



Factors Inhibiting Goal Attainment in Public Secondary Schools in Cross River State, Nigeria: A Path Analytical Model.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The yearning for paper qualifications in Nigeria has resulted in many forms of corruption in schools. Despite governments efforts in achieving accountability and transparency within the system, the problem of poor output from public secondary schools still persists. However, there exists a gap in knowledge on the structural relationships among principal-related and contextual factors and how they jointly influence school goal attainment in Nigerian secondary schools. Much of the existing research focuses on isolated predictors and direct associations, with limited empirical attention to the direct and indirect pathways through which these variables operate. Addressing this gap requires the application of a path analytical approach to provide a more integrated and explanatory understanding of the determinants of school goal attainment among secondary school principals in Nigeria.

Objective: The objective of the study was to determine how corrupt practices such as nepotism/favouritism, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery inhibit school goals attainment in public secondary schools in Cross River State using path analytical model.

Method: study adopted cross-sectional survey design approach, All the 272 principals in the 272 public secondary schools in Cross River Sate were used. Data were collected using a self-developed 66-item modified 4-point likert scale instrument with consistency coefficients ranging from 0.822 - 0.830, while analysis was subjected to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Analysis of MOment of Structure (AMOS), and presented using table and figure.

Results: The result revealed that there were significant direct predictive effects between absenteeism and school goal attainment, embezzlement and school goal attainment, bribery and school goal attainment and forgery and school goal attainment. The result also revealed that nepotism had significant positive predictive direct effects with absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery.

Conclusion: The study concluded that lack of transparency, increased teacher's absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery, fraud, and impede quality education and school goal attainment. Bias, irresponsible and unaccountable school personnel hampers school goal attainment.

Unique Contribution: This study has provided new insights into the factors Impeding goal attainment in public secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Hopefully, school authorities, policymakers, and government will find this fresh insight valuable in putting policies and measures to curb these menaces in our schools for the attainment of school goals.

Key Recommendation: Provision of comprehensive integrated monitoring systems to identify, checkmate and prevent corruption in the school environment.

Keywords: school goal attainment, nepotism, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery



INTRODUCTION

The yearning for qualifications and self-esteem worldwide and principally in developing countries has resulted in many forms of corruption in schools such as nepotism or favoritism, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery, forgery, examination malpractice among others. To reduce this precarious and intimidating scourge, the government at all levels in combination with education stakeholders have reinforced its intervention programs such as regular supervision of schools, in-service training programmes for teachers and school administrators, timely payment of salaries, and institutionalization of anti-corruption outfits of government like SERVICOM, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), yet the problem still persists.

Education is a valuable mechanism worldwide for societal growth and development. Countries invest resources to make sure its people obtain quality education which will afford them with the competence to explain and do things appropriately in real life circumstances. Education is the fourth goal of the sustainable development plan. It is given this precedence in the sustainable development goal owing to the reality that it is a fundamental human right and the groundwork on which to build peace and drive sustainable development (Universal Declaration of Human Right of 1948; UNESCO, 2017). Undoubtedly, each goal of the sustainable development cannot be achieved exclusively devoid of education. The declaration by the Director-General of UNESCO IRINA BOKOVA (2017) led credibility to the significance of educational goals attainment. He said “an essential change is needed in the way we think about education’s role in the global development because it has a catalytic effect on the well-being of persons and the future of our planet. Currently, more than ever, education has a dependability to be in line with 21st century challenges and ambitions in order to promote the right types of value and skills that will lead to sustainable and all-encompassing growth and peaceful living together”

In view of the foregoing, Adesina (2019); Aligwe et al., (2017) noted that education is the foremost force in economic, intellectual, social and cultural empowerment. In addition, Okorji and Unachukwu (2019) portray education as the summation of learning experience provided to students with the intention of making them productive and purposeful members of the society. On the quality of education, Hammond (2013); Ogbaeja and Nwafor, (2017) stated that, quality education covers learning resources, technology, program enrolled, module done, teaching method, attachment, qualification, co-curriculum activities, performance awards, students and teacher’s standpoint and their views and evaluation towards education.

