

SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PHUBBING BEHAVIOUR, TEACHERS' TASK PERFORMANCE AND SATISFACTION IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS, EDUCATION DISTRICT V, LAGOS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Stakeholders believe that phones can be valuable tools for improving efficiency and satisfaction, but phone misuse, particularly through behaviours such as phubbing, may likely pose risks to teachers' task performance, motivation, and the trust that sustains healthy school relationships. This study, therefore, examined school principals' phubbing behaviour, teachers' task performance, and satisfaction in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research hypotheses. The study used a descriptive survey research design, and the population consisted of 2,825 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, while the sample size was 352 participants who were selected using the multi-stage sampling technique. A self-designed, structured, validated questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of .70 was used for data collection. The instrument was designed on a four-point Likert-type scale. Data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences at the .05 level of significance. The study revealed that principals' phubbing behaviour relates to teachers' task performance and job satisfaction. Based on these findings, it was therefore recommended that school principals should be sensitized through professional development workshops on the negative impact of phubbing, ensuring they adopt attentive leadership practices that foster effective communication, instructional coordination, and improved teacher task performance. Conclusively, adequate concentration during discussions with teachers will aid effective communication and positively influence teachers' task performance and satisfaction.

Keywords: Phubbing, Behaviour, Task, Performance, Satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' task performance and satisfaction describe how well you plan, instruct, manage classrooms, and support learning, and how you evaluate your work context and relationships, measured with validated tools like the Teaching Satisfaction Scale (Pretorius &

Padmanabhanunni, 2023; Yuan et al., 2022). Satisfaction aligns with classroom quality, lower turnover intent, and stronger student outcomes, so leadership, workload, and discipline support matter (Wartenberg et al., 2023; IEA, 2025). This nexus makes leadership a practical lever for performance and satisfaction in schools (Wartenberg et al.,

2023). Leadership is central to daily teacher experience, so specific leader behaviors that interrupt interaction deserve scrutiny. Phubbing, phone use during face-to-face exchanges, signals inattention and social exclusion in meetings and supervision sessions (Knausenberger et al., 2022). In hierarchical settings, leader phubbing predicts lower trust, weaker rapport, and poorer follower outcomes through social distance and reduced motivation (Xu et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2022).

This frames principals' phubbing as a plausible disruptor of teacher satisfaction and task execution (Xu et al., 2022). When principals phub teachers, perceived exclusion increases, trust drops, and engagement falls, which undermines core instructional tasks and daily performance, linking communication quality to teacher outcomes (Koçak, 2021; Xu et al., 2022; Wartenberg et al., 2023). This pathway aligns a clear mechanism, social distance, and trust, with observable teaching work and satisfaction metrics (Xu et al., 2022; Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2023).

This issue about the phubbing behavior of leaders has been reported in different countries across the world. According to Xu et al. (2022), leader phubbing in China lowered performance through social distance and trust erosion. Similarly, in Pakistan and the United States, supervisor phubbing reduced engagement and performance via intrinsic motivation, moderated by enterprise social media use (Yousaf et al., 2022). Koçak (2021) also reported that being phubbed in Türkiye reduced daily engagement, while Knausenberger et al. (2022) found that experimental phubbing in Germany reduced trust and threatened needs, and phubbing harmed well-being in Spain (Garrido et al., 2024).

This indicates the various findings on how leadership practices, including phubbing affects employees. However, some findings are nuanced or indirect. In China, leader

phubbing's direct effect on performance weakened once mediators entered, with indirect paths via social distance and trust (Xu et al., 2022). Cross-cultural work showed moderation by digital collaboration tools (Yousaf et al., 2022). Systematic reviews in New Zealand noted benefits when phone use is structured for pedagogy, showing context dependence (Gath et al., 2024; Dorris et al., 2024). Large policy and mental health studies reported mixed associations between school phone policies and student outcomes, reinforcing the need to specify mechanisms and contexts (Goodyear et al., 2025). Locally, Lagos evidence points to leadership, conflict management, and professional development as dominant levers for performance and satisfaction, which may dilute any direct phone-related leadership effect (Orunbon et al., 2025; Orunbon et al., 2024).

