

## The Mediating Role of Mental Health and Emotional Intelligence in Personal Growth Initiative and Achievement Striving Behavior of Political Office Holders in South-West Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *Abstract: Political office holders are chiefly entrusted with the formulation and implementation of government policies and programmes designed to enhance sustainable development. Their activities can therefore make or unmake a nation, geo-political region initiative. The mental health and emotional intelligence of political office holders had been linked with their personal growth initiative and achievement striving behaviour in other parts of the World aside from Nigeria. The present study was therefore conducted to examine the mediating role of mental health and emotional intelligence in personal growth initiative and achievement striving behaviour in a sample of 200 political office holders in South-West, Nigeria. Correlation and regression analyses were employed. Results showed that there were significant inter-relationships among achievement striving, personal growth initiative, mental health, and emotional intelligence and that personal growth initiative significantly contributed to achievement striving behaviour. It was also found that whereas mental health had a significant mediating effect, emotional intelligence had no such effect.*

**Keywords:** *Mental health, emotional intelligence, personal growth initiative, achievement striving behavior, political office holders.*

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### Introduction

Political office holders are chiefly entrusted with the formulation and implementation of government policies and programs designed to enhance sustainable development. Their activities can therefore make or unmake a nation, geo-political region or state. Good governance, which entails processes, decisions, and outcomes that sustain natural resources, alleviate poverty, and improve the quality of life, is critical to ensuring that development benefits the people. It has a positive effect on various aspects of government including formulation of policies, meeting procedures, service quality protocols, officer conduct, role clarification, and good working relationships. Good governance and sustainable development can only be attained in an atmosphere conducive to positive achievement striving behavior among our political leaders.

Achievement striving behavior is a domain of conscientiousness (one of the Big Five personality traits). Conscientiousness is a tendency to be organized and dependable, show self-discipline, act dutifully, aim for achievement, and prefer planned rather than spontaneous behavior. Conscientiousness can also appear as sloppiness and lack of reliability (Toegel & Barsoux, 2012). Achievement striving behavior is motivated by the need for personal achievement and sense of direction. According to Beuke (2007), high achievers are often marked, unsurprisingly, by a strong motive to achieve. Less accomplished individuals are often motivated to avoid failure. Achievement striving individuals have a strong desire to accomplish something important and gain gratification from success in demanding tasks. Consequently, they are willing to expend intense effort over long time spans in the pursuit of their goals.

Achievement striving behaviour exists on a continuum, from low level, through failure avoidance, to high level. Failure avoiding individuals are more focused on protecting themselves from the embarrassment and sense of incompetence that can accompany failing at a valued task. Consequently, they are less likely to attempt achievement-oriented tasks, and may give up easily if success is not readily

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forthcoming. Where total avoidance of tasks is not possible, failure avoiding individuals may procrastinate, give less than their best effort, or engage in other self-handicapping behavior that provides a face-saving excuse in the event of failure. Beuke (2007) asserts that achievement striving individuals see success as their personal responsibility, demanding tasks as opportunities, achievement striving as enjoyable and valuable, skills as capable of being improved, and believe in persistence even in the face of obstacle and failure. Achievement striving individuals have a strong desire to accomplish something important and gain gratification from success in demanding tasks. Individuals high in achievement striving behavior are likely to be hardworking, involved in their jobs, and ambitious.

Obviously, achievement striving behavior is positively and strongly linked with personal growth initiative. Personal growth initiative, a construct operationalized by Robitschek (1998), involves intentional engagement in the process of trying to change oneself. It grew out of her work with students in a program christened *Outward Bound*, which focuses on personal growth. Personal growth initiative includes cognitive and behavioral elements. The cognitive elements — such as believing that change within the self is possible, valuing this type of change, and knowing how to change the self — function as precursors for the behavioral elements. The behavioral elements involve actually engaging in the behaviors that lead to changes in the self when confronted with a need to change or when the person simply desires to change (Barak & Achiron, 2011). Clearly, achievement striving behavior is strongly linked with personal growth initiative. Personal growth initiative is a promising antecedent of optimal functioning and well-being. An individual demonstrates personal growth initiative when he or she has a deliberate and active desire to grow in the most crucial areas of his or her life (Robitschek, 1998; Robitschek *et al.*, 2012). Personal growth initiative is an intentional participation in the self-change process that can be behavioural or cognitive and can take place in any life sphere and that yields changes associated with intentional development (Robitschek, 1999). Personal growth initiative exists on a continuum from low to high levels. Personal growth initiative determines, in part, how the person will respond in a situation that either requires the person to change or presents an opportunity for change or growth. For example, if a person with a high level of personal growth initiative wants to become assertive, this person most likely will believe that it is possible to become more assertive or will take the initiative to find out how to become more assertive.

