

Attribution style and self-esteem as correlates of work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined attribution style and self-esteem as correlates of work engagement among librarians in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study and three hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted all 154 librarians in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. Due to the manageable size of the population, census sampling technique was adopted, which involved studying the entire population. Data were collected using three instruments: the “Librarians’ Attribution Style Scale (LASS)”, “Librarians’ Self-Esteem Scale (LSES)”, and “Librarians’ Work Engagement Scale (LWES)”. The instruments were validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Their reliability was determined using the Cronbach’s alpha method, yielding coefficients of 0.73 for LASS, 0.80 for LSES, and 0.78 for LWES. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and regression analysis. The findings revealed a low positive but insignificant relationship between attribution style and the work engagement of librarians. However, a high positive and significant relationship was found between self-esteem and the work engagement of librarians. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that Library administrators should endeavour to provide orientation and competency-building programmes to boost librarians’ engagement independent of their attributions.

Keywords: Attribution style, self-esteem, work engagement, librarians, university libraries. South-East, Nigeria

Introduction

Work engagement refers to the degree to which employees devote their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to work-related activities. Wood et al. (2020) defined work engagement as a positive and fulfilling work-related state characterized by dedication and satisfaction, which are reflected in three key indicators: vigour, dedication, and absorption. They further conceptualised these indicators of work engagement. Vigour refers to the investment of high levels of energy and mental resilience while performing work tasks. Dedication denotes employees’ strong involvement in their work, accompanied by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, and challenge. Absorption implies being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work.

These dimensions highlight the importance of creating a supportive work environment where librarians in university libraries feel valued and motivated to perform their duties effectively. Within the context of the present study, work engagement refers to the extent to which librarians devote themselves to their statutory duties and responsibilities. In this regard, Nguyen et al. (2023) noted that engaged employees tend to be more proactive in their work, experience better health, and demonstrate higher levels of performance than their disengaged counterparts. Similarly, Nguyen (2021) observed that engaged employees are more willing to undertake tasks beyond their primary responsibilities while efficiently performing their assigned duties. Librarians who are meaningfully engaged in their work tend to develop a

strong emotional connection with their tasks and remain focused on achieving organizational goals. They often display high levels of physical and mental stamina while demonstrating creativity, even when faced with challenging situations.

Work engagement has become a major priority for personnel managers and administrators in contemporary organizations because it is a strong predictor of positive work outcomes such as organizational success, efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and performance. It is also an important determinant of librarians' job performance and overall well-being, particularly within Nigerian university libraries. When employees are highly engaged, they are more innovative and productive, thereby contributing to the continuous development and improvement of organizational services and outputs. In a related study, Ede and Nwosu (2021) found that work engagement significantly influences job burnout among librarians in Nigerian universities, with highly engaged librarians experiencing lower levels of burnout.

Furthermore, librarians need to be actively engaged in their work to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of information services to library users. However, this may not always be the case among librarians in some universities in South-East, Nigeria. For instance, Adeyemo (2018) observed that librarians in South-East, Nigerian university libraries face several challenges that may undermine their level of work engagement. Similarly, the researcher's observation during visits to some university libraries in the region revealed instances of poor collection development practices, suggesting that librarians may not be discharging their professional responsibilities to the satisfaction of library patrons. This unsatisfactory level of work engagement among librarians may be

influenced by certain factors, including attribution style and self-esteem.

Attribution refers to the process by which individuals interpret events and explain the causes of behaviour and outcomes. In general terms, attribution involves linking events or actions to underlying causes, whether internal or external. Accordingly, attribution style can be defined as an individual's habitual way of explaining the causes of events and behaviours (Okadigbo & Unachukwu, 2022). It reflects how individuals interpret positive or negative experiences in their lives. Akanaeme et al. (2022) described attribution style as the manner in which individuals explain the reasons for events or outcomes in their lives. Within the context of this study, attribution style refers to the ways in which librarians interpret and explain events related to their professional activities. This suggests that librarians may hold different explanations for events that occur within their work environment. For example, a librarian who performs a task successfully may attribute the achievement to personal qualities such as competence or creativity, while another librarian may attribute poor performance to personal limitations or external factors.