These mixed results reflect variation in culture, policy, tools, and mediators like trust, exclusion, and engagement, which shape whether phubbing shows direct or indirect effects, and why findings differ across sites and methods (Xu et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2022; Wartenberg et al., 2023). This warrants targeted inquiry on principals' phubbing, teacher task performance, and satisfaction in a specific public secondary system. A clear empirical gap remains in selected Public Senior Secondary Schools in Education District V, Lagos, because this study appears to be the first within the reach of the researchers to examine principals' phubbing behavior, task performance, and satisfaction in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Education District V, Lagos.

Phubbing, a term derived from "phone" and "snubbing," refers to the act of ignoring individuals during face-to-face interactions by focusing on a mobile device. Phubbing behaviour refers to attending to a smartphone during a face-to-face exchange, which signals inattention and reallocates attention away from the interlocutor. Conceptually, phubbing is a socio-digital interruption that threatens

belonging, control, and meaning, producing negative mood and lower trust (Knausenberger et al., 2022). In organizations, supervisor or leader phubbing acts as a devaluation cue that increases social distance, erodes trust, reduces intrinsic motivation, and weakens engagement and performance (Xu et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2022). Studies also associate habitual phubbing with poorer psychological well-being, underscoring social costs beyond single interactions (Garrido et al., 2024).

In educational leadership, school principals' phubbing behaviour involves instances where principals divert attention from teachers, students, or stakeholders during official engagements to engage with their phones. In the school environment, principals are regarded as professional role models and good communication representatives, yet in moments when the model exhibits minimal precedent in distractibility or disengagement, it becomes an obstruction to authority and trusting connections (Krasnova et al., 2021). Such behaviour can hamper organizational climate, inter-professional relationships, as well as the attainment of the task on a day-to-day basis by teachers.

When principals attend to phones during staff conferences or feedback meetings, teachers may infer exclusion and lower regard, which depresses engagement and, over time, constrains task execution and job satisfaction. Evidence aligns with this interpretation, including findings that supervisor phubbing predicts weaker supervisor employee rapport, an effect that parallels supervision relationships in education (Langlais & Welch, 2025). The habit of using devices during meetings or categorical observation by the school principals in the school-based practice may be interpreted as bad manners or a lack of interest, and this may act as a gap point between the administration and the employees. This aligns with the media displacement theory, whereby

utilization of digital media is likely to substitute face-to-face exchanges (Vanden Abeele, 2020). In addition, social exchange theory means that the lack of attention and respect may be resolved by teachers through the reduction of organizational commitment (David & Roberts, 2021). Therefore, it is important to accept and overcome the issue of the phubbing behaviour of principals to ensure healthy relations with the rest of the professional environment, contribute to the establishment of a positive atmosphere at school, and enhance motivation, task performance, and satisfaction of teachers.

In public senior secondary schools, principals' phone use during face-to-face exchanges interrupts supervision and signals exclusion, which erodes trust and threatens teachers' task performance and satisfaction (Xu et al., 2022; Wartenberg et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2025). Focusing on performance, the question is whether principals' phubbing predicts teachers' task performance once social distance, trust, and engagement are considered, since these mechanisms shape planning, classroom management, and instructional delivery, the core of performance (Xu et al., 2022; Yousaf et al., 2022; Wartenberg et al., 2023). Principals' phubbing may relate to teachers' satisfaction because weak rapport often drives dissatisfaction and turnover intention, which strains collegial relations and stability (Yousaf et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2025; Wartenberg et al., 2023). HadiYuda and Suyono (2024) reported that boss phubbing significantly undermines trust, employee engagement, and ultimately job satisfaction. Obviously, when leaders engage in phubbing, employees feel less valued and engaged, which erodes their task performance and job satisfaction.

From the foregoing, it appears that disagreement still exists among researchers on the effects of phubbing on teachers and school sustainability. Similarly, there are limited research findings in Nigeria and particularly in Lagos State on the phubbing behavior of

principals and how it relates to task performance and satisfaction of teachers. To close this gap, the present study used a single primary-data questionnaire in selected Public Senior Secondary Schools in Education District V, Lagos, to measure principals' phubbing, teachers' task performance, and satisfaction.

