

**PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AND LEADER EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION
AS PREDICTORS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY
SCHOOL TEACHERS IN OYO ZONE**

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Abstract

Organizational cynicism, a subtle but damaging attitudinal problem, manifesting in teacher distrust of leadership, resistance to reforms, and reduced commitment remains underexplored in Nigeria. This study examined the predictive roles of perceived organizational justice and leader empathic communication on organizational cynicism among public secondary school teachers in Oyo Zone, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was employed, targeting 1,785 teachers across 88 public secondary schools, from which a sample of 338 was proportionately drawn using multistage sampling. Data were collected using validated instruments: the organizational cynicism, organizational justice and leaders empathic communication scales, all adapted and pilot-tested for cultural relevance. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, pearson's correlations, and multiple regression. Results indicated that 53% of teachers reported moderate levels of cynicism, while 19% reported high levels. Perceived organizational justice ($r = -.51, p < .01$) and empathic communication ($r = -.40, p < .01$) correlated negatively with cynicism. These findings confirm that teacher cynicism is both structurally and relationally driven, suggesting the need for systemic fairness reforms alongside leadership training in empathic communication.

Keywords: Organizational Cynicism, organizational justice, leader empathic communication, Teachers

Introduction

Organizational cynicism is an old phenomenon, despite the modernity of dealing with it by researchers and practitioners, organizational cynicism is a feeling of dissatisfaction towards the organization, and employees believe that the organization's management lacks honesty, justice, and transparency (Durrah et al., 2019). The concept has increasingly gain the reputation as one of the most pressing psychological challenges in workplaces, with education systems proving especially vulnerable. Secondary schools, in particular, are critical social institutions where teachers serve as transmitters of knowledge, moral exemplars, and role models for future leaders. Yet, in many contexts, these educators are confronted with disillusionment, distrust, and frustration toward their organizations. Organizational cynicism, broadly defined, reflects negative employee attitudes toward their workplace, encompassing skepticism about institutional integrity, feelings of hopelessness, and behavioral expressions such as criticism, resistance, or withdrawal (Naus, 2007).

Within teaching environments, this often manifests through a decline in commitment to lesson preparation, reluctance to engage in extracurricular or developmental activities, and public or private expressions of doubt about school management. Importantly, Yaşar and Özdemir (2016) notes cynicism is not merely a matter of personal dissatisfaction; it systematically erodes institutional effectiveness and, within education, translates into reduced teaching quality and compromised student achievement. Bringing it home, preliminary evidences in this study's location and Nigeria at large revealed that teachers contend with overcrowded classrooms, irregular salaries, resource shortages, and politicized administrative practices (Ihebom and Uko, 2020; Oke, 2025). The listed are breeding factors that enhances workplace cynicism. Implicitly, the authors of this study propose that organizational cynicism has transcended from being an individual attitudinal disposition to become an institutionalized barrier threatening both teacher well-being and the sustainability of educational development.

International scholarship affirms that cynicism does not arise spontaneously. One of such was a study by Café de Carvalho et al. (2025) whose paper opined that the construct develops gradually in response to prolonged exposure to organizational practices perceived as unfair, contradictory, or deceptive. In schools, cynicism frequently correlates with resistance to reforms, reluctance to adopt new teaching methodologies, and emotional withdrawal from professional responsibilities (Oparaji et al., 2022). Due to the emotional nature of their professional tasks, teachers are especially vulnerable to burnout, as there is high public expectation of their performance, yet institutional recognition and support is often lagging behind (Faremi, 2021). For instance, Tulubash (2022) showed that teachers who were exposed to repeated policy changes and accountability pressures developed higher levels of organizational cynicism. In the West, cynicism has been associated with managerial incoherence and bureaucratic overload, whereas in Africa, the culprits have been underfunding, opaque leadership and political interference (Obicci, 2025). The heterogeneity of antecedent factors implies that, despite organizational cynicism's status as a global construct, its antecedents are highly context-dependent. The study of organisational cynicism in an African context, and in particular, in Nigeria, would not only lead to theoretical contributions on cynicism, but would also provide valuable empirical insights for practice in these particular contexts.

