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Principals Leadership Competence and Teachers Job Satisfaction in Ondo North Public and Private Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study examines the nexus between principals' leadership competence and teachers' job satisfaction in public and private secondary schools in Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo State, Nigeria. It explores whether school ownership influences teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership abilities and their own job satisfaction.

Design/methodology/approach - The study employs a descriptive survey research design. A structured questionnaire was administered to 150 teachers (75 from public and 75 from private secondary schools) selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests at a 0.05 level of significance.

Findings - Findings indicate no statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership competence between public and private secondary schools ($X^2 = 1.26, df = 14, p < 0.05$). Similarly, no significant difference was found in teachers' job satisfaction across the two school types ($X^2 = 0.443, df = 9, p < 0.05$). Teachers rated collegiality and fair treatment highest, while recognition and career advancement were rated lowest.

Research limitations/implications - The study is limited to one senatorial district in Ondo State, Nigeria, and employs a cross-sectional design using self-report measures. Future research should extend to other districts and adopt mixed-methods approaches.

Practical implications - Insights from this study inform education policymakers, school administrators, and private school proprietors in Nigeria, guiding them in strengthening leadership practices and teacher recognition systems across both public and private schools.

Originality/value - This study contributes empirical evidence from the Nigerian context demonstrating that school ownership is not a significant determinant of leadership competence or teacher satisfaction, and that leadership quality and collegial relationships are more central to teacher motivation.

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1. Introduction

School leadership remains a key factor in determining a school's effectiveness, instructional quality, and capacity for continuous improvement. Successful principals do more than handle administrative tasks; they set instructional priorities, motivate teachers, foster professional cultures, and create conditions that promote improvements in teaching and learning. Research and theory consistently indicate that effective school leadership impacts student outcomes indirectly by enhancing teacher motivation, encouraging collaboration, overseeing instruction, and shaping the school climate (Day et al., 2016; Haglund and Glaés-Coutts, 2023; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Therefore, principals' leadership skills are crucial for aligning school goals, managing staff, and maintaining educational standards.

Teacher job satisfaction is vital because teachers are the primary agents who translate school improvement into classroom practice. It reflects teachers' positive views of their work, encompassing fulfillment, recognition, belonging, autonomy, and fairness at work (Spector, 1997; Locke, 1976; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017). Research highlights that factors like working conditions, administrative support, workload, recognition, collegial relationships, and professional development are key to teacher satisfaction (Dinham and Scott, 2000; Schad and Johnsson, 2019; Toropova et al., 2021, 2023). Low satisfaction links to absenteeism, lower commitment, emotional burnout, and leaving the profession. Conversely, higher satisfaction promotes retention, engagement, and school unity (Ingersoll, 2001; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Schad et al., 2022; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017).

The connection between principals' leadership skills and teachers' job satisfaction can be understood through various leadership perspectives. Transformational leadership suggests that leaders boost motivation and satisfaction by articulating a clear vision, providing personalized support, and fostering intellectual growth among followers (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Top et al., 2015). Instructional leadership focuses on principals' ability to set academic goals, oversee instruction, provide constructive feedback, and promote professional development, thereby enhancing teachers' confidence and satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021b; Robinson et al., 2008). Distributed leadership advocates for involving teachers in decision-making and collective problem-solving, fostering a sense of ownership, trust, and teamwork (Harris et al., 2022; Nadeem, 2024; Shal et al., 2024; Spillane, 2012). Additionally, trust plays a key role, as fair, transparent, and supportive relationships between principals and teachers influence how leadership practices are perceived (Conan Simpson, 2021; Price, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Van Maele and

Van Houtte, 2012).

In many developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, principals are vital because schools often struggle with resource shortages, policy issues, large class sizes, and limited professional development. Research on teacher satisfaction in these areas shows that the internal organization of schools greatly impacts teacher motivation and retention, especially where systemic support is lacking (Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007; Peprah Opoku et al., 2025; Sahito and Vaisanen, 2020). In Nigeria, the rollout of education policies has been constrained by resource deficits, administrative challenges, and disparities between policy aims and school conditions (Alukagberie et al., 2023; Enyiazu, 2022; Okoroma, 2006). In such environments, principals' abilities in communication, supervision, resource management, conflict resolution, and staff motivation are particularly crucial.