Therefore, it is of maximum significance that serious consideration be given to education at all levels beginning from primary to tertiary education. Interestingly, education having been expressed as a mechanism per excellence for development, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) listed four broad objectives of education which are the inculcation of national consciousness and national accord, inculcation of the right type of value and attitude for the survival of person and Nigeria society. Other objectives are the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and the acquisition of suitable skills and development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences for the person to live in and add to the development of the society, as well.



Post primary education is very critical in the educational structure of Nigeria since it is the link between the primary and tertiary education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (2004) undoubtedly states that post primary education is the education children receive after primary education and prior to tertiary stage. The importance of post primary education cannot be neglected, apart from being the connecting arrangement for primary and tertiary education it presents the opportunity for students to acquire more knowledge and skills in addition to that received at the primary level. According to Chinelo (2021), Ige (2018), Yusuf (2019), Osoh and Osoh (2017), the most significant factor that require the acquisition of secondary education in Nigeria is the reality that education given at the primary level is proving to be inadequate for a child to acquire everlasting literacy, communicative and numeracy skills anticipated at the conclusion of primary training.

Goals have been defined by Vroom (2024) as “desired future state of affairs”. Generally speaking, goals are objectives, aims, or purposes which are to be achieved by an establishment over varying era of time. It is imperative to note that planning and supervision is necessary for selecting and achieving of goals. Consequently, the National Policy on Education (2004) set up two most important goals of secondary education which are to prepare the person for useful living within the society and higher education. In particular, secondary education shall; provide all primary school leavers with the prospect for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religion or ethnic background; offer diversified curriculum to provide for the variation in talents, opportunities and future responsibilities; provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grade; develop and promotes Nigeria languages, art and culture in the framework of words cultural heritage; motivate students with the aspiration for self-improvement and achievement of excellence; cultivate national unity with an emphasis on ties that unite us in our diversity; raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feeling of others, value the dignity of labour, and be pleased about the values specified under the expansive national goals and lives as good citizens; and supply technical knowledge and vocational skills crucial for agricultural, industrial, commercial, and economic development. To accomplish these goals, secondary education shall be of six years duration, given in two phases, each shall be of three years period of junior and senior secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The effect of nepotism on school goal attainment is devastating as Özler, Ergun and Gümüştekin (2021) observed in their study. They noted that nepotism is aimed at employing or promoting somebody based on kinship relationships while employing or promoting him/her, but not considering his/her required qualities like ability, success, and education levels which negatively impede school goal attainment. They stressed that nepotism is the root cause of deadwood, inefficiency, ghost workers, embezzlement, truancy, forgery, examination malpractice, fraud, absenteeism, corruption, misappropriation and redundancy which leads to job dissatisfaction and related conflicts in an organization. Nepotism in employees’ recruitment process has disastrous negative consequences on workers performance in the civil service. In the support on the above result Mustafa (2017); Nsude and Nwafor, (2016) in his submission noted nepotism negatively affect job satisfaction and organizational devotedness, while they positively affected the intent to



quit. He concluded that school environment where team work is necessary for goal attainment, nepotism attitude weaken communication and cooperation which result in hostile behavior, decrease motivation and performance. Nepotism is elementally unfair and helps to cause inequity which affect teacher's teaching effectiveness and student's failure in an examination which impedes school goal attainment.

The attainment of educational goals requires more than having a teacher present in the classroom. The high rate of teachers' absenteeism is worrisome as it poses problems of accountability and good governance which are in itself an obstacle to educational goal attainment. Inequality in teacher's entitlement such as salaries and unprofessionalism in teaching vocation are among the causes of teachers' absenteeism. Teacher's absenteeism is inversely related to student performance as observed by Barmase and Shukla (2017). They noted that absenteeism has the tendency to prevent or slow down the attainment of National education goals. Absenteeism is the regular absence of student, teacher, and other member of the school system without valid reason or permission. Schools with high absenteeism rate, administrative records may be a poor guide to actual cost of teachers' actual attendance to classroom, making the cost of teacher's absenteeism very significant. Irregular absent from school may not pose serious threat, while excessive absenteeism could have negative impact on school goals attainment, especially in public schools. Teachers with high record of absenteeism have negative impact on both students in academics and in social endeavors, when compare with their peers.

