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Occupational Stress As A Correlate Of Academic Staff Job Performance In Public Universities In Benue State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated occupational stress as a correlate of academic staff job performance in Public Universities in Benue State. To achieve the purpose of the study, five research questions guided the study and five hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study was anchored on Person-Environment (PE) Fit theory by Carl Ransom Rogers and Sidney Cobb 1970 and the theory of performance by Richard Schechner 1938. Conceptual and empirical review were carried out on occupational stress in the areas of poor working conditions, workload pressure, time pressure, role conflict and interpersonal conflict and academic staff job performance in public Universities. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1,940 academic staff from three public universities in Benue State. The sample size of 320 academic staff from two public universities in Benue State, Nigeria was used for the study. Purposive sampling, proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used for this study. The instrument used for data collection was two sets of questionnaires titled "Occupational Stress Questionnaire (OSQ)" and "Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (ASJPQ)" with reliability coefficient of 0.98 and 0.96. A total number of 320 copies of the questionnaire were taken to the field and administered to the respondents. However, only 309 copies of the questionnaires returned were used for data analysis. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that poor working conditions, workload pressure, time pressure, role conflict and interpersonal conflict have significant strong negative correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State. The study concluded that occupational stress has significant strong negative correlate with academic staff job performance in Public Universities in Benue State. The study recommended among others that university governing councils should improve working conditions by providing adequate office accommodation, modern teaching facilities, research resources and staff welfare through increased funding and regular infrastructure maintenance, thereby reducing occupational stress and enhancing academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State.

Keywords: occupational stress, academic staff job performance, poor working conditions, workload pressure

INTRODUCTION

Academic staff job performance is regarded as pivotal to teaching quality, research innovation and overall university excellence. However, universities worldwide are concerned about declining staff job

performance reflected in reduced research output, limited student mentorship, delayed feedback, poor curriculum delivery and weakened community engagement. In advanced countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, studies report faculty burnout, poor students' supervision and low research productivity due to increasing work demands and institutional pressures (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2022). Similarly, Nigerian universities seem to experience challenges including inadequate lecture preparation, delayed examination processing, low research publication rates and poor academic advising. These problems seem to be evident in public universities in Benue State, where academic staff often struggle with heavy workloads, inadequate facilities and role overload, resulting in weak delivery of teaching, research and administrative responsibilities. These trends suggest that academic staff in public universities may not be performing well for universities to achieve pre-determined objectives.

Academic staff job performance refers to the ability of lecturers to effectively execute their core duties of teaching, research and community service toward achieving institutional goals (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2021). It encompasses lesson delivery, mentoring of students, curriculum development, scholarly publishing, participation in professional activities and administrative responsibilities (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2020). High-quality teaching is reflected in adequate lesson preparation, timely assessment of students and provision of feedback, which collectively strengthen learning outcomes (Ezeani, 2019). Research productivity measured through publications, grant acquisition and conference engagement contributes to institutional visibility and knowledge creation (Adekola & Lawal, 2022). Similarly, involvement in community service enhances societal development and reinforces university–community relationships (Olojede, 2023). Effective job performance improves institutional ranking and student satisfaction, while poor performance undermines academic standards and programme quality (Ita & Essien, 2021). Given its multidimensional nature, academic staff job performance could be shaped by personal, institutional and environmental factors, thereby providing a basis to explore how occupational stress may influence productivity.

Occupational stress refers to the psychological, emotional and physical strain experienced by workers when job demands exceed their coping resources (World Health Organization, 2020). In university settings, occupational stress results from excessive workload, limited resources, unclear job roles, inadequate support and strained interpersonal relationships (Akinola & Ojo, 2022). It manifests in fatigue, anxiety, burnout, reduced motivation and diminishing job satisfaction (Gillespie, Brown & Taylor, 2021). Studies show that prolonged academic stress negatively affects staff well-being, diminishes teaching quality and lowers research output due to loss of concentration and reduced creativity (Okolie & Ogbu, 2023). Poor working conditions, role conflict and time pressure are frequently cited as key predictors of stress-related outcomes among academic employees (Odu & Adeyemi, 2020; Yusuf & Ali, 2022). Consequently, occupational stress could jeopardize institutional productivity and staff retention, highlighting its relevance in understanding employee performance. Therefore, examining occupational stress with focus on poor working conditions, workload pressure, time pressure, role conflict and interpersonal conflict could provide a logical foundation for evaluating its correlation with academic staff job performance.

Poor working conditions refer to the inadequate physical and organizational environments in which academic staff perform their duties, including lack of office space, overcrowded lecture halls, insufficient instructional materials, unreliable electricity and poor welfare structures (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2021). Research shows that lecturers who operate in unsafe or resource-constrained environments often struggle to prepare lessons effectively, engage in meaningful research and provide quality student supervision (Okwa & Igwe, 2022). Such conditions foster discomfort, low morale and frustration, which may gradually undermine job satisfaction and academic productivity (Chukwu & Ngwu, 2020). In public universities in Benue State, cases of deteriorating facilities, limited access to laboratories and poor ICT infrastructure seems to heighten stress levels and discourage innovative teaching. Consequently, the interaction between poor work environments and demanding university tasks could threaten academic

performance. This highlights the need to consider how workload pressure further compounds these stressors.