Public and private secondary schools offer a valuable comparison because they operate under different governance and accountability systems. Public schools tend to be more bureaucratically regulated and may face resource constraints, while private schools often have greater managerial flexibility but face higher performance expectations, heavier workloads, and greater job insecurity. Evidence shows that school ownership alone doesn't fully determine teachers' satisfaction; organizational factors like administrative support, school climate, recognition, workload, and professional development opportunities generally have a greater impact (Noori, 2023; Shabbir and Wei, 2015; Toropova et al., 2021). Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether these structural differences lead to notable variations in teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership abilities and job satisfaction, specifically in the Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo State, Nigeria (Bush and Glover, 2016; Shabbir and Wei, 2015). This unresolved issue forms the research gap that this study aims to address.

This study explores the relationship between principals' leadership skills and teachers' job satisfaction in both public and private secondary schools within Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo State, Nigeria. It specifically examines teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership abilities, evaluates overall job satisfaction, and assesses notable differences between public and private schools. The research is valuable for policymakers, school leaders, private school owners, and education scholars, as it provides district-specific insights into whether leadership quality or school ownership influences teacher satisfaction more. The paper is structured with Section 2 detailing the methodology, including design, population, sample, and data analysis. Section 3 reports findings, while Section 4 interprets these results in light of existing studies and theories. The final section, Section 5, offers conclusions, policy implications, recommendations, and ideas for future research.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is ideal for systematically collecting quantitative data on existing attitudes, perceptions, and conditions without modifying the variables. This approach allows researchers to identify patterns within a specific population and explore natural differences or relationships among variables in educational contexts (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saeed and Shahbaz, 2025). It is especially effective for school-based research, as it facilitates efficient data collection from participants while maintaining the authentic environment of educational leadership and teachers' experiences (Bonyadi, 2023; Fraenkel et al., 2022; Igbokwe, 2012; Kolodii et al., 2023). In this case, the design was appropriate because it allowed an assessment of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership skills, teachers' job satisfaction, and the current conditions of secondary schools. Additionally, it enabled comparisons of responses between public and private schools without any experimental manipulation.

2.2 Population and Sample

The study involved 304 public and 422 private secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. The target population included all full-time teachers, encompassing government-employed teachers in public schools and full-time teachers in private schools. Clearly defining the population and target population is vital in educational research because it determines the group to which results can be generalized (Fraenkel et al., 2022). Teachers in Ondo State were appropriate for this research since they work in both public and private schools and can evaluate principals' leadership skills as well as their own job satisfaction. A multistage sampling method was employed, following established procedures for studying large, geographically dispersed educational populations (Cohen et al., 2018). First, Ondo State was divided into three senatorial districts, with Ondo North District selected purposively. Subsequently, Akoko South-East, Akoko North-East, and Owo Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly chosen. Within each LGA, one public and one private secondary school were randomly selected. From each of the six schools, 25 teachers were randomly picked, totaling 150 teachers—75 from public and 75 from private schools—a sample appropriate for a descriptive survey (Gay et al., 2018; Nassaji, 2025).

2.3 Instrument Development

The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire titled "The Nexus Between Principals' Leadership Competence and Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Ondo North Senatorial District." It aimed to gauge teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership skills and their own job satisfaction. Questionnaires are well-suited for descriptive surveys because they facilitate the consistent collection of data on perceptions, experiences, and attitudes in educational settings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2022). The instrument comprised three sections: Section A collected demographic and school-related information; Section B had 15 items assessing principals' leadership competence, including instructional supervision, decision-making, communication, motivation, and school-community leadership; and Section C included 10 items on teachers' job satisfaction, focusing on recognition, workload, administrative support, professional growth, working conditions, collegiality, and career advancement. Responses used a 4-point Likert scale from Very True = 4 to Very Untrue = 1, consistent with typical Likert measures for attitudes and perceptions (Joshi et al., 2015; Likert, 1932; Salkind, 2012). The questionnaire was adapted from existing instruments, tailored for this study, reviewed by the supervisor and educational measurement experts, and revised before final deployment (Cohen et al., 2018; DeVellis, 2017; Kirabira et al., 2023).