Corrupt practices, most specifically embezzlement of assets specify for improvement of education system has given rise to inadequate resources for the effective management of secondary education. Corrupt practices, specifically embezzlement results in wastage of resources made available for provision of quality education diverted for selfish use. This why Suleiman (2021) opined that misappropriation of assets limits the resources budgeted for educational sector thereby creating an obstacle for effective school goals attainment. Poisson (2019) on their study of embezzlement noted that the lack of explicit norms and regulations to public finance, allowances and public procurement, lack of transparency at the levels of administration, lack of professional ethics or relative enforcement mechanism in public administration, inadequate salaries and weak incentive system, low management capacity, lack of supervision and disciplinary matters allows for financial malpractices, and low salaries combined with inadequate incentive in the education profession causes educational administrator and teachers to involve in corrupt practices such as embezzlement.

Despite these claims, Anagbogu and Owor (2021) found out that, the factors inhibiting school goal attainment could not solely depend embezzlement, bribery and forgery, but could be attributed to other factors such as teacher's commitment to covering syllabus contents, school facilities, or class size. The above assertion was supported by Anagbogu, Oluseyi, Sunday and Owor (2021) who, in their study on assessment of social media immersion and undergraduate students' academic performance in research methods in University of Calabar, revealed that school goal attainment could not also hinged solely on factors like absenteeism and fraud, but other issues such as staff reckless use of social media platforms such as whatsapp, facebook, instagram, 2go, myspace among others.



In corroboration, Bisong, Oko, John, Achu and Owor (2021), argued that school goal attainment is not solely attributed to lack of transparency and increased teacher's absenteeism, but could also be caused by staff personal variables such as their gender and age. They noted that some staff may not be mentally matured enough to handle assigned tasks. This contention was also affirmed by Anagbogu, Ofoegbu, Ovat and Owor in their study of a path analytical model on factors with the implementation of civic education curriculum among teachers in Cross River State, Nigeria, noted that factors such as lack of staff supervision, teacher's knowledge of subject matter and teachers' attitude, could impede school goal attainment. Anagbogu, Onu and Owor (2021) conducted a study on the evaluation of incidences of examination malpractice and intervention measures among undergraduate students in University of Calabar, Nigeria, noted that school goal attainment could not be attributed to staff irresponsibility and unaccountability only, but also on the examination malpractices that goes on in the school setting within some teachers and students alike. The study recommended that sincere implementation of disciplinary actions should be taken on culprits irrespective of who they are. A similar study conducted by Anagbogu, Akpan and Owor (2021) on the evaluation of the provision and use of communication facilities in higher educational institutions in Cross River State, reported that, in addition to examination malpractices in school, lack of available and functional office equipment, electricity and so on could be added as factors inhibiting school goal attainment. It was however recommended that generators or other sources of power generation be used to generate power for effective functioning of office activities, as these measures could significantly boost school goal attainment.

Bribery and corruption in school is a phenomenon that has a damaging and harmful impact on teacher's teaching effectiveness and impedes school goal attainment. Bribery as the crime of giving money or present to someone so that they will help you by doing something dishonest or illegal. These illegal and unethical categories of bribery such as offerings, promises, giving, accepting or soliciting for an advantage as an inducement for an action or a breach of trust hampers school goal attainment (Svensson, 2023).

Saliv (2018) study showed that mismanagement of forgery practices in school involves the making, altering, use, or possession of a false writing in order to commit a fraud thereby making supervision of secondary school programmes unattainable. He noted that mismanagement of forgery practices in school could occur in many forms, from signing another staff name on a check to falsifying one's own academic transcript. Forgery refers to faking a signature without permission, making a false document or other object, or changing an existing document or other object without authorization. Our educational system relies heavily on the ability of schools to produce and exchange legitimate and trustworthy documents. Forged documents can have serious and far-reaching negative consequences on students, staff and political entities. Inefficiency in managing forgery practices in our school system could lead to teacher's teaching ineffectiveness, low student's academic productivity, low self-esteem on the part of staff, and lack of trust and inefficiency in the attainment of school goals.