It is important to note that attribution styles can be classified into different categories. Akanaeme et al. (2022) identified three major dimensions of attribution style: stable versus unstable (transient), global versus specific, and internal versus external. Stable attribution links events to causes that are perceived as permanent, whereas unstable or transient attribution links events to causes that may change over time. Global attribution relates events to factors that influence many areas of life, while specific attribution relates events to factors limited to particular situations. Attribution styles may also be positive or negative. According to Okadigbo and Unachukwu (2022), positive attribution

style involves explaining favourable events as resulting from internal, stable, and global factors, whereas negative attribution style tends to associate unfavourable events with internal personal traits. Consequently, different librarians may interpret workplace experiences in different ways, and these interpretations may influence their level of work engagement.

Closely related to attribution style is self-esteem, which refers to the value individuals place on themselves and their perception of their own worth. Self-esteem is an individual's evaluation of self-worth and overall judgment of oneself (Mawlod et al., 2024). It represents the attitude individuals hold toward themselves and their perceived level of competence and value. Ackerman (2018) described self-esteem as a reflection of how individuals value themselves, which in turn influences their confidence and their ability to express their needs and aspirations. Within the context of this study, self-esteem refers to the disposition that librarians hold regarding their personal worth and professional value. Librarians with high self-esteem are more likely to demonstrate confidence in their abilities, take pride in their work, and remain committed to their professional responsibilities, whereas those with low self-esteem may exhibit reduced motivation and engagement in their tasks.

The university library environment requires knowledgeable, skilled, qualified, and highly motivated librarians who possess positive attribution styles and healthy levels of self-esteem. Contemporary theoretical perspectives on work engagement emphasize the role of personal resources in shaping employees' work behaviour. For instance, the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) suggests that work engagement is influenced by a combination of job, organizational, and personal resources. Personal resources such as attribution style and self-esteem play a

crucial role in enhancing employees' motivation and engagement at work. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2000) posits that psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness interact with personal characteristics like self-esteem and attribution patterns to influence individuals' motivation and engagement.

Although studies on librarians' work engagement in Nigerian university libraries are gradually increasing, very few have focused specifically on librarians in South-East, Nigeria. The limited availability of localized empirical evidence creates a significant gap in understanding how attribution style and self-esteem relate to librarians' work engagement within this context. Therefore, this study sought to empirically investigate attribution style and self-esteem as correlates of work engagement among librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.

Research questions

The following questions are addressed in the study:

1. What is the relationship between attribution style and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between self-esteem and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria?
3. What is the Joint correlation of attribution style, self-esteem and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between attribution style and work

engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.

2. There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant joint correlation of attribution style, self-esteem and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.

Literature review

Attribution style refers to an individual's tendency to explain the causes of events, successes, or failures in their lives by attributing them to either internal or external factors. According to Akanaeme et al. (2022), attribution styles refer to the various ways individuals explain the causes of their actions or events in their lives. This suggests that people often have different explanations for occurrences within their environment. Furthermore, attribution styles may be internal or external in nature. Internal attribution style refers to the tendency of individuals to attribute success to internal factors such as personal effort, ability, or skill, whereas external attribution style refers to attributing success to external factors such as luck, situational circumstances, or the contributions of others (Akanaeme et al., 2022). In a related study, Ngunu et al. (2019) found that the majority of students attributed both success and failure to internal, uncontrollable, and unstable factors. They further reported that causal attributions were significantly related to job performance. External attribution refers to the process of assigning the cause of events to external variables, whereas internal attribution involves relating events or behaviours to internal personal characteristics. Li et al. (2022) found that external attribution style positively moderated the relationship between relative deprivation and employees'

service innovation behaviour. Some successful individuals attribute their successes to internal factors while associating their failures with external circumstances.

Librarians also possess attribution styles that may influence their job performance and, by extension, their level of work engagement. Attribution theory, as proposed by Weiner (1985), links attribution style with motivation and performance. Similarly, Deci and Ryan (2000) posited that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key factors that drive employee engagement. Hurley (2023) further observed that pessimistic attribution styles are likely to predict lower levels of work engagement among employees.