Individuals with high personal growth initiative take advantage of opportunities and intentionally develop themselves (Robitschek & Cook, 1999; Robitschek *et al.*, 2012). Ryff (1989) describes a person with a high level of personal growth initiative as someone who has the intention of constant development. Such a person will see himself as growing, as able to realize his potentials, as open to new experiences, changing in ways that reflect self-knowledge and success, and sees improvement in self and behaviour over time. Personal growth initiative is both an intentional and conscious process.

Logically, personal growth initiative is expected to positively relate to, and predict achievement striving behavior. Studies have shown substantial intersection between elements of emotional intelligence and those of mental health: Emotional intelligence influences an individual's physical and mental health, and its dimensions are sufficient to explain various components of physical and mental health (Fernandez-Abasca & Martin-Diaz, 2015; Mohanty, Pradhan, & Jena, 2015). However, the influence of personal growth initiative on achievement striving behavior could be mediated by some variables which include mental health and emotional intelligence. Since the focus of this study is on the mediating effect of mental health and emotional intelligence in the relationship between personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior of political office holders, it is expedient at this juncture to examine both the concepts and mediating role of mental health and emotional intelligence.

Mental health has been defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potentials, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization, 2001). Mental health relates to emotions, thoughts, and behavior. A person with good mental health is generally able to handle day-to-day events and obstacles, work toward important goals, and function effectively in society. However, even minor mental health problems may affect everyday activities to the extent that individuals cannot

function as they would wish, or are expected to, within their family and community. Siegel (2012) identified nine factors that contribute to what we might consider good mental health. These are body regulation, attuned communication, emotional balance, response flexibility, fear modulation, insight, empathy, morality, and intuition.

Emotional intelligence is a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use emotional information to guide one's thinking and actions (Mayer & Salovey, 1990). Mayer and Salovey (1990) also identified the following basic dimensions of emotional intelligence: Self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and handling relationships. Mayer and Cobb (2000) describe emotional intelligence as the ability to process emotional information as it pertains to the perception, assimilation, expression, regulation, and management of emotions. Goleman (2005) states that emotional intelligence is the capability for realizing one's feelings and those of others, for motivating oneself, and for managing emotions well in oneself and in one's relationships with others. Cherry (2012) describes emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions.

There is no doubt that policies, programs, and other routine activities of political office holders are a function of their personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior. Ordinarily, we expect the formulation and implementation of government policies to be influenced by the mental health and emotional intelligence of this class of people. It is the realization of this fact that has led to a recent call to subject political office holders in Nigeria to psychiatric tests and evaluations (Akinkuotu, 2016). In a nutshell, good governance, which results in sustainable development, is strongly influenced by these factors. In other words, personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior have implications for good governance and sustainable development. Good governance is demonstrated by government's ability to design, formulate, and implement policies and programs which are development oriented and geared toward the improvement of the quality of life of the citizens. It is especially accepted that, to promote good governance, the civil society should be obedient to the policies or constitutional dictates expected of them. However, the government through its arms should lead while the citizens follow (Onichakwe, 2016). In her own submission, Weber (2015) asserts that fair and effective governance is critical in ensuring that development benefits both people and the planet, and that good governance should therefore entail processes, decisions, and outcomes that sustain natural resources, alleviate poverty, and improve the quality of life. Good governance stems from a set of favorable political conditions in which people have the right to vote, exercise oversight, and seek redress from politicians and officials. The real test of good governance is when citizens feel secure and trust governments to conduct public affairs in the best interests of society as a whole rather than for the privilege few. Good governance naturally leads to sustainable development.