2.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection involved directly administering questionnaires, a method suitable for survey-based educational research, as it ensures standardized distribution, easier access for respondents, and systematic collection of completed forms (Cohen et al., 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2022). The researcher personally visited each selected public and private secondary school in the Ondo North Senatorial District, first obtaining permission from the respective principals before administering the questionnaires to the selected teachers. The questionnaires were then given to respondents, who had two weeks to complete them carefully and independently. After the response period, the researcher returned to the schools to collect the completed questionnaires. This direct approach was chosen because it encouraged greater participation, allowed clarification

of procedural issues as needed, and was appropriate for a school setting where online access might be inconsistent (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). All 150 questionnaires distributed were collected, resulting in a 100% response rate. This minimized nonresponse bias and enhanced data completeness (Baruch and Holtom, 2008; Fincham, 2008; Osorio-Gómez et al., 2024).

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The age distribution revealed that the majority of teachers fell within the 21–30-year age range (47.3%), followed by those under 20 (34.7%). Female respondents slightly outnumbered males (56.0%), and most participants were married (74.0%). Regarding qualifications, respondents were fairly evenly spread across N.C.E., B.Ed./B.A./B.Sc., and M.Ed./M.A. and higher categories, reflecting a well-qualified teaching workforce. Most respondents had over 11 years of teaching experience, indicating a predominantly experienced group. The sample was equally divided between public and private secondary schools, with 75 teachers from each, ensuring a balanced basis for comparison.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20 years	52	34.7
	21–30 years	71	47.3
	31 years and above	27	18.0
Gender	Male	66	44.0
	Female	84	56.0
Marital Status	Single	39	26.0
	Married	111	74.0
Qualification	N.C.E.	48	30.0
	B.Ed./B.A./B.Sc.	59	36.9
	M.Ed./M.A. and above	53	33.1
Teaching Experience	Below 5 years	13	8.7
	5–10 years	32	21.3
	11–20 years	46	30.7
	Above 20 years	59	39.3
School Status	Public	75	50.0
	Private	75	50.0

Note. $N = 150$. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

3.2 Principals' Leadership Competence

Table 2 presents teachers' evaluations of principals' leadership skills in both public and private secondary schools. The overall Grand Mean Weighted Value was 2.84, reflecting a generally positive or satisfactory view of principals' leadership, as the mean exceeds the 2.50 benchmark. The highest-rated aspects were principals' ability to motivate staff through non-monetary recognition ($M = 3.03$) and make informed decisions using school performance data ($M = 3.00$). These findings suggest that teachers see principals as fairly effective in motivating staff and decision-making. The lowest-rated areas were setting high academic standards and tracking progress ($M = 2.66$) and resolving staff conflicts fairly and efficiently ($M = 2.81$), indicating where leadership qualities could be strengthened.

3.3 Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Table 3 displays teachers' job satisfaction levels across the surveyed schools. The Grand Mean Weighted Value was 2.54, signifying an overall satisfactory job satisfaction based on the decision rule of Mean ≥ 2.50 . The most highly rated item was the sense of belonging and collegiality among staff ($M = 2.85$), followed by fair treatment and respect from school leadership ($M = 2.67$). These results indicate that interpersonal relationships and perceived fairness are the strongest areas of teacher satisfaction. In contrast, the lowest-rated items were satisfaction with recognition for their work ($M = 2.07$) and opportunities for career advancement ($M = 2.43$). These findings reveal that recognition and career growth are the weakest aspects of teachers' job satisfaction.

3.4 Testing of Hypotheses

Table 4 presents a comparison of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership skills in public and private schools across 15 different indicators. The average scores for public schools ranged from 2.51 to 2.88, while for private schools, they ranged from 2.55 to 2.91. All indicators had an expected mean of 2.50, indicating that teachers in both sectors generally viewed their principals' abilities positively above the baseline. In public schools, the highest average was for effective school resource management ($M = 2.88$), followed by non-monetary staff motivation ($M = 2.85$), and recognition of teachers' achievements ($M = 2.81$). In private schools, data-informed decision-making was rated highest ($M = 2.91$), with delegation and follow-up ($M = 2.81$), resource management ($M = 2.81$), encouragement of instructional innovation ($M = 2.79$), and parent/community relations ($M = 2.79$) also rated prominently. Although some minor differences emerged between public and private schools at the item level, these differences were small and did not indicate a significant divergence in teachers' overall perceptions. The overall findings suggest that principals in both school types are viewed as demonstrating similar competence in communication, instructional support, decision-making, motivation, resource management, and academic monitoring.