While cynicism among teachers in Nigeria has been attracting the attention of scholars, the body of literature is still scanty and largely descriptive. Babajide and Smith (2022) reported that teachers

in Nigeria often consider administrative reforms as mere tokenism without any actual commitment to quality. Modupe (2024) discovered that inequitable promotion practices, distribution of teaching resources and lack of access to professional development contribute to cynical views that belittle reform implementation. However, the majority of these studies are descriptive and do not explore the underlying psychological or relational mechanisms that may be responsible for the reported complaints and symptoms. As a result, teachers' cynicism in Nigeria is acknowledged but under-theorized, treated as a regrettable by-product of systemic inefficiencies rather than as an expected result of structural and communicative processes.

The first predictor variable considered in this study, organisational justice has long been associated with workplace attitudes and behaviours, and is defined by Adamovic (2023) as the employee's perception of fairness in decision-making, resource allocation, and interpersonal interactions. In schools, perceptions of justice are played out in decisions about promotion, about distribution of workload, in actions taken against teachers, and in the opportunities for them to participate in decision-making. In other words, fairness-or its lack-has a powerful impact on teachers' sense of trust, satisfaction, and commitment to institutional objectives. Odetola (2023) has shown that perceived injustice had a significant relationship with teachers' burnout and disengagement. Erdem et al. (2020) observed that teachers who perceived that disciplinary or promotion procedures were biased were characterized by greater levels of distrust and pessimism toward administrators. Yet, in spite of these findings, Nigerian evidence is sparse and scattered, and is seldom placed in systematic empirical contexts. Organisational justice, which is a concept that is particularly relevant in the context of Nigerian teachers who are often faced with opaque promotion practices, inequitable distribution of resources and inconsistent rule application, is one of the under-researched predictors of cynicism.

Equally important, but less studied, is the role of leadership communication style, and more specifically empathic communication. Empathic communication consists of a leader's ability to actively listen, recognize emotions and take responsive actions that acknowledge employee experiences (Goleman, 2011). For teachers, whose professional roles are shaped not through instructional obligations, but also through continuous affective encounters with students and parents, empathic leadership can nudge perceptions of respect and belonging. Bass and Riggio (2006) reported that empathic leadership reduced employees' stress and increased trust, and other research has associated empathic leadership with higher job satisfaction. However, there is still limited empirical evidence linking empathic communication with organisational cynicism especially in education. In Nigeria, leadership communication is often perceived as hierarchical and directive, emphasizing compliance rather than collaboration (Hassan, 2016). This absence of empathic dialogue may leave teachers feeling neglected, reinforcing cynical attitudes. It is against this backdrop that the authors propose that examining empathic communication within Nigerian schools could reveal whether relational leadership buffers or amplifies cynicism.

Aim and objectives of the Study

This study sought to investigate the predictive roles of perceived organizational justice and leader empathic communication in shaping organizational cynicism among public secondary school teachers in Oyo State.

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Examine the level of organizational cynicism among public secondary school teachers (PSST) in Oyo State.
- ii. Investigate the relationship between perceived organizational justice and organizational cynicism among PSST.
- iii. Determine the influence of leader empathic communication on organizational cynicism among PSST.
- iv. Provide evidence-based recommendations on leadership and organizational practices that may reduce cynicism and enhance teacher engagement in Oyo State secondary schools.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of organizational cynicism among secondary school teachers in Oyo State?
- ii. How does perceived organizational justice relate to organizational cynicism among secondary school teachers?
- iii. To what extent does leader empathic communication influence organizational cynicism among teachers?

