggesting that leadership's effect on retention operates partly through employees' attachment to their organization. Ajayi and Olatunji (2017) ^[1] investigated factors driving turnover intentions among 925 public high school teachers in Ogun State. Employing regression analyses and t-tests grounded in four theoretical lenses personal health, work-family balance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention the study identified job dissatisfaction, health-related concerns, and work-family conflict as primary predictors of voluntary departure. These insights offer policymakers targeted areas

for intervention to curb teacher attrition.

Professional development and teacher's job performance

Professional development encompasses deliberate administrative efforts to broaden educators' knowledge and skills, thereby elevating their job performance. In schools, this involves updating teachers on contemporary instructional methods and pedagogical innovations, which enhances their instructional proficiency and ultimately leads to better student outcomes (Akinwale, 2020) ^[5]. Because educational challenges continually evolve, teachers must pursue ongoing learning, and school principals are pivotal in organizing and supporting these opportunities for all staff, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

A core strategy for strengthening special education lies in delivering focused training to both pre-service and in-service teachers, equipping them to collaborate effectively with general education colleagues in inclusive classrooms (Drelick *et al.*, 2024; Norwich & Nash, 2011, as cited in Alsudairy, 2024) ^[3]. Robust training programs have been shown to enhance teacher competencies, boosting job satisfaction and commitment. For example, Sultana (2013) found a significant positive effect of training on productivity among 250 employees in Dhaka. In Nigeria's southwest, Okeleke, Uzoka, and Oladejo (2017) ^[27] surveyed 4,080 staff in public colleges of education and demonstrated a strong link between professional development and performance. Although these studies highlight training's impact in tertiary contexts, there remains a need for similar research in secondary schools—an area this study addresses. Complementing these findings, Mduma and Mkulu (2021) ^[22] used a mixed-methods approach with 91 Tanzanian teachers and confirmed that ongoing professional development markedly improves teaching strategies and overall job effectiveness, underscoring its importance for Nigerian secondary education.

The literature review demonstrates a clear link between the selected independent sub-variables and the dependent variable, teachers' service delivery. However, it also highlights important gaps in existing studies particularly regarding geographic focus, scope, and methodology. Most prior research was conducted outside the study area (either in other countries or in different regions of Nigeria), and employed research designs, instruments, and procedures that differ from those outlined here. To address these limitations, this study "Assessing the Nexus between School Management Variables and Teachers' Job Performance in Special Education Centres in Cross River State" has been formulated. By situating the investigation within the target region and using context-appropriate methods, the research aims to close these gaps and make a substantive contribution to the body of knowledge.

Statement of the problem

Special education centres are dedicated institutions designed to meet the needs of learners with disabilities or learning difficulties by offering tailored instructional strategies, specialized materials, and comprehensive support services. In these settings, teachers must address a wide range of abilities, interests, and educational requirements while maintaining an orderly and supportive learning environment. Yet in Cross River State's special education centres, many teachers display unprofessional conduct such as frequent lateness,

class absenteeism, poor classroom management and relationship with the student, which undermines the quality of service delivered to the vulnerable students.

Although the state government has responded with interventions such as regular payment of salaries, provision of teaching and learning materials, classroom renovations under the Universal Basic Education programme, and additional teacher recruitment, there has been little observable improvement in student engagement, classroom dynamics, interpersonal relationships, or examination outcomes. This ongoing shortfall suggests that institutional management factors may be at the heart of the problem. Consequently, this study on “Assessing the Nexus between School Management Variables and Teachers’ Job Performance in Special Education Centres in Cross River State” seeks to explore how the organization and administration of these centres influence teachers’ job performance.

Purpose of the study

This study assessed the nexus between school-management variables and teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to find out the relationship between:

- School leadership and teachers’ instructional delivery in special education centres in Cross River State.
- Professional development and teachers’ instructional delivery in special education centres in Cross River State.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided study:

- School leadership does not significantly relate to teachers’ instructional delivery in special education centres in Cross River State.
- Professional development does not significantly relate to teachers’ instructional delivery in special education centres in Cross River State.

Methodology

The study employed a correlational research design and targeted all 192 teachers across the 27 special education centres in Cross River State. Because the population was manageable in size, a census approach was used to include every teacher. Data were gathered using the “School Management Variables and Teachers’ Job Performance Questionnaire (SMVTJQP),” which comprised two sections: Section A elicited demographic information (age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications), and Section B featured 18 items assessing both school-management variables and teachers’ service delivery on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Initially, 22 items were drafted and then reviewed by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement & Evaluation at the University of Calabar; four items were removed or revised based on their feedback. A pilot test with 30 teachers outside the study area established reliability, yielding Cronbach’s alpha coefficients between .79 and .83. Ten research assistants were trained to administer the questionnaires, and permissions were obtained from school administrators. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality. The questionnaires were distributed and collected by the research team, achieving a

100% response rate. After checking for completeness, items were scored (positively worded: SA = 4 to SD = 1; negatively worded: reverse scoring), and subscale scores were summed. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson’s product-moment correlation at the 0.05 significance level.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis one

School leadership does not significantly relate to teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State. The two variables in this hypothesis are school leadership and teachers’ job performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 1. Table 1 showed the correlation coefficient between school leadership and teachers’ job performance. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant for teachers’ job performance ($r = .64$, $p < .05$). Since $p (.000)$ is less than $p (.05)$, hypothesis one is rejected in terms of teachers’ teachers’ job performance. The result of the analysis implied that there is a statistically positive significant relationship between school leadership and teachers’ job performance in special special education centres in Cross River State.