Table 5 shows the results of the Chi-square test examining whether there is a significant difference in principals' leadership competence between public and private secondary schools in Ondo North Senatorial District. Each group had 75 respondents, providing a balanced basis for hypothesis testing. The calculated Chi-square value was 1.26 with 14 degrees of freedom, which is less than the critical value of 23.685 at the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating no significant difference in teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership competence across the two school types. This aligns with the findings in Table 4, where most item-level mean scores for

Table 2. Teachers' Perceptions of Principals' Leadership Competence

Statement Items	VT	T	U	VU	Weighted Total	Mean	Decision
The principal provides clear instructional goals and communicates them to teachers.	43	49	26	32	403	2.69	A
The principal regularly observes classroom teaching and provides constructive feedback.	51	50	23	26	426	2.84	A
The principal organizes and supports professional development activities for teachers.	40	58	25	27	411	2.74	A
The principal makes informed decisions based on school performance data.	60	51	18	21	450	3.00	A
The principal delegates responsibilities appropriately and follows up.	50	55	21	24	431	2.87	A
The principal resolves staff conflicts fairly and promptly.	54	43	24	29	422	2.81	A
The principal encourages teachers to try new instructional methods.	51	48	27	24	426	2.84	A
The principal recognizes and praises teachers' achievements.	53	52	24	21	437	2.91	A
The principal involves teachers in important school decisions.	57	51	23	19	446	2.97	A
The principal manages school resources effectively.	44	49	29	28	409	2.73	A
The principal communicates expectations and policies clearly and consistently.	46	53	27	24	421	2.81	A
The principal demonstrates integrity and fair treatment of all staff.	51	47	25	27	422	2.81	A
The principal motivates staff through non-monetary recognition.	56	59	19	16	455	3.03	A
The principal maintains good relationships with parents and the school community.	51	53	17	29	426	2.84	A
The principal sets high academic standards and monitors progress.	44	42	33	31	399	2.66	A
Grand Mean Weighted Value						2.84	A

Note. VT = Very True; T = True; U = Untrue; VU = Very Untrue; A = Accepted/Agree. Decision rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Agree.

Table 3. Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Statement Items	VT	T	U	VU	Weighted Total	Mean	Decision
I feel satisfied with my current job as a teacher.	38	41	35	36	381	2.54	A
I am satisfied with the level of recognition I receive for my work.	24	19	50	57	310	2.07	R
I am satisfied with the professional development opportunities available to me.	34	37	40	39	366	2.44	R
I feel my workload is reasonable and manageable.	40	35	39	36	379	2.53	A
I am satisfied with the level of support I receive from the school administration.	42	44	33	31	397	2.65	A
I feel fairly treated and respected by the school leadership.	46	43	27	34	401	2.67	A
I am satisfied with the working conditions, including classrooms and teaching materials.	38	41	43	28	389	2.59	A
I am satisfied with my opportunities for career advancement in this school.	36	31	44	39	364	2.43	R
I feel a strong sense of belonging and collegiality among staff.	48	51	32	19	428	2.85	A
I would recommend this school as a good place to work for other teachers.	39	44	36	31	391	2.61	A
Grand Mean Weighted Value						2.54	A

Note. VT = Very True; T = True; U = Untrue; VU = Very Untrue; A = Accepted/Agree; R = Rejected/Disagree. Decision rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Agree; Mean $<$ 2.50 = Reject.

both schools were above the expected mean of 2.50, with only minor variations. Overall, according to the Chi-square test, principals in both public and private secondary schools are perceived to have similar leadership competence.