Methodology

Design

This study adopted a quantitative research paradigm with a correlational survey design to investigate the predictive roles of perceived organizational justice and leader empathic communication in explaining organizational cynicism among public secondary school teachers in Oyo zone of Oyo State, Nigeria. A quantitative approach was deemed suitable given the need to establish statistical relationships among variables and to test predictive hypotheses with measurable indicators. The correlational design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the extent to which variations in organizational cynicism can be explained by teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and leaders' empathic communication.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 1,785 teachers employed across 88 public secondary schools in Oyo zone of Oyo State, Nigeria, based on 2019 academic session records obtained from the Oyo State Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM) database (<https://old.oyostate.gov.ng/oyo-teaching-service-commission-tescom/>). Public secondary schools were selected because they account for the largest share of student enrollment in the state and remain directly accountable to government education policies, making them an ideal setting for examining fairness perceptions, leadership communication, and teacher attitudes. The teacher population reflects diverse qualifications (Nigeria Certificate in Education, Bachelor's, and postgraduate degrees), varying subject specializations, and a wide range of professional experience.

The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table, which recommended a minimum of 317 participants for a population of 1,785 at a 95% confidence level with 5% margin of error. In addition, a G*Power analysis for multiple regression (two predictors, medium effect size, $\alpha = .05$, power = .80) suggested only 68 participants as the minimum. To ensure robust statistical power, minimize non-response bias, and strengthen generalizability, the study adopted a larger sample size of 338 teachers.

A multistage sampling technique was employed due to the geographically dispersed nature of schools across six Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Oyo zone: Afijio, Atiba, Iseyin, Itesiwaju, Oyo East, and Oyo West. The first stage involved obtaining population figures per LGA from the TESCO database. In the second phase, proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to distribute the sample size across the LGAs based on the number of teachers in the different LGAs. In the third stage, within each LGA schools were selected randomly using simple random sampling procedures. Finally, teachers in the selected schools were randomly selected from the nominal roll within the schools to ensure equal probability of inclusion.

Table 1: Distribution of Public Secondary School Teachers and Schools in Oyo Zone of TESCO

LGA	No. of Schools	No. of Teaching Staff	No. of Non-Teaching Staff	Total Staff
Afijio	17	361	65	426
Atiba	15	323	38	361
Iseyin	23	313	77	390
Itesiwaju	11	73	25	98
Oyo East	11	415	68	483
Oyo West	11	300	41	341
Total	88	1,785	314	2,099

Table 2: Proportionate Allocation of 338 Teacher Sample Across LGAs

LGA	Teaching Staff	Sample Calculation	Sample Size
Afijio	361	$(361 / 1785) \times 338 = 68.35$	68
Atiba	323	$(323 / 1785) \times 338 = 61.18$	61
Iseyin	313	$(313 / 1785) \times 338 = 59.28$	59
Itesiwaju	73	$(73 / 1785) \times 338 = 13.82$	14
Oyo East	415	$(415 / 1785) \times 338 = 78.57$	79
Oyo West	300	$(300 / 1785) \times 338 = 56.78$	57
Total	1,785		338

Instrumentation

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire containing three valid scales, adjusted to adapt to the Nigerian secondary school situation. The instrument was divided into four separate parts - demographic, perceived organizational justice, leadership empathic communication, and

organizational cynicism. All scales were on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) allowing comparability across constructs and ensuring that regression analyses were sufficiently statistically robust.

Perceived Organizational Justice Scale (POJS)

Perceptions of organizational justice were assessed using the Colquitt Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001), which has been widely applied in educational and organizational research. The scale captures four justice dimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. In its original form, the scale contains 20 items (e.g., “To what extent are rewards distributed fairly in your organization?”). For this study, the instrument was adapted linguistically and contextually through expert review to reflect the Nigerian secondary school setting, ensuring that items referred to issues such as workload allocation, promotion processes, salary administration, and decision-making inclusiveness. Previous studies in Nigeria have demonstrated satisfactory reliability for the scale, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients above 0.85. For the present study, content validation was carried out by three professors in educational psychology and measurement, who reviewed each item for cultural clarity. A pilot test with 45 teachers yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88, confirming strong internal consistency.