It has been observed that government at all levels have made effort to eradicate corrupt practices in Nigerian education system, yet the problem still persisted. As a result of this ugly situation, it has become expedient to seek for solution to this problem using a path analytical model to determine the factors inhibiting school goals attainment in public secondary schools in Cross River State.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

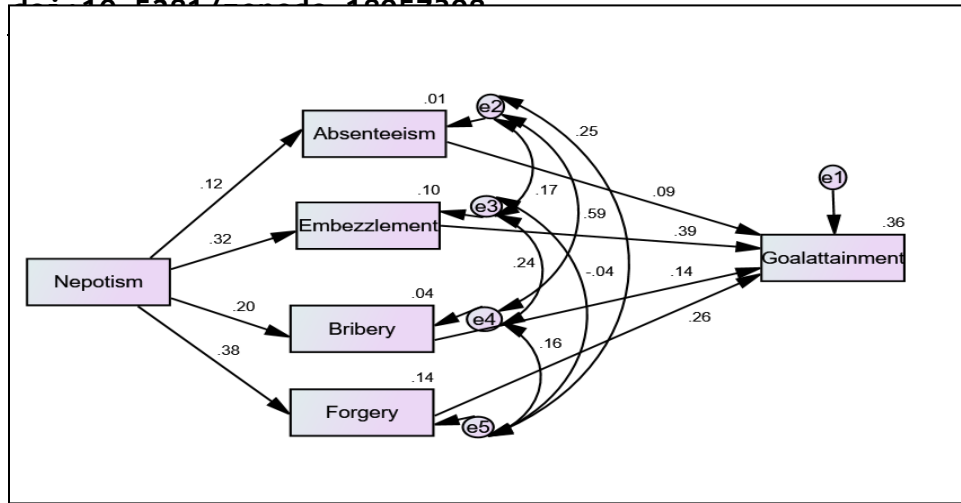
The purpose of the study was to determine how corrupt practices such as nepotism/favouritism, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery inhibit school goals attainment in public secondary schools in Cross River State using path analytical model.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design approach. This survey method was applicable since data were gathered at a particular time for the underlying principle of describing the population represented by the sample at that given time. All the 272 principals in the 272 public secondary schools in Cross River State were used. An average score of four (4) teachers per school who served as sampling unit were selected to assess one principal (unit of analysis). A self-developed 66-item modified 4-point likert scale instrument titled: Corrupt Practices and Secondary School Goal Attainment Questionnaire (CPSSGAQ) was designed to collect information on the variables of interest. Ten (10) items each was developed to illicit information on the independent variables such as nepotism/favouritism, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery, forgery and examination malpractice while fifteen (15) items provided information on the dependent variable (school goals attainment). Cronbach Alpha reliability method was employed to test the internal consistency of the items. The variables produced reliability coefficient estimates ranging from .822 - .830. The data was also subjected to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using Analysis of MOment of Structure (AMOS) in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate a path analytical model.

RESULTS:

The comparative fit indices of chi-square/DF > 2, AGFI > .9, CFI > .9, RMSEA < .05 showed that the model was plausible as these indices were within suitable criteria and all the connections were explainable within the theoretical outline. The model was explained by four direct causal pathways of the exogenous variables (absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery) to the endogenous variable (schools goal attainment), and four direct causal pathways of the exogenous variable (nepotism) to the endogenous variables (absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery), with one indirect pathway from exogenous variable (nepotism) to goal attainment.



Chi-square = 2.146
 DF = 1
 AGFI = .996
 CFI = .998
 P-value = .503
 RMSEA = .008

Fig. 1: A path diagram showing the relationship of nepotism, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery with school goal attainment in secondary schools in Cross River State.