Statement of The Problem

Teachers' task performance and job satisfaction are critical indicators of school effectiveness and quality education delivery. Task performance reflects teachers' ability to effectively plan lessons, deliver instruction, assess learners, and manage classrooms, all of which directly affect student achievement (Adeyemi, 2021). Similarly, job satisfaction influences teachers' motivation, commitment, and willingness to exert discretionary effort in carrying out professional duties (Ofoegbu, 2004). It appears that satisfied teachers tend to perform better, remain committed to their schools, and contribute to a positive organizational climate (Adeniji, 2022). Conversely, low task performance and dissatisfaction among teachers often result in poor instructional quality, absenteeism, and high turnover, thereby undermining school sustainability.

In recent years, however, attention has turned to subtle leadership behaviours that may shape teachers' work experiences. One such behaviour is *phubbing*; the act of ignoring or diverting attention away from others to focus on a mobile phone. It is believed that the widespread use of smartphones has transformed communication patterns in organizations, including schools. While digital devices facilitate efficiency and connectivity, their misuse in interpersonal interactions has given rise to a phenomenon known as *phubbing*: the act of ignoring others by diverting attention to one's phone. In educational settings, principals' phubbing behaviours during meetings, classroom observations, or informal interactions may inadvertently undermine

teachers' sense of respect, trust, and engagement. Such behaviours could affect teachers' motivation, satisfaction, and ultimately their task performance.

Similarly, principals' phubbing during meetings, interactions, or classroom visits may signal disrespect, weaken communication, and erode trust. Empirical research outside education has shown that supervisor phubbing negatively impacts employee satisfaction, trust, and performance (Roberts & David, 2017; Hadi Yuda & Suyono, 2024). Yet, little is known about how this behaviour influences teachers' task performance and satisfaction in schools, particularly in Nigeria, where teacher morale and school leadership remain ongoing concerns (Adeniji, 2022). Addressing this gap is essential because principals' leadership behaviours directly shape teachers' work environment. If principals' phubbing contributes to reduced teacher satisfaction and weakened task performance, it poses a significant threat to instructional quality and overall school effectiveness. This study, therefore, investigates the influence of principals' phubbing behaviour on teachers' task performance and satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship among principals' phubbing, teachers' task performance, and satisfaction in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Education District V, Lagos State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Investigate the relationship between principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' task performance.
2. Examine the relationship between principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' job satisfaction.

Research Hypotheses

1. Principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' task performance are not significantly related.

- Principals’ phubbing behaviour is not significantly related to teachers’ job satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consists of all 2,825 teachers in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, while the sample size of 352 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The multi-stage sampling approach was used for the selection of participants across the four zones under Education District V. At the first stage, the simple random sampling technique was used to select one zone to participate in the study, and this led to the selection of Amuwo Local Government Area. The second stage involved the use of a stratified random sampling technique to determine the number of teachers that will participate in each of the 20 senior secondary schools in the local government.

Thereafter, the simple random sampling technique was used to select the actual participants in each senior secondary school in the local government. A self-designed and structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into four sections (demographic information, principals’ phubbing behaviour, teachers’ task performance, and teachers’ satisfaction). The

validity of the instrument was assured by experts in educational management and behavioural psychology to confirm that the items are relevant, comprehensive, and aligned with the study’s objectives. The suggestions and corrections were considered to arrive at the final draft of the instrument. Reliability was established through internal consistency testing using the Cronbach alpha reliability after administering it to 40 participants who were not involved in the main study. A reliability coefficient value of .70 proved the instrument was reliable.

The instrument was administered by the researchers, and a total of 352 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, while 347 (98.6%) copies were returned. This study is therefore based on the 348 copies of the questionnaire that were returned. Pearson’s correlation was used to test the stated hypotheses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0, with significance set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study based on the stated research hypotheses.

H₀₁: Principals’ phubbing behaviour and teachers’ task performance are not significantly related.