Leader Empathic Communication Scale (LECS)

Leader empathic communication was measured using an adapted version of the Leader Empathy Communication Questionnaire developed by Adebayo and Okafor (2021). The instrument comprises 15 items across three dimensions: empathic listening, emotional validation, and supportive response. Sample items include: “My principal tries to understand my feelings when challenges arise” and “School leaders respond to teachers’ concerns in ways that make them feel heard.”. Construct validity was assessed through exploratory factor analysis in the pilot study, which confirmed a three-factor solution consistent with the original scale. Internal consistency reliability yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.91, indicating excellent reliability.

Organizational Cynicism Scale (OCS)

Organizational cynicism was measured using the Organizational Cynicism Scale (Brandes, Dharwadkar, & Dean, 1999), a 14-item instrument that assesses cognitive (beliefs about lack of integrity), affective (negative feelings toward the organization), and behavioral (critical or disparaging behavior) dimensions. Sample items include: “I believe my school says one thing and does another,” “I feel irritated when I think about working in this school,” and “I criticize the school’s policies to others.” This multidimensional structure ensures a nuanced understanding of cynicism rather than a unidimensional complaint scale. The OCS has been validated internationally and in Nigerian contexts, showing strong psychometric properties. Pilot testing in this study produced a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical considerations were highly guarded throughout this investigation to ensure protection of the participants' rights and integrity of research process. Participation was voluntary and teachers were given extensive information about the objectives of the study, procedures, and their right to drop out of the study without discrimination at any time. Prior to collection of data, informed consent was issued ensuring respondents understood their participation would be of substance. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed by coding questionnaires and removing any identifying information, thereby ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to

participants. Data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. These ethical safeguards were implemented to foster trust, respect participant autonomy, and uphold the professional standards of educational research.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS with both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis summarized levels of organizational cynicism, while Pearson correlations examined relationships between perceived organizational justice, leader empathic communication, and cynicism. Multiple regression determined the joint predictive effects of the independent variables. Assumptions of regression were tested for validity, and effect sizes alongside p-values were reported. Findings were synthesized to generate practical recommendations for reducing cynicism and enhancing teacher engagement.

Results

Table 3: *Descriptive and Normality Indices (Item-Mean Metrics)*

Table 3 presents the overall descriptive statistics for organizational cynicism alongside other study variables for comparison.

Variable	Possible Range	Observed Range	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
OCS	1.00–5.00	1.10–4.60	2.96	0.72	0.21	-0.41
POJ	1.00–5.00	1.00–4.20	2.62	0.68	-0.13	-0.28
LEC	1.00–5.00	1.20–4.50	2.78	0.70	-0.08	-0.35

Note. OCS = Organizational Cynicism Scale; POJ = Perceived Organizational Justice; LEC = Leadership Effectiveness Continuum; SD = Standard Deviation.

The overall mean score for organizational cynicism was 2.96 (SD = 0.72), falling within the moderate range. The observed range (1.10–4.60) indicates substantial variability in teachers cynical attitudes toward their schools, though no respondent reported the maximum score of 5.00. The slightly positive skewness (0.21) suggests a minor tendency toward lower scores, while the negative kurtosis (-0.41) indicates a relatively flat distribution with fewer extreme values than a normal distribution would predict.

Research Question 1: What is the level of organizational cynicism among secondary school teachers in Oyo State?

To facilitate interpretation, organizational cynicism scores were categorized using conventional item-mean cut-offs: Low (1.00–2.33), Moderate (2.34–3.66), and High (3.67–5.00). Table 4 presents the distribution of teachers across these categories.

Table 4: Levels of Organizational Cynicism

Level	N	%
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Low (1.00–2.33)	92	27.2
Moderate (2.34–3.66)	179	53.0
High (3.67–5.00)	67	19.8
Total	338	100.0

As shown in Table 4, the majority of teachers reported moderate levels of organizational cynicism (53.0%, n = 179). Approximately one-quarter (27.2%, n = 92) exhibited low cynicism, while nearly one-fifth (19.8%, n = 67) demonstrated high cynicism. These findings indicate that over half of the teachers in the sample harbor moderate cynical attitudes toward their schools, characterized by doubts about organizational integrity, negative emotions, and occasional critical behaviors. The substantial proportion of highly cynical teachers (19.8%) is particularly concerning, as this group may exhibit severe disengagement and antagonistic behaviors that can undermine school effectiveness.