Table 1: Regression weights of direct and indirect paths in the diagram

			Unstandardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	standardized Estimate
Absenteeism	<---	Nepotism	.107	.054	2.003	.045	.121
Embezzlement	<---	Nepotism	.333	.061	5.465	***	.315
Bribery	<---	Nepotism	.155	.046	3.393	***	.202
Forgery	<---	Nepotism	.449	.067	6.676	***	.376
Goal attainment	<---	Absenteeism	.118	.078	1.500	.134	.093
Goal attainment	<---	Embezzlement	.416	.054	7.687	***	.391
Goal attainment	<---	Bribery	.208	.092	2.268	.023	.142
Goal attainment	<---	Forgery	.242	.048	5.062	***	.258

S. E = Standard Error; C.R = Composite Reliability; Significance = $p < .05$

The direct causal pathways showed that there were significant positive predictors between absenteeism and school goal attainment, embezzlement and school goal attainment, bribery and school goal attainment and forgery and school goal attainment. All the factors to school goal attainment were significant at .05 level of significance. The predictive strengths of these causal



pathways to school goal attainment estimated by the standardized β weights revealed that embezzlement had the strongest positive predictor of school goal attainment at 39 percent ($\beta = 0.39$), forgery, bribery and absenteeism also showed strong positive predictors of school goal attainment at 26 percent ($\beta = 0.26$), 14 percent ($\beta = 0.14$) and 9 percent ($\beta = 0.09$) respectively. All the four direct causal pathways together accounted for 36 percent of the variation in schools goal attainment.

The result also revealed that there was no direct effect between nepotism and schools goal attainment. However, nepotism had significant positive predictive direct effects with absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery at 12 percent ($\beta = 0.12$), 32 percent ($\beta = 0.32$), 20 percent ($\beta = 0.20$), and 38 percent ($\beta = 0.38$) respectively, accounting for 1 percent, 10 percent, 4 percent and 14 percent of the variations in absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery respectively. Nevertheless, the relationship between nepotism and school goal attainment produced an indirect effect of 26 percent.

The result further revealed that there were positive and negative correlations among the exogenous variables to school goal attainment as observed in figure 1. There was a significant positive strong correlation between absenteeism and embezzlement by 17 percent embezzlement also had a significant positive correlation with bribery by 24 percent Similarly, there was a significant positive strong correlation between bribery and forgery by 16 percent The result also revealed that there was a significant positive correlation among absenteeism, embezzlement and bribery while embezzlement, bribery and forgery showed a negative weak correlation among them. Meanwhile, all the four direct exogenous factors to school goal attainment showed a significant strong correlation by 25 percent.

DISCUSSION

The result of the study illustrated that nepotism in school, though not having a direct causal effect on school goal attainment fundamentally played a central function in the path model. In essence, it was the motivating power for the attainment of any established school goals. Nepotism of school managers was found to directly predict absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery which in turn affected school goal attainment. If the recruitment of deans, directors of institutes, heads of departments, administrators and managers for the operational units are done in accordance with competence, merit and performance would lead to successful school goal attainment. Nepotism is unfair and helps to cause inequity which affect teacher's teaching effectiveness and student's failure in an examination which impedes school goal attainment. This result corroborates Özler, Ergun and Gümüştekin (2021) that nepotism is the root cause of deadwood, inefficiency, ghost workers, embezzlement, truancy, forgery, examination malpractice, fraud, absenteeism, corruption, misappropriation and redundancy which leads to job dissatisfaction and related conflicts in an organization. Nepotism in employees' recruitment process has disastrous negative consequences on workers performance in the civil service. Nepotism is aimed at employing or promoting somebody based on kinship relationships while employing or promoting him/her without considering his/her required qualities like ability, success, and education levels which negatively impede school goal attainment.