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from the Brundtland Report (United Nations, 1987) which defines it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- (i) The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- (ii) The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

Studies that have been carried out on personal growth initiative and achievement striving have not considered the mediating role of mental health and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, most of these studies have been conducted in foreign countries using samples other than those of political office holders. This paper therefore focuses on the mediating role of mental health and emotional intelligence in personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria.

The purpose of the paper is to determine, for political office holders in South-West, Nigeria, whether:

- (i) there are statistically significant relationships among mental health, emotional intelligence, personal growth initiative, and achievement striving behavior;
- (ii) there is statistically significant contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior, independent of mental health and emotional intelligence;
- (iii) there is statistically significant mediating effect of mental health in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior; and
- (iv) There is statistically significant mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria.

## **Method**

The population of this study consisted of all political office holders in the six states of South-West, Nigeria. A sample of 200 political office holders was chosen through the stratified random sampling technique. The population was divided into three strata: Ekiti and Ondo States, Lagos and Ogun States, and Osun and Oyo States, being the six States making up South-West, Nigeria. Political office holders in each stratum were sampled across three categories: Commissioners and Special Advisers, State and Local Government Legislators, and Chairmen of Local Government Areas. The instruments used for data collection were the following:

### **1. Achievement Striving Scale (ASS)**

The Achievement Striving Scale (ASS) was developed by Golderg, Johnson, Eber, Ashton, and Gough (2006) to assess striving for achievement among individuals in different fields of endeavour. It contains 10 items formatted as a 4-point Likert-type scale with possible responses ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree. All the items on the scale are positively worded. Examples of items on the scale are *I go straight to the goal in whatever I do* and *I never give up*.

The ASS has been validated by its developers. It showed evidence of good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .78), as well as good construct and predictive validity, showing expected relations with health ( $r = .405, p < .05$ ), well-being ( $r = .493, p < .05$ ), and life satisfaction ( $r = .517, p < .05$ ) outcomes. The reliability index in the present study is  $\alpha = .81$ .

### **2. Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS)**

The Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS) was developed by Robitschek (1998) to assess the degree of personal growth initiative in the general population. The instrument consists of nine items. Respondents are required to rate each item on a 4-point Likert-type scale with possible responses ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree. All the items on the scale are positively worded. Examples of items on the PGIS are *I can choose the role that I want to have in a group* and *I have a specific action plan to help me reach my goals*.

Robitschek (1998) reported a high Cronbach's alpha of .75 and a significant test-retest reliability coefficient with a one-month interval ( $r = .506, p < .05$ ) for the PGIS. This shows that the scale is internally consistent and stable over time. The developer cross-validated the PGIS by correlating scores on it with scores on the Career Success Scale (CSS) (Sevine, 2001) using a sample of 460 employees in manufacturing organizations. The convergent validity was found to be high ( $r = .79$ ). The reliability index in the present study is  $\alpha = .78$ .

### **3. Mental Health Inventory - 5 (MHI-5)**

The Mental Health Inventory - 5 (MHI-5) is, as the name suggests, a 5-item Likert-type scale designed by Berwick, Murphy, Goldman, Ware, and Weinstein (1991) to assess the mental health of individuals. It is a 6-point scale with the following possible responses: 1 = None of the time; 2 = A bit of the time; 3 = A little of the time; 4 = Most of the time; 5 = Some of the time; 6 = All of the time. The scale contains both positively and negatively worded items. Examples of items on the scale are *How*

*much of the time during the past month have you felt calm and peaceful? and How much of the time during the past month have you been a very nervous person?*

Damasio, Borsa, and Koller (2014) administered the MHI-5 on 524 subjects aged 18 to 88 years old from 17 Brazilian states. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported a single factor solution or uni-dimensionality of the scale. A Cronbach’s alpha of .85 was reported, confirming the internal consistency reliability of the scale. The MHI-5 presented strong evidence of validity and it appears appropriate to evaluate mental health in the Brazilian population. Criterion-related validity of mental health as measured by the MHI-5 with measures of hope and life satisfaction was also established. The reliability index in the present study is  $\alpha = .83$ .