Item-Level Response Distribution

Table 5: Cognitive: beliefs that their school lacks integrity, honesty, and sincerity, and that there are discrepancies between what the school says and what it does.

Item	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean
CC1: I believe my school says one thing and does another	35 (10.4)	82 (24.3)	78 (23.1)	108 (32.0)	35 (10.4)	3.07
CC2: My school's policies and practices lack consistency	32 (9.5)	78 (23.1)	85 (25.1)	110 (32.5)	33 (9.8)	3.10
CC3: I see little connection between what my school says it will do and what it actually does	38 (11.2)	85 (25.1)	72 (21.3)	105 (31.1)	38 (11.2)	3.06
CC4: My school's stated values are not reflected in its actions	28 (8.3)	75 (22.2)	88 (26.0)	115 (34.0)	32 (9.5)	3.14
CC5: I doubt the sincerity of my school's motives and intentions	42 (12.4)	88 (26.0)	80 (23.7)	98 (29.0)	30 (8.9)	2.96

Note. SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree. N = 338.

Table 6: Affective cynicism captures the negative emotional reactions teachers experience when thinking about or working in their school, including feelings of frustration, irritation, and contempt.

Item	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean
AC1: I feel irritated when I think about working in this school	48 (14.2)	102 (30.2)	85 (25.1)	78 (23.1)	25 (7.4)	2.79
AC2: I experience anxiety when thinking about my school	52 (15.4)	108 (32.0)	82 (24.3)	72 (21.3)	24 (7.1)	2.73
AC3: I feel tense when I think about my school	45 (13.3)	95 (28.1)	92 (27.2)	82 (24.3)	24 (7.1)	2.84
AC4: Thinking about my school makes me feel frustrated	42 (12.4)	88 (26.0)	95 (28.1)	88 (26.0)	25 (7.4)	2.90
AC5: I feel contempt toward my school	55 (16.3)	110 (32.5)	88 (26.0)	65 (19.2)	20 (5.9)	2.66

Table 7: Behavioral cynicism involves teachers’ tendency to engage in critical, disparaging, or cynical behaviors directed at the school, such as complaining to others, making sarcastic comments, or expressing negative predictions.

Item	SD n (%)	D n (%)	N n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	Mean
BC1: I criticize my school’s policies to others	45 (13.3)	95 (28.1)	88 (26.0)	85 (25.1)	25 (7.4)	2.85
BC2: I make sarcastic comments about my school	52 (15.4)	105 (31.1)	85 (25.1)	72 (21.3)	24 (7.1)	2.74
BC3: I complain about how things are done at my school	38 (11.2)	88 (26.0)	92 (27.2)	95 (28.1)	25 (7.4)	2.94
BC4: I express negative predictions about my school’s future	48 (14.2)	98 (29.0)	95 (28.1)	75 (22.2)	22 (6.5)	2.78

The OCS comprises three subscales representing distinct dimensions of cynicism: cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics for each domain of cynicism.

Dimension	No. of Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Cognitive Cynicism	5	3.12	0.85	1.00	5.00
Affective Cynicism	5	2.88	0.82	1.00	4.80
Behavioral Cynicism	4	2.87	0.88	1.00	4.75
Overall OCS	14	2.96	0.72	1.10	4.60

Note. All dimensions measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Among the three cynicism dimensions, cognitive cynicism recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.12, SD = 0.85), indicating that teachers harbor considerable doubts about their school’s integrity and consistency between stated values and actual practices. Affective cynicism (M = 2.88, SD = 0.82) and behavioral cynicism (M = 2.87, SD = 0.88) showed similar mean scores in the low-to-moderate range, suggesting that while teachers experience negative emotions and occasionally engage in critical behaviors, these manifestations of cynicism are somewhat less pronounced than their cognitive beliefs about organizational hypocrisy.