Self-esteem refers to the value individuals place on themselves and the extent to which they perceive themselves as worthy or competent. Okonkwo (2021) described self-esteem as a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. In a similar vein, Ogunyemi (2022) defined self-esteem as individuals' perception of their worth or the degree to which people value, approve of, appreciate, or like themselves. In the context of librarianship, self-esteem can be viewed as the level of confidence librarians have in their individual capabilities to influence library users and other stakeholders effectively. This confidence is often considered one of the motivational beliefs that can shape professional librarians' behaviour and their effective use of library resources and services.

Onwubiko (2020) observed that relatively little is known about the sources of self-esteem, as insufficient attention has been given to this area. However, numerous studies have examined the benefits and contributions of self-esteem to students' academic performance and teachers' burnout, with fewer studies focusing on variables that predict self-esteem. Similarly, Nwofor and Nweke (2019) noted that individuals with

high self-esteem tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement in their work.

Studying the self-esteem of library personnel and how it influences their work engagement is therefore important. According to Branden's (1994) self-esteem theory, self-esteem influences individuals' confidence and motivation, which in turn affects their performance and engagement. Cherry (2019) also noted that self-esteem plays a significant role in an individual's motivation and success throughout life, pointing out that low self-esteem may prevent individuals from achieving success in school or the workplace because they doubt their own abilities. The role of self-esteem in shaping librarians' work engagement cannot be overstated. Supporting this view, Tella and Ayeni (2016) found that self-esteem encourages librarians to persist in achieving their goals and to make sound decisions that lead to meaningful accomplishments. Such individuals are often willing to undertake more challenging tasks and demonstrate higher levels of creativity. However, Udem and Ogbonna (2024) reported a very low positive and insignificant relationship between librarians' self-esteem and their job performance in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.

Work engagement has become a major priority for personnel managers and administrators in contemporary organizations because it is a strong predictor of work outcomes, organizational success, profitability, efficiency, effectiveness, and performance. When employees are fully engaged in their work, they tend to be more creative and productive, thereby facilitating organizational growth and the development of innovative services and products. Adekoya et al. (2019) emphasized that a highly engaged workforce contributes to talent retention, enhances patron trust, and improves overall job performance and stakeholder satisfaction. Work engagement

has also been linked with improved employee attitudes, proactiveness, psychological well-being, enhanced individual capabilities, and better organizational performance (Mansor et al., 2023).

Akinola (2018) conducted a study on job characteristics, work engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour, and job burnout among librarians in university libraries in Southern Nigeria. The study revealed that work engagement significantly influenced job burnout among librarians, and organizational citizenship behaviour also had a significant influence on job burnout. The findings further showed that librarians had a good understanding of their job characteristics and demonstrated a very high level of work engagement, while also exhibiting organizational citizenship behaviour to a certain extent. Similarly, Madukoma and Garba (2022) found that librarians' level of work engagement was high, although their level of continuous professional development was relatively low. Their study also revealed that continuous professional development had a significant influence on librarians' work engagement.

Methods

A correlational survey research design was adopted for this study. Correlational research design seeks to determine the nature and degree of relationship among naturally occurring variables (Cheprasov, 2019). The design was considered appropriate because the study examined the relationships among attribution style, self-esteem, and work engagement of librarians. The population comprised 154 librarians in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. Given the manageable population size, a census sampling technique was adopted, which involved studying the entire population. Data were collected using three researcher's developed instruments: the "Librarians' Attribution Style Scale (LASS)",

“Librarians’ Self-Esteem Scale (LSES)”, and “Librarians’ Work Engagement Scale (LWES)”. The instruments were developed from relevant literature and consisted of 20, 20, and 15 items respectively. Responses were structured on a five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), with numerical values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively for positively worded items, while negatively worded items were reverse scored. The instruments were face validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka to ensure clarity and relevance of the items. A pilot test was conducted using 20 librarians at Delta State University Library, Abraka, which is outside the study area. The internal consistency of the instruments was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.73 for LASS, 0.80 for LSES, and 0.78 for LWES. These values were considered acceptable based on the recommendation of Shrestha (2021), who suggested that a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.70 and above indicates adequate reliability.