**4. Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS)**

The Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS) was developed by Mabekoje (2012). Items were created based on the theory of Mayer and Salovey (1997), from the following four domains of emotional intelligence: Appraisal and Expression of Emotion, Use of Emotion, Knowledge of Emotion, and Management of Emotion. The scale contains both positively and negatively worded items. Examples of items on the scale are *I can easily recognize the feelings of others* and *someone cannot hurt me and get away with it*. The developer administered the instrument on 423 adolescents and young adults and found the items to be internally consistent. Coefficients alpha for Appraisal and Expression of Emotion, Use of Emotion, Knowledge of Emotion, and Management of Emotion dimensions were .57, .64, .69, and .56 respectively. The convergent validity of this scale was supported by significant positive relationships with Overall Emotional Intelligence ( $r = .956, p < .05$ ), Agreeableness ( $r = .222, p < .05$ ), Conscientiousness ( $r = .403, p < .05$ ), Openness to Experience ( $r = .308, p < .05$ ), Cognitive Mental Ability ( $r = .193, p < .05$ ), Perspective Taking ( $r = .246, p < .05$ ), Fantasy ( $r = .442, p < .05$ ), Empathic Concern ( $r = .193, p < .05$ ), and Empathy ( $r = .364, p < .05$ ). The discriminant validity of the SREIS has been supported by significant negative relationships between the scale and External Oriented Thinking ( $r = -.224, p < .05$ ) and Alexithymia ( $r = -.073, p < .05$ ). The reliability index in the present study is  $\alpha = .71$ .

The instruments were administered on the participants personally by the researcher after meeting and obtaining permission from the relevant authorities. The subjects were given directions on how to fill the questionnaires and an appeal was made for frank and sincere responses, with assurance that information obtained would be treated as strictly confidential and used only for the purpose of this study. The instruments were then distributed and later collected and scored. A 100% return rate was achieved. Data collected were tested by means of correlation coefficients and regression analysis. Tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level. All analyses were carried out with the aid of the IBM SPSS Version 22 software.

**Results**

**First Hypothesis**

Ho1: There are no significant relationships among mental health, emotional intelligence, personal growth initiative, and achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South West, Nigeria.

*Table (1): Correlation Matrix for the Relationship among Mental Health, Emotional Intelligence, Personal Growth Initiative, and Achievement Striving Behavior*

	MENTHE	EMOTINTE	PERGROIN	ACHSTRIV
MENTHE	1	.423*	.246*	.361*
EMOTINTE	-	1	.284*	.401*
PERGROIN	-	-	1	.503*
ACHSTRIV	-	-	-	1

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

NOTE: MENTHE = Mental Health; EMOTINTE = Emotional Intelligence; PERGROIN = Personal Growth Initiative; ACHSTRIV = Achievement Striving Behavior

Results in Table 1 revealed significant and positive inter-correlations among mental health, emotional intelligence, personal growth initiative, and achievement striving behavior. The strongest relationship was between personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior ( $r = .503, p < .05$ ). This was followed by relationships between mental health and emotional intelligence ( $r = .423, p < .05$ ), emotional intelligence and achievement striving behavior ( $r = .401, p < .05$ ), mental health and achievement striving behavior ( $r = .361, p < .05$ ), emotional intelligence and personal growth initiative ( $r = .284, p < .05$ ), and mental health and personal growth initiative ( $r = .246, p < .05$ ). The null hypothesis is consequently rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that there are significant relationships among mental health, emotional intelligence, personal growth initiative, and achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria.

### Second Hypothesis

Ho2: There is no significant contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria independent of mental health and emotional intelligence.

*Table (2): Model Summary and Coefficient of the Regression Analysis of the Contribution of Personal Growth Initiative to Achievement Striving Behavior*

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	t	F	Sig.
ACHSTRIV	.503	.253	.231	-	-	10.483	.000
(Constant)	-	-	-	.367	9.388	-	.000
PERGROIN	-	-	-	.216	6.719	-	.000

Dependent Variable: Achievement Striving Behavior

Predictors: (Constant), Personal Growth Initiative

Results in Table 2 showed that personal growth initiative significantly predicted achievement striving behavior among the participants ( $t = 6.719, p < .05$ ). The model explains 23.1% of the variance in achievement striving behavior. The null hypothesis is consequently rejected and the alternative hypothesis is upheld. It is therefore concluded that there is a significant contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria.