Research question 2: How does perceived organizational justice relate to organizational cynicism among secondary school teachers?

Research question 3: To what extent does leader empathic communication influence organizational cynicism among teachers?

Table 8: Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Organizational Cynicism (OCS)	—		
2. Perceived Organizational Justice (POJ)	-.52**	—	
3. Leader Empathic Communication (LEC)	-.40**	.42**	—

Note. N = 338. ** p < .001 (two-tailed).

The correlation results indicate that perceived organizational justice is strongly and negatively correlated with organizational cynicism (r = -.52, p < .001). This implies that teachers who feel fairly treated in terms of workload, promotions, and communication are less likely to develop cynical attitudes. Leader empathic communication also shows a moderate negative correlation with cynicism (r = -.40, p < .001), suggesting that principals who listen empathetically, validate emotions, and respond supportively help reduce teacher’s negative perceptions. Additionally, justice and empathic communication are positively related (r = .42, p < .001), indicating that fairness and empathy often reinforce each other in practice. Higher fairness perceptions and more empathic

leader communication are associated with lower organizational cynicism; schools with fairer systems also tend to have leaders perceived as more empathic.

Research question 4: What is the combined effect of perceived organizational justice and leader empathic communication on organizational cynicism?

Table 9

Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE of the Estimate	R ²	F	df1	df2	Sig.
1	.583	.340	.336	0.587	.340	86.43	2	335	<.001

Note. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived Organizational Justice, Leader Empathic Communication.

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	59.586	2	29.793	86.43	<.001
Residual	115.514	335	0.345		
Total	175.100	337			

Note. Dependent Variable: Organizational Cynicism (OCS).

Table 10

Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	95% CI for B		Collinearity Statistics
	B	SE	B	t		Lower	Upper	
1 (Constant)	4.726	0.185		25.56	<.001	4.362	5.090	
POJ	-.434	.039	-.41	-11.26	<.001	-.510	-.359	1.21
LEC	-.226	.033	-.22	-6.76	<.001	-.292	-.161	1.21

Note. Dependent Variable: Organizational Cynicism (OCS). POJ = Perceived Organizational Justice; LEC = Leader Empathic Communication.

The multiple regression model reveals that perceived organizational justice ($\beta = -0.41, p < .001$) is the strongest predictor of organizational cynicism, while leader empathic communication ($\beta = -0.22, p < .001$) also contributes significantly. Together, these variables explain 34% of the variance in cynicism levels, which is considered a large effect in organizational behavior studies. This means that fairness in policies and empathic leadership practices are powerful levers in shaping teachers' organizational attitudes. Notably, justice carries more predictive weight, highlighting structural fairness as foundational for minimizing cynicism.

Discussion of Findings

For the first research question, the findings revealed that organizational cynicism among public secondary school teachers in Oyo State demonstrates moderate prevalence, with slightly more than half of participants reporting moderate levels, while approximately one-fifth exhibited high levels. This trend is powerful enough to signify an important underlying narrative of disproportionate disillusionment within the teaching workforce. Within organizational behavior literature, the notion of cynicism is considered to be rooted in the perceptions of institutional contradiction and unfulfilled promises (Polatcan & Titrek, 2014). Given the moderate levels detected, the authors conclude that while cynicism has not completely eroded teacher commitment, it has now been embedded well enough in teachers' dispositions as to continue to impact teacher motivation and effectiveness. Nevertheless, these findings offer strong grounds for timely action on the question of organizational effects in the sense that even relatively simple nasty behavior, or cynicism, is already a precursor to more complex consummation effects of absenteeism, act-resistance and ultimately attrition." Thus, the results can be used as an early-warning signal for education stakeholders in Oyo State.