The result also revealed that absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery had significant direct effects to school goal attainment. The attainment of educational goals requires more than having a teacher present in the classroom. This result also supports Barmase and Shukla (2017) that absenteeism has the tendency to prevent or slow down the attainment of National education goals, stressing that schools with high absenteeism rate, administrative records may be a poor guide to actual cost of teachers' actual attendance to classroom, making the cost of teacher's absenteeism very significant. Irregular absent from school may not pose serious threat, while excessive absenteeism could have negative impact on school goals attainment, especially in public schools. Teachers with high record of absenteeism have negative impact on both students in academics and in social endeavors. Teacher's absenteeism is inversely related to student performance which in turn impedes school goal attainment.

The result also showed that embezzlement significantly predicted school goal attainment. Embezzlement of assets destined for improvement of education system give rise to inadequate resources for the effective management of secondary education. This result is in tandem with Suleiman (2021) that misappropriation of assets limits the resources budgeted for educational sector thereby creating an obstacle for effective school goals attainment, stressing that embezzlement results in wastage of resources made available for provision of quality education diverted for selfish use. Lack of explicit norms and regulations to public finance, allowances and public procurement, lack of transparency at the levels of administration, lack of professional ethics or relative enforcement mechanism in public administration, inadequate salaries and weak incentive system, low management capacity, lack of supervision and disciplinary matters allows for financial malpractices, and low salaries combined with inadequate incentive in the education profession causes educational administrator and teachers to involve in corrupt practices such as embezzlement. The result also revealed that bribery directly significantly predicted school attainment. This result agrees with Svensson (2023) that bribery in school is a phenomenon that has a damaging and harmful impact on teacher's teaching effectiveness and impedes school goal attainment, stressing that these illegal and unethical categories of bribery such as offerings, promises, giving, accepting or soliciting for an advantage as an inducement for an action or a breach of trust hampers school goal attainment.

Forgery was also found to be direct predictor to school goal attainment. This result agrees with Salvic (2018) and Nwonyi et al., (2024) that forged documents can have serious and far-reaching negative consequences on students, staff and political entities. Inefficiency in managing forgery practices in our school system could leads to teacher's teaching ineffectiveness, low student's academic productivity, low self-esteem on the part of staff, lack of trust and inefficiency in the attainment of school goals, stressing that mismanagement of forgery practices in school could occur in many forms, from signing another staff name on a check to falsifying one's own academic transcript. Forgery refers to faking a signature without permission, making a false document or other object, or changing an existing document or other object without authorization. The result showed that there was positive correlation among the predictors to student's acquisition of skills. Schools where nepotism thrive teachers are likely to be absent from their duties, embezzle school resources without fear of being audited, collect bribe of any



sort as well as forge documents, all the detriment of realizing the goals for which the school was established.

CONCLUSION

From diverse viewpoints, there are quite lot of ways for the advancement of goal attainment. The research presented an empirical proof for school personnel to improve on the goals set to be achieved by the school. The major findings were discussed and the conclusions reached were as follows: First and foremost, absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery and forgery had significant positive direct effects on school goal attainment. Lack of transparency, increased teacher's absenteeism, embezzlement, bribery, fraud, and also impede quality education and school goal attainment. Secondly, nepotism of school personnel did not provide a direct impact on school goal attainment but was the motivating force for the achievement of school programmes. Bias, irresponsible and unaccountable school personnel weaken communication, while lack of cooperation among staff entrench workplace hostility, decreased motivation thereby weakening school goal attainment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

School authority should be sure to elucidate the significance of attendance and why being on time and in school matters, set a considerable attendance goal in the school improvement plan and frequently monitor progress toward that goal. The school authority should publish minimum academic and professional qualifications for each position, and use a point-based assessment rubrics for both appointment and promotions. The authorities should also provide integrated monitoring systems for staff, develop suitable methods for trustworthiness, integrate complaints and monitoring systems with a mandate for competence and expertise to identify and prevent corruption-related activities throughout the school system.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



Authors' Contributions

Dr. Owor Efiom, and Dr. Ogba Uwaoma, conceived the study, including the design, both authors collated the data, and while Dr. Owor handled the analysis and interpretation. Both authors wrote the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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