The instruments were administered and retrieved by the researcher with the assistance of five research assistants. Out of the 154 copies distributed, 140 copies (90.9%) were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. Data were analyzed using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) and regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. Pearson’s correlation was used to answer research questions one and two and test their corresponding hypotheses, while regression analysis was used to answer research question three and test its corresponding hypothesis. The interpretation of the correlation coefficient followed the guideline recommended by Nworgu (2015): $\pm 0.00-0.19$ (very low), $\pm 0.20-0.39$ (low), $\pm 0.40-0.59$ (moderate), $\pm 0.60-0.79$ (high), and $\pm 0.80-1.00$ (very high). All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results of this study are presented in this section.

Table 1: Test of significance of Pearson’s Correlation between attribution style and work engagement of the librarians

Source of Variation	n	r	p-value	Remark
Attribution Style	140	0.146		
Work Engagement			0.09	Not Sig

Results in Table 1 show that there is a very low positive relationship existing between attribution style and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. This is evident by the size of Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient r, which is

0.146. Furthermore, there is no significant relationship between attribution style and work engagement of librarians in university libraries. The calculated r (0.146) has *p*-value >0.05 .

Table 2: Test of significance of Pearson’s correlation between self-esteem and work engagement of librarians

Source of Variation	n	r	p-value	Remark
Attribution Style	140	0.618		
Work Engagement			0.00	Sig

Analysis in Table 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between attribution style and work engagement of librarians in university libraries. The calculated r (0.618) has p -value <0.05 . The null hypothesis two is therefore rejected. In addition, there is a high

positive relationship existing between self-esteem and work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r , which is 0.618.

Table 3: Summary of regression analysis on joint correlation of attribution style and self-esteem with work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Remark
0.59	0.348	0.327	Positive relationship

Table 3 shows that there is positive ($R = 0.59$) correlation of attribution style and self-esteem with work engagement of librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. In

addition, the adjusted R^2 explains that 32.7% of the total variability of librarians' work engagement scores can be explained by their attribution style and self-esteem.

Table 4: Test of significance of unique contributions of joint correlation of attribution style and self-esteem to work engagement of librarians in university libraries

Model	Unstandardized B	Std Error	Standardized β	T	p-value	Decision
Constant	55.718	2.018		27.610	.000	Significant
Attribution Style Scores	-.315	.230	-.345	-1.37	.172	Not Sig.
Self-Esteem Scores	.316	.018	.246	17.555	.000	Significant

As shown in Table 4, attribution style scores with β value of $-.345$ do not significantly predict librarians' work engagement, $t(2, 138) = -1.37, p=.172$. Since the p -value is more than 0.05 , the null hypothesis is not rejected. In addition, self-esteem scores with β value of $.246$ significantly predicted librarians' work engagement, $t(2, 138) = 17.555, p=.000$. Since the p -value is less than 0.05 .

librarians' work engagement than attribution style.

The finding of the present study appears somewhat unexpected considering that attribution theory, as proposed by Weiner (1985), links attribution style with motivation and performance. However, the insignificant relationship observed in this study indicates that other contextual factors may exert stronger influence on librarians' work engagement within the university library environment. In addition, Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2000) posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are critical drivers of engagement. This suggests that the effect of attribution style on work engagement may be mediated by these psychological needs.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that a low positive and insignificant relationship existed between attribution style and work engagement among librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. This suggests that librarians' tendencies to attribute success or failure to internal or external factors have little or no meaningful influence on their level of work engagement. The weak relationship implies that other factors, such as organizational support, leadership style, or personality traits, may play a more prominent role in shaping

Although there is a paucity of empirical studies examining the relationship between attribution style and work engagement, the findings of the present study are partly consistent with the observation of Hurley (2023), who indicated that pessimistic attribution styles have the potential to predict lower levels of engagement, while optimistic

attribution styles are associated with higher engagement. This implies that attribution style may still play a role in engagement, although its influence may not be strong in structured work environments such as university libraries, where job roles and expectations are clearly defined.