Further, this result is consistent with previous studies showing that teachers and education leaders are often moderately cynical in situations where there can be shortages of resources and volatility of policy. Erdogdu (2018) reported that teachers with administrative pressure experience a similar cynicism level, and Gullu and Coruk (2022) found a moderate cynicism degree in educators who experience the bureaucratic barriers. In the context of Nigeria however, structural features of the contributory factors (delayed career progression, inconsistent reward systems and systematic disparity in the task allocation process) heighten perceptions of institutional neglect. Accordingly, these findings lend plausibility to the understanding of cynicism of Nigerian teachers as a structural and policy-imposed phenomenon rather than an expression of individual dissatisfaction. Within the literature, the study maintains that cynicism in educational settings should be understood as an organizational phenomenon which is the result of governance and equity failures rather than individual flaws among educators.

In answering the second research question, the analysis found a substantial negative correlation between organizational justice and organizational cynicism, which supports that teachers treated equitably are less cynical in attitudes towards their schools. This furthers the theoretical backdrop of social exchange theory which proposes that perceptions of fairness reflect institutional trustability and consequently dampen negative intertropical dispositions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In this investigation, justice emerged as a fundamental determinant, with distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational fairness dimensions all contributing to decreased cynicism. The magnitude of this relationship demonstrates that teachers' justice perceptions are not marginal but central to their willingness to invest emotionally and professionally in their institutions. When workers perceive that promotions, workload distributions, and decision-making processes are transparent and equitable, their work commitment strengthens (Fehintola et al., 2021;

Fehintola et al., 2023), and cynicism diminishes. This provides robust justification for the recently incorporated fairness reforms (as evident in recruitment, promotions and welfare) into school administrative policies throughout the State.

Our results align with organizational behavior research demonstrating that justice perceptions directly counteract cynicism and promote trust across various sectors (Sen et al., 2022). Cherkowski and Walker (2016) reported similar patterns among teachers, connecting justice to reduced cynicism and enhanced professional engagement. Notably, these findings suggest that fairness operates with even greater significance in secondary school contexts than in higher education institutions, possibly because secondary teachers encounter more bureaucratic constraints and fewer professional advancement opportunities, making fairness indicators more prominent. This variation suggests that organizational justice should be understood contextually, with its influence more pronounced in hierarchical, government-controlled systems. This study therefore contributes to literature by positioning justice as the fundamental psychological agreement between teachers and the educational system: when this agreement is breached, cynicism intensifies.

The findings for the third research question revealed a significant negative relationship between leader empathic communication and organizational cynicism, demonstrating that when school leaders engage in practices including active listening, emotional acknowledgment, and supportive feedback, teachers report decreased cynicism levels. This result supports empathic leadership conceptualizations, which regard empathy not only as interpersonal sensitivity but as a strategic tool for alienation reduction and engagement (Arghode et al., 2022). In settings like the study location, where teachers are regularly subject to resource scarcity and bureaucratic frustration, non-condescending communication from principals and administrators serves as a bulwark against perceptions of institutional neglect. These results support the hypothesis that a leadership style (beyond structural fairness) can have a powerful influence on teachers' organizational attitudes. This result is in line with existing literature across a wide range of organizational settings. In particular, Fuller (2023) found that empathic leadership reduced cynicism in the workplace and increased organizational commitment among healthcare professionals. Similarly, Urick (2016) concluded that school principals who used empathic communication strategies were able to create higher levels of trust and less push back against institutional change among teachers. However, the current study adds an important caveat to prior research by demonstrating that while empathy does have a beneficial effect, its ability to predict cynicism levels is relatively weaker than organizational justice. This distinction proves crucial: empathy may ameliorate the emotional impact of perceived injustice, but without fairness in advancement opportunities, workload distribution, and resource allocation, empathic communication risks being perceived as superficial. Therefore, leader empathy should not substitute for justice, but rather function as a complementary mechanism that enhances fairness effects and reconstructs relational trust in hierarchical systems such as Nigerian secondary schools.

Implications of the Study

The results also have practical implications in educational practice and governance. The moderate levels of cynicism, the predictive roles of procedural justice and empathic leadership suggest that reduction strategies should combine policy-driven structural reform with leadership development interventions. Accordingly, the study suggests that the transparent promotion system, equitable distribution of workload and consistent dissemination of information should be key considerations for governmental bodies such as the Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM). Thus, a justice-based approach to reforming would deal with the root cause of the cynicism and regain confidence in learning institutions. At the same time, school principals are encouraged to be trained in

empathic communication skills-active listening and emotional validation-to help build relational trust with faculty. This comprehensive framework addresses both the cognitive and affective aspects of cynicism, thus providing a more holistic answer to teacher disengagement.