Table 6 compares public and private school teachers' job satisfaction across 10 indicators. Public school teachers' mean scores ranged from 2.38 to 2.70, while private school teachers' scores ranged from 1.84 to 2.82, with an expected mean of 2.50 for each. Among public teachers, the highest satisfaction was for sense of belonging and collegiality ($M = 2.70$), followed closely by fair treatment and respect from school leadership ($M = 2.69$), support from administration ($M = 2.66$), and manageable workload ($M = 2.62$). Private teachers also scored highest on sense of belonging and collegiality ($M = 2.82$), then fair treatment and respect ($M = 2.77$), satisfaction with working conditions ($M = 2.59$), and admin support ($M = 2.58$). Lower scores were observed for recognition received, notably among private teachers ($M = 1.84$), and for professional development opportunities ($M = 2.17$). These findings suggest that collegiality, fairness, and administrative support are stronger predictors of satisfaction, while recognition and professional growth are weaker. Overall, both public and private school teachers showed moderate satisfaction levels, with differences across specific areas rather than a consistent pattern.

Table 7 shows the results of the chi-square test comparing teachers' job satisfaction based on school status. It involves 75 teachers from public secondary schools and 75 from private secondary schools, maintaining equal group sizes for comparison. The Chi-square value was 0.443, well below the critical value of 16.919 at 9 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 significance level. This indicates that the null hypothesis is supported, meaning there is no significant difference in job satisfaction between teachers in public and private secondary schools in Ondo North Senatorial District. This finding is consistent with the descriptive data in Table 6, which indicate moderate satisfaction levels in both groups, particularly regarding collegiality, fair treatment, administrative support, and working conditions. Although private school teachers had slightly lower scores in some areas, such as recognition and professional development, these differences were not statistically significant. Overall, the data suggest that teachers' job satisfaction patterns are similar across school types, and school status alone does not significantly affect their satisfaction in this context.

Table 4. Public–Private Comparison of Principals’ Leadership Competence

Leadership Competence Item	Public Observed Mean	Expected Mean	Private Observed Mean	Expected Mean
Clear instructional goals and communication	2.510	2.500	2.590	2.500
Classroom observation and constructive feedback	2.580	2.500	2.620	2.500
Professional development support	2.530	2.500	2.600	2.500
Data-informed decision-making	2.730	2.500	2.910	2.500
Delegation and follow-up	2.560	2.500	2.810	2.500
Fair and prompt conflict resolution	2.550	2.500	2.720	2.500
Encouragement of instructional innovation	2.560	2.500	2.790	2.500
Recognition and praise of teachers’ achievements	2.810	2.500	2.680	2.500
Participative decision-making	2.740	2.500	2.590	2.500
Effective school resource management	2.880	2.500	2.810	2.500
Clear communication of expectations and policies	2.630	2.500	2.760	2.500
Integrity and fair treatment of staff	2.620	2.500	2.760	2.500
Non-monetary staff motivation	2.850	2.500	2.550	2.500
Parent and community relations	2.680	2.500	2.790	2.500
Academic standards and progress monitoring	2.690	2.500	2.720	2.500

Note. Expected Mean = 2.50.

Table 5. Chi-Square Test of Difference in Principals’ Leadership Competence by School Status

Group	N	df	X ² Calculated	X ² Tabulated	Decision
Public	75	14	1.26	23.685	Ho Accepted
Private	75				

Note. Level of significance = 0.05. Since X² calculated < X² tabulated, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 6. Public–Private Comparison of Teachers’ Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction Item	Public Observed Mean	Expected Mean	Private Observed Mean	Expected Mean
Satisfaction with current job	2.5100	2.5000	2.0300	2.5000
Satisfaction with recognition received	2.3800	2.5000	1.8400	2.5000
Satisfaction with professional development opportunities	2.4400	2.5000	2.1700	2.5000
Reasonable and manageable workload	2.6200	2.5000	2.4600	2.5000
Support from school administration	2.6600	2.5000	2.5800	2.5000
Fair treatment and respect by school leadership	2.6900	2.5000	2.7700	2.5000
Satisfaction with working conditions	2.5200	2.5000	2.5900	2.5000
Opportunities for career advancement	2.5100	2.5000	2.4100	2.5000
Sense of belonging and collegiality	2.7000	2.5000	2.8200	2.5000
Recommendation of school as a good workplace	2.5900	2.5000	2.5300	2.5000

Note. Expected Mean = 2.5000.

Table 7. Chi-Square Test of Difference in Teachers’ Job Satisfaction by School Status

Group	N	df	X ² Calculated	X ² Tabulated	Decision
Public	75	9	0.443	16.919	Ho Accepted
Private	75				

Note. Level of significance = 0.05. Since X² calculated < X² tabulated, the null hypothesis was accepted.