Table 1: Principals’ Phubbing Behaviour and Teachers’ Task Performance

Variable	Mean	SD	N	df	r	p	Rmk	Decision
Principals’ Phubbing Behaviour	10.40	1.26	348	346	.72	.001	Sig	Reject H ₀₁
Teachers’ Task Performance	6.48	2.12						

Sig@ p<.05

Information in Table 1 shows the result of the analysis on principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers’ task performance in public senior

secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria. The result showed that there is a strong, positive and significant relationship between principals phubbing behaviour and teachers’ task performance in

public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria ($r(348)=.74$; $df=346$; $p<.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' task performance are not significantly related was rejected. This implies that principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' task performance are significantly

related in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Principals' phubbing behaviour is not significantly related to teachers' job satisfaction.

Table 2: Principals' Phubbing Behaviour and Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Variable	Mean	SD	N	df	r	p	Rmk	Decision
Principals' Phubbing Behaviour	10.40	1.26	348	346	.70	.002	Sig	Reject Ho ₂
Teachers' Job Satisfaction	4.23	1.63						

Sig@ p<.05

Information in Table 2 shows the result of the analysis on principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' job satisfaction in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria. The result showed that there is a strong, positive and significant relationship between principals phubbing behaviour and teachers' job satisfaction in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria ($r(348) = .70$; $df=346$; $p<.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that principals' phubbing behaviour is not significantly related to teachers' job satisfaction was rejected. This implies that principals' phubbing behaviour is significantly related to teachers' job satisfaction in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of hypothesis one showed that there is a strong, positive, and significant relationship between principals' phubbing behaviour and teachers' task performance in public senior secondary schools in Education District V, Lagos State, Nigeria. These findings suggest that inattentive leadership, marked by divided

attention due to phone use, undermines instructional coordination and efficient communication in schools. This aligns with the findings of a study by Orunbon, Isaac-Philips, and Onyene (2024), where it was found that participative, directive, and achievement-oriented leadership significantly predicted higher teacher performance in Lagos. Similarly, Obadimeji and Oredein (2022) established that effective digital leadership and respectful communication improved performance, whereas distracted communication eroded work culture. These findings are also consistent with Xu, Li, and Zheng (2022), who reported that leader phubbing in Chinese organizations reduced employee performance through weakened leader-member relationships.

The findings of the second research hypothesis showed that principals' phubbing behaviour significantly relates to teachers' job satisfaction. This shows that phubbing is perceived not merely as a distraction but as a relational insult that directly erodes teachers' workplace morale and psychological satisfaction. This result corroborates the findings of Orunbon, Ibikunle, and Badmus (2023), which demonstrated that attentive and supportive digital leadership in Lagos schools enhanced teacher morale and job satisfaction,

while inattentive behaviours created risks of disengagement. The findings also agree with Roberts and David (2020), who established that supervisor phubbing eroded employee trust and job satisfaction in workplace settings. Similarly, Blake, Hassard, Singh, and Teoh (2024) found that constant smartphone engagement by leaders eroded employee satisfaction and well-being.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Principals' phubbing behaviour, which involves prioritizing phone use over direct human interaction, poses a serious threat to effective school leadership because it diminishes open communication, weakens trust, and reduces the mutual respect necessary for a healthy school climate. When teachers or students feel ignored during conversations, they may interpret such behaviour as a lack of concern, which can negatively impact morale, motivation, task performance, satisfaction, and overall commitment to the school's vision. Sustainable leadership, therefore, demands that principals consciously model attentive and respectful communication by setting aside digital distractions during meetings, classroom visits, and interpersonal exchanges. By doing so, they not only strengthen relationships with staff and students but also foster a culture of respect, inclusion, and accountability that is vital for the long-term sustainability of schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were suggested based on the findings of this study:

1. Professional development workshops should be conducted to sensitize school principals on the ill effects of phubbing, thus incorporating attentive leadership behaviours as a means of thriving communication, coordination of instruction, and positive performance of tasks.

2. The authorities involved in the education process ought to set clear standards whereby minimal phone usage is encouraged when dealing with professional situations, through which it is expected that respectful relationships will be engendered to uplift the morale, performance, and job satisfaction of teachers. This can be further examined to determine the relationship with service delivery in schools.

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