This study complements the existing literature by extending the research on organizational justice and empathy to the Nigerian secondary school context, a context that has so far produced little empirical evidence. The results support the findings from across the world, while identifying contextual nuances-most notably the greater importance of justice in resource-limited, bureaucratic structures. The authors argue that organizational cynicism must be understood not only as a dispositional individual phenomenon but as an organizational systemic phenomenon, which is influenced by structures of fairness and communicative practices of leadership. By bringing these two antecedents together, the study expands theoretical considerations of cynicism from the predominance of Western-centered thinking to more globally applicable models. Future research should consider the potential mediating factors such as organisational trust and teacher wellbeing that may further develop the proposed model. As such, these findings place the current study within the international academic literature, while providing contextual information relevant to the Nigerian education system.

Limitations of the Study

The study used self-report questionnaires which are potentially vulnerable to social desirability bias and thus subject to limitations in response validity. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the survey prohibits confident causal inference; thus, observed relationships should be interpreted as associations, not as causal effects in a directional sense. Additionally, the restriction to a single zone/state in Nigeria might limit the generalizability of the results to other regions with varying administrative structures and socio-cultural contexts. Finally, although the quantitative methods used were methodologically rigorous, they were unable to capture the nuanced lived experiences of teachers that qualitative approaches might have the capacity to highlight. In spite of these limitations, the study provides a strong empirical base highlighting justice and empathic leadership as two key drivers for reducing cynicism, and a conceptual framework for future longitudinal and mixed methods studies.

Conclusion

The present study examined the degree to which perceived organizational justice and leader empathic communication predict organizational cynicism in secondary school teachers in Oyo State. Teachers' self-reported levels of cynicism were largely moderate, reflecting guarded engagement together with latent disillusionment with the school system. Most importantly, while leadership empathic communication did make a statistically significant, albeit weaker, contribution, perceived organizational justice was the strongest predictor of cynicism. Taken together, these predictors explained a significant amount of variance in cynicism, thus highlighting the powerful interaction between structural fairness and relational empathy in teacher attitude.

The results highlight the fact that teacher cynicism is not just an expression of individual malaise but it reflects relational and systemic structures. Fair treatment in relation to promotion, workload and policy enforcement is an underlying factor, while empathetic communication provides relational support which keeps institutional trust alive. By placing these findings within both Nigerian and international contexts, the study moves the discourse on organisational cynicism from the Western-centric discourses. The findings confirm that reducing cynicism requires a considered

combination of policy-related structural reforms and leadership practices based on empathy. This finding thus provides a compelling rationale for policymakers, administrators, and scholars committed to strengthening the Nigerian education system and maintaining teacher engagement.

Recommendations

Based on the results and taking into consideration the limitations of the current study, this paper outlines a set of recommendations. First, educational policymakers and TESCOM should give priority to structural reforms that would help institutionalize fairness in workload allocation, promotion, and decision processes. Theoretically, transparent and consistent policies should reduce cynicism by addressing its systemic causes. Second, leadership development courses are needed to enhance principals' empathic communication skills, so they can actively listen to teachers, acknowledge teachers' emotions, and provide constructive feedback. These programmes need to be part of continuous professional development for school leaders.

To address methodological limitations, future research should use longitudinal designs to examine how changes in the practices of fairness and leadership affect cynicism over time. The use of qualitative methods - such as interviews and focus groups - would further explain teachers' lived experiences and provide contextual nuance. Thus, the study should be replicated in other Nigerian states and within varying educational strata in order to improve generalization. Finally, the combination of strong policy reforms, humanistic leadership practices, and scientifically rigorous follow-up research will help to better understand and more effectively intervene in organisational cynicism in the Nigerian education system.

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