### Third Hypothesis

Ho3: There is no significant mediating effect of mental health in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria.

*Table (3): Model Summary of the Regression Analysis for the Mediating Effect of Mental Health in the Contribution of Personal Growth Initiative to the Prediction of Achievement Striving Behavior*

Model	Coeff.	Std. Error	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
(Constant)	12.51	1.80	6.95	.00	8.96	16.07
Mental Health	.36	.07	5.20	.00	.22	.50
PGI	.39	.08	5.14	.00	.24	.54
Model Summary R = .51; R <sup>2</sup> = .26; MSE = 22.97; df1 = 2.00; df2 = 197.00; p < .05						

Dependent Variable: Achievement Striving Behavior

Predictors: (Constant), PGI

Note: PGI = Personal Growth Initiative

Results in Table 3 revealed a significant mediating effect of mental health in the contribution of personal growth initiative to the prediction of achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria ( $t = 5.20, p < .05$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that there is a significant mediating effect of mental health in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement behavior striving of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria. Table 4.3 further showed that 26.0% of the variance in achievement striving behavior of political office holders was accounted for by personal growth initiative and the mediating effect of mental health ( $R^2 = .26$ ).

**Fourth Hypothesis**

Ho4: There is no significant mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria.

*Table (4): Model Summary of the Regression Analysis for the Mediating Effect of Emotional Intelligence in the Contribution of Personal Growth Initiative to the Prediction of Achievement Striving Behavior*

Model	Coeff.	Std. Error	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
(Constant)	10.40	1.62	6.42	.00	7.21	13.60
EMOTINTE	.24	.03	8.40	.00	.19	.30
PGI	.26	.07	3.51	.00	.11	.40
Model Summary R = .62; R <sup>2</sup> = .38; MSE = 19.24; df1 = 2.00; df2 = 197.00; p < .05						

Dependent Variable: Achievement Striving Behavior

Predictors: (Constant), PGI

Results in Table 4 showed a significant mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the contribution of personal growth initiative to the prediction of achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria ( $t = 8.40, p < .05$ ). The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria is therefore rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis. It is consequently concluded that there is a significant mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria. Table 4.4 further revealed that 38.0% of the variance in achievement striving behavior was accounted for by personal growth initiative and the mediating effect of emotional intelligence ( $R^2 = .38$ ).

**Conclusion**

A common thread running through this study is that the vast majority of past research on the relationship between personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior of political office holders in Nigeria have neglected to examine some important factors that could modify this relationship. The current study therefore investigated the mediating role of mental health and emotional intelligence in personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior of political office holders in South-West, Nigeria. Specifically analyzed were relationships among the variables and the way the other variables contribute to achievement striving behavior among our participants and population.

Results revealed significant and positive inter-relationships among all the variables of the study, the strongest being between personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior. Personal growth initiative and achievement striving behavior, though separate constructs, have some common elements or characteristics such as upward mobility in one’s productive activities and tendency towards self-actualization. They are therefore expected to be positively correlated. The significant and positive inter-correlations among all the variables of this study could also be due to the fact that they are all positive psychological constructs. For example, a mentally healthy person is expected to score high on emotional intelligence, personal growth initiative, and achievement striving behavior scales. The significant contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior found in this study could be attributed to strong motivation inherent in individuals with high personal growth initiative to develop themselves (Robitschek & Cook, 1999; Robitschek *et al.*, 2012; Ryff, 1989).

Results further suggested that mental health plays a critical mediating role in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders. This result echoes the governing function of the brain in all human activities. Without having sound mental health, poorly thought out and inappropriate policies and decisions would be made by our political leaders in government, and, of course, these automatically result in wrong actions leading to the opposite of good governance and sustainable development. In line with the submission of Akinkuotu (2016) among others, the time is ripe for psychiatric evaluations not only of political office holders but also of other individuals occupying sensitive positions in all sectors of the Nigerian economy.

Similarly, a significant mediating effect of emotional intelligence in the contribution of personal growth initiative to achievement striving behavior of political office holders was found. The implication of this finding is that the desire for growth could motivate the striving for personal achievement. This finding supported that of Akinkuotu (2016) among other scholars and what one would ordinarily expect.

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