4. Discussion

This study found that teachers' views of principals' leadership skills were similar across public and private secondary schools in the Ondo North Senatorial District. Likewise, there was no significant difference in job satisfaction levels between the two school types. The data showed that principals' leadership qualities were generally regarded positively, with a grand mean weighted value of 2.84, while teachers' job satisfaction was moderate yet satisfactory, with a value of 2.54. Overall, the results suggest that whether a school is public or private has little impact on teachers' perceptions of leadership or their job satisfaction. Instead, leadership practices and satisfaction levels are quite comparable across both types of schools in the area.

The absence of a significant difference in principals' leadership competence between public and private schools suggests that effective leadership depends more on the quality of leadership behaviors demonstrated by principals than on school ownership. This aligns with the perspective that leadership for learning encompasses essential practices such as setting goals, supervising instruction, providing professional support, and fostering a positive school climate, all of which are applicable across different school settings (Hallinger, 2005, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Moreover, Day et al. (2016) find that successful principals blend transformational and instructional strategies to enhance school outcomes, while Robinson et al. (2008) highlight that leadership effects are strongest when focused directly on teaching and learning. These findings also support recent evidence indicating that instructional and distributed leadership practices boost teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction through a supportive culture and collaboration (Liu et al., 2021b). Meta-analyses further confirm that various leadership styles affect teacher attitudes and satisfaction across different contexts, rather than being confined to a single ownership model (Hallinger, 2005; Liu et al., 2021b). Additionally, Dou et al. (2017) suggest that the link between autonomy, principal leadership, and teacher outcomes depends on how leadership is enacted within the school, not solely on formal governance structures.

The similar levels of teachers' job satisfaction in public and private schools suggest that satisfaction depends more on school working conditions than on ownership type. This aligns with Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), who identify school context factors, stress, belonging, and motivation as key to teacher satisfaction. Likewise, Toropova et al. (2021, 2023) point to working conditions, teacher traits, cooperation, and workload as critical influences. Caprara et al. (2003); Lopes and Oliveira (2020) show that both individual and school factors are important, while Sims (2020) connect working conditions to satisfaction and workplace mobility. Teachers reported higher satisfaction with collegiality and fair treatment, but lower satisfaction with recognition and career growth, indicating that relational factors are stronger than reward structures. This aligns with findings that organizational climate, self-efficacy, and leadership support influence satisfaction (Fang and Qi, 2023; Jentsch et al., 2023; Ortan et al., 2021; Xie and Zou, 2025). It also supports broader evidence that job satisfaction affects retention, burnout, turnover, and instructional quality (Harrison et al., 2023; Li and Yao, 2022; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Wartenberg et al., 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries, this is especially relevant because satisfaction often depends more on systemic conditions, professional support, and school climate than on ownership alone (Peprah Opoku et al., 2025; Sahito and Vaisanen, 2020).

The link between principals' leadership abilities and teachers' job satisfaction is clear, as evidenced by high leadership ratings and moderate satisfaction levels. Although causality is not established, results suggest effective leadership may create conditions that improve teacher satisfaction through recognition, fairness, collegial relationships, instructional support, and communication. Recent meta-analyses confirm that various leadership styles are consistently associated with teacher satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021b; Shi et al., 2024). Instructional and distributed leadership are particularly relevant since they promote collaboration, autonomy, and a positive school culture—factors linked to greater job satisfaction (Liu et al., 2021a,b). Data from TALIS and other international studies support that distributed leadership, teacher self-efficacy, and professional collaboration are vital pathways to satisfaction (Sun and Xia, 2018; Torres, 2019; García Torres, 2019). Recent research on satisfaction. But transformational leadership enhances satisfaction by supporting teacher well-being and motivation (Ma et al., 2025), and it reduces role stress through stronger affective commitment and job satisfaction (Yong and Zhang, 2025). Leadership styles such as authentic and paternalistic leadership are connected to higher engagement, commitment, and satisfaction, emphasizing healthy relationships as key to leadership impact (Alazmi and Al-Mahdy, 2022; Shi et al., 2020). Trust also plays a crucial role, as teachers' confidence in leadership shapes their satisfaction and professional security (Van Maele and Van Houtte, 2012). Furthermore, the study's low scores for recognition and career growth highlight the ongoing need for professional development and improved working conditions, reinforcing the importance of these factors in leadership efforts (Barbieri et al., 2019; Burkhauser, 2017; Smet, 2022).