Table 1: Summary of correlation between school leadership and teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State. (N=192)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	S. D	R	Sig.
School leadership	19.38	3.40		
Teachers’ job performance	19.18	4.38	.64*	.000

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=190$

Hypothesis Two

Professional development does not significantly relate to teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State. The two variables in this hypothesis are professional development and teachers’ job performance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the hypothesis and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 2. Table 2 showed the correlation coefficient between professional development and teachers’ job performance. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant for teachers’ job performance ($r = .63$, $p < .05$). Since $p (.000)$ is less than $p (.05)$, hypothesis two is rejected in terms of teachers’ teachers’ job performance. The result of the analysis implied that there is a statistically positive significant relationship between professional development and teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State.

Table 2: Summary of correlation between professional development and teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State. (N=192)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	S. D	r	Sig.
Professional development	18.40	4.62		
Teachers’ job performance	19.18	4.38	.86*	.000

*Significant at $p < .05$ $df=190$

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one which stated that, school leadership does not significantly relate to teachers’ job performance in special education centres in Cross River State, was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The findings indicate a

significant high positive relationship between school leadership and teachers' job performance which show that effective leaders especially those who employ transformational and participative approaches create clear goals, provide ongoing support and feedback, and foster a collaborative culture, all of which boost teacher motivation, instructional quality, and professional growth. The implication is that educational authorities and school boards should prioritise the development of robust leadership programmes such as targeted training for principals in vision-setting, coaching, and distributed decision-making to enhance teacher effectiveness, improve retention, and ultimately drive better student learning outcomes.

The finding aligns with that of Eğribayun (2019) ^[14] who surveyed 352 teachers across 18 schools in Izmir, Turkey, using purposive sampling and confirmed the measurement scales' validity via confirmatory factor analysis. Results showed a moderate, positive correlation between transactional leadership and teacher motivation. The finding corroborate that of Gul *et al.* (2012) explored how different leadership styles relate to organizational commitment and turnover intentions among insurance sector employees in Pakistan. With 121 usable responses out of 170 distributed questionnaires (71.2% response rate), their SPSS-based analysis (Version 20) revealed that both transactional and transformational leadership styles were inversely but not significantly related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis two which stated that, professional development does not significantly relate to teachers' job performance in special education centres in Cross River State, was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The results reveal a strong, positive association between professional development and teachers' job performance, indicating that greater engagement in training activities translates into more effective instructional delivery. This outcome is expected, as professional development provides educators with up-to-date content knowledge, innovative pedagogical techniques, and refined teaching skills that are crucial for high-quality classroom practice. Consequently, sustained investment in well-designed, context-relevant professional development initiatives can elevate teaching standards and, in turn, bolster student achievement. These findings echo Sultana's (2013) study, which demonstrated a significant positive impact of training on employee productivity in Dhaka, and align with Okeleke, Uzoka, and Oladejo's (2017) ^[27] research in Southwest Nigeria, where a robust link between staff development and performance was observed. Likewise, they corroborate Mduma and Mkulu's (2021) ^[22] evidence that professional learning substantively enhances instructional strategies and overall job effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study concludes that effective school leadership and continuous professional development are critical drivers of teachers' performance. Strong and supportive leadership creates an enabling environment that motivates teachers, fosters accountability, and promotes professional growth. Likewise, participation in relevant and structured professional development programs enhances teachers' instructional competence, classroom management skills, and overall effectiveness. These results underscore the need for school administrators and policymakers to prioritize leadership development and invest consistently in the

professional training of special education teachers. By doing so, the quality of teaching and learning in special education centres can be significantly improved, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes for learners with special needs.

Recommendations

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

- The Ministry of Education should support school authorities to organize regular leadership training programs for administrators to equip them with effective administrative and interpersonal skills. This will foster a more supportive and productive working environment, which can significantly enhance teachers' motivation and job performance.
- School administrators should prioritize the design and implementation of continuous, targeted, and inclusive professional development programs for special education teachers. These programs should focus on innovative teaching strategies, inclusive classroom practices, and the use of assistive technologies to better support diverse learners.

Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by empirically establishing a statistically significant relationship between school leadership, professional development, and teachers' job performance in special education centres in Cross River State. Unlike previous studies that focused largely on general or tertiary education contexts, this research specifically addresses the unique dynamics within special education settings, thereby filling a critical gap in the literature. The findings offer evidence-based insights that highlight the pivotal role of effective school management practices in enhancing teacher effectiveness, particularly in environments serving learners with special needs. This contribution is valuable for policymakers, school administrators, and researchers seeking to improve educational outcomes in special education through informed leadership and capacity-building strategies.

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