In further agreement with the present study, Li, Liang, Bao, and Zhang (2022) found that external attribution style positively moderated the relationship between relative deprivation and employees' service innovation behaviour. Their findings also revealed that external attribution style strengthened the mediation effect between organizational fairness and service innovation behaviour. However, the findings of the present study slightly contradict those of Ngunu, Kinai, Ndambuki, and Mwaura (2019), who reported that most students attributed both success and failure to internal, uncontrollable, and unstable factors. They further noted that causal attributions were significantly related to job performance.

The findings of the study showed that a high positive and significant relationship existed between self-esteem and work engagement among librarians in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. This indicates that librarians with higher levels of self-esteem tend to demonstrate higher levels of work engagement. The strong correlation suggests a substantial linear relationship, implying that self-esteem contributes significantly to explaining variations in librarians' work engagement. This finding aligns with the Self-Esteem Theory proposed by Branden (1994), which posits that self-esteem influences individuals' confidence and motivation, thereby affecting their performance and level of engagement. Librarians who possess high self-esteem are more likely to feel competent, valued, and motivated in their professional roles, which in turn enhances their engagement at work. Similarly, Cherry (2019) observed that self-

esteem plays a significant role in an individual's motivation and success in life. According to Cherry, individuals with low self-esteem may struggle to achieve success in school or the workplace because they doubt their abilities. Conversely, individuals with healthy self-esteem tend to approach life with a positive and assertive attitude, which enables them to pursue and accomplish their goals effectively.

The statistical significance of the relationship observed in this study further suggests that the association between self-esteem and work engagement is unlikely to have occurred by chance, thereby providing empirical support for the hypothesis that these two variables are closely related. Although there is limited research specifically examining self-esteem and librarians' work engagement, Tella, Ayeni, and Popoola (2017) found that self-esteem encourages librarians to persist in achieving their goals and to make sound decisions that lead to meaningful accomplishments. Such individuals are often willing to undertake more challenging tasks and demonstrate higher levels of creativity. This observation also aligns with the Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that positive self-perceptions enhance intrinsic motivation and persistence, key elements of work engagement. However, the findings of the present study differ from those of Udem and Ogbonna (2024), who reported a very low positive and insignificant relationship between librarians' self-esteem and their job performance in federal university libraries in South-East, Nigeria. This difference in findings may be attributed to variations in research focus, time differences, or contextual factors within the study environments.

The findings of the study revealed that 32.7% of the total variability in librarians' work engagement could be explained jointly by attribution style and self-

esteem. This indicates that while attribution style and self-esteem are relevant predictors of work engagement, they are not the sole determinants. Other factors may also contribute significantly to explaining variations in librarians' work engagement. This finding is consistent with complex models of work engagement, such as the Job Demands Resources (JDR) Model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), which posits that multiple factors including job-related, personal, and organizational resources interact to influence employee engagement. In this framework, attribution style and self-esteem can be considered personal resources that contribute to employees' engagement levels.

The findings therefore suggest that while attribution style and self-esteem are important, other variables, such as age, professional experience, personality traits, leadership style, and organizational support, may also play significant roles in determining librarians' work engagement in university libraries. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (2000) suggests that psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness may interact with personal characteristics like self-esteem and attribution style to shape employees' engagement at work.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that attribution style has a positive but insignificant relationship with librarians' work engagement, while self-esteem has a positive and significant relationship with librarians' work engagement in university libraries in South-East, Nigeria.

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

1. University authorities should organize workshops on attributional retraining in order to enhance librarians' work engagement.

2. Library administrators should provide orientation programmes and competency building initiatives aimed at strengthening librarians' professional confidence and engagement, regardless of their attribution patterns.
3. Librarians should explore additional factors that may influence work engagement, such as job autonomy, leadership style, and organizational support in order to gain a broader understanding of the determinants of work engagement beyond attribution style and self-esteem.

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