The findings support a broad view of school leadership, in which transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership collectively influence teacher attitudes. Transformational leadership is crucial because principals who inspire, support, and motivate teachers can reduce stress and increase satisfaction (Day et al., 2016; Yong and Zhang, 2025). Likewise, instructional leadership plays a role, as principals' emphasis on teaching, supervision, feedback, and shared academic goals positively affects teacher attitudes and overall school progress (Hallinger, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). Distributed leadership explains why collegiality and participative environments enhance teacher satisfaction, especially when teachers share responsibility and collaborate (García Torres, 2019; Harrison et al., 2023; Sun and Xia, 2018; Torres, 2019). The trust perspective also highlights how fairness, respect, and credible leadership relationships turn leadership skills into higher teacher satisfaction (Van Maele and Van Houtte, 2012).

The study's limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting its findings. Firstly, it was restricted to Ondo North Senatorial District, which limits the generalizability to other areas, states, or the entire country. Secondly, its cross-sectional approach captured teachers' perceptions only at a single point in time, making it impossible to observe changes over time. Thirdly, the data was collected via self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by perception bias, social desirability, or recent workplace experiences.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that principals' leadership competence and teachers' job satisfaction in public and private secondary schools in Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo State, Nigeria, are relatively comparable across school ownership categories. The findings indicate that differences between public and private schools are not the primary factor shaping teachers' perceptions of leadership competence or their job satisfaction. Rather, the quality of leadership practice appears to be more central in creating a supportive school environment where teachers feel respected, motivated, involved, and professionally valued. Principals who communicate clearly, support instructional improvement, manage resources effectively, recognize teachers' contributions, and promote collegial relationships are more likely to strengthen teacher morale and commitment. Therefore, efforts to improve teacher satisfaction should focus less on the distinction between public and private schools and more on strengthening leadership capacity across both sectors. It is recommended that education authorities and private school proprietors provide regular leadership training for principals, support continuous professional development for teachers, institutionalize teacher recognition systems, and encourage participatory decision-making within schools. Future studies should extend the investigation to other districts and

states in Nigeria, adopt mixed-methods designs, and examine how different leadership practices influence teacher satisfaction, student learning outcomes, and overall school effectiveness. Competent school leadership remains essential for improving teacher motivation and sustaining educational quality in Nigeria.

Ethical Statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the relevant institutional research authority at Upland College of Education, Ifira/Ipesi-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, before data collection commenced. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and the principles of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments, as applicable to educational research involving questionnaire-based human participation. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants, and all responses were treated confidentially and used solely for academic research purposes. All sources used in this study were appropriately cited and acknowledged in accordance with academic integrity and publication ethics.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. Permission was first obtained from the principals of the participating public and private secondary schools in Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo State, Nigeria. Subsequently, the selected teachers were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the assurance that their responses would be treated confidentially and used solely for academic research purposes. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the questionnaire.

Author Contributions

Adepoju Oladehinde Joseph, PhD, contributed to the conceptualization of the study, theoretical framework development, methodology design, literature review, formal analysis, interpretation of findings, and original manuscript drafting. The author also conducted critical revision, manuscript editing, and final approval of the submitted version.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with the participating schools and teachers in Ondo North Senatorial District, Ondo State, Nigeria. The data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to teachers in public and private secondary schools and contain responses regarding principals' leadership competence and teachers' job satisfaction. Any additional information or materials supporting the study's findings can be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The research was conducted independently, and all interpretations, analyses, and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT to assist with organizing the literature, refining language, structuring the work academically, and ensuring formatting consistency. No generative artificial intelligence tool was used to produce the research data, theoretical analysis, findings, or scholarly conclusions of this study. Any language refinement support was limited to improving readability, grammar, and formatting, and did not replace the author's intellectual contribution, critical interpretation, conceptual analysis, or responsibility for the content. After using this tool, the author reviewed, verified, edited, and approved the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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