Workload pressure reflects in the excessive teaching, research and administrative responsibilities assigned to academic staff beyond the manageable limit (Akinola & Ojo, 2022). Academic staff are often required to teach large classes, supervise numerous students, publish regularly and participate in university committees simultaneously (Okolie & Ogbu, 2023). When these tasks accumulate without adequate time or resources, lecturers may experience burnout, emotional exhaustion and declining productivity (Adeyemi, 2020). In Public Universities in Benue State, workloads seem to be worsened by staff shortages, growing student enrollment and limited support systems, creating intense pressure on lecturers to meet multiple demands. This heightened pressure contributes significantly to occupational stress, pushing lecturers into a cycle of fatigue and dissatisfaction. Understanding workload pressure thus leads logically to examining how time pressure further influences academic staff job performance.

Public universities in Benue State refer to government-owned apex higher education institutions established, funded and regulated by either the federal or state government to provide accessible tertiary education, promote research and support human capital development within the state (Yusuf & Ali, 2022). These universities primarily serve students from Benue State and beyond, operate under statutory governance structures and employ academic staff whose teaching, research and community service roles contribute to regional and national development. In recent years, instances such as frequent lecture cancellations, delayed graduation likely due to incomplete supervision and rising cases of staff burnout seem to have raised concerns among students, parents and university authorities in Benue State; this trend underscores the urgent need to investigate how occupational stress correlate of academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

Academic staff job performance is acknowledged as a major determinant of teaching quality, research productivity and institutional effectiveness in higher education (UNESCO, 2022). However, educational stakeholders in Nigeria including university management, regulatory bodies, parents and professional associations have continued to express concern and worry over the declining academic staff job performance of academic staff, which is reflected in reduced research output, poor student supervision, diminished teaching quality and limited community engagement. These concerns seem to be particularly pronounced in public universities in Benue State, where the researcher has observed recurring issues, such as delays in grading students' work, insufficient research publications, limited mentoring and inadequate preparation for lectures.

The above challenges appear to be closely linked to occupational stress, manifested in poor working conditions and workload pressure among academic staff. Many lecturers operate in resource-poor environments characterized by poor lightings, inadequate water supply, high student-teacher ratio, poor time management, overcrowded lecture halls, insufficient office space, inadequate teaching materials and low welfare support. The demands of multitasking; balancing teaching, research, administrative responsibilities and community service likely result in high workload and time pressure, while unclear job expectations and overlapping duties seem to create role conflict. Observation by the researcher seems to reveal widespread stress-related conditions such as increased health challenges, sudden deaths, low research productivity, frequent absenteeism, low morale and likely high job dissatisfaction among lecturers in public universities in Benue State. Despite the observable link between stress-inducing work environments and job performance, limited empirical studies have investigated this relationship within the context of public universities in Benue State; it becomes imperative for the researcher to investigate occupational stress as a correlate of academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the occupational stress as a correlate of academic staff job performance in Public Universities in Benue State. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. determine correlation between poor working conditions and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

2. find out correlation between workload pressure and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the correlation between poor working conditions and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State?
2. What is the correlation between workload pressure and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Poor working conditions have no significant correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.
2. Workload pressure has no significant correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. his research design was considered suitable for this study because it sought to test the direction and strength of association between the independent variable (Occupational stress) and the dependent variable (Academic staff job performance) through the analysis of research questions and hypotheses with no manipulation or intervention by the researcher. The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria, which has 23 local government areas. These include Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo and Makurdi. The population of the was 1,940 academic staff from the three public universities in Benue State. The sample size was 320 staff members from two public universities in Benue State, Nigeria which represents 17% of the population. This sample agrees with Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table using sample size formula for a finite population. The study employed multi-stage sampling procedure. This includes: purposive sampling, proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Two sets of questionnaires structured by the researcher titled "Occupational Stress Questionnaire (OSQ)" and "Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (ASJPQ)" with over all reliability coefficient of 0.98 and 0.96 was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. These included two experts in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation, who reviewed the questionnaire to confirm its relevance, clarity and suitability for the study. A four-point rating scale was used to establish the level of agreement or disagreement in the respondents' opinions. Thus, Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 was used by the respondents to respond to each item in each cluster. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research questions and also test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented, analyzed and interpreted as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the correlation between poor working conditions and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State*?*

Table 1:

Correlation Between Poor Working Conditions and Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Benue State

Variables	N	r	Decision
Poor Working Conditions	309		
		-0.93	Strong Negative Correlation
Academic Staff Job Performance	309		

The result in Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficient of 0.92 falls within 0.5 to 1.0 which indicate a strong positive correlation. This implies that there is a strong negative correlation between poor working conditions and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

Research Question 2: What is the correlation between workload pressure and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State*?*

Table 2:

Correlation Between Workload Pressure and Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Benue State

Variables	**N**	**r**	**Decision**
Workload Pressure	309		
		-0.85	Strong Negative Correlation
Academic Staff Job Performance	309		

The result in Table 2 revealed that the correlation coefficient of 0.83 falls within 0.5 to 1.0 which indicate a strong relationship. This implies that there is a strong negative correlation between workload pressure and academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

Test of Hypotheses

In this section, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical tool was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1: Poor working conditions have no significant correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

Table 3:

Significant Correlation Between Poor Working Conditions and Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Benue State

Variables	**N**	**r**	**Df**	***P***	**Decision**
Poor Working Conditions	309				
		-0.93	307	0.000	Significant Strong Negative Relationship
Academic Staff Job Performance	309				

The result in Table 3 shows that r = -0.93; df = 307; p-value = 0.000 < 0.05. Since P-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that *p*oor working conditions have no significant correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State was therefore rejected. This implies that poor working conditions have significant strong negative correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

Hypothesis 2: Workload pressure has no significant correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

Table 4:

Significant Correlation Between Workload Pressure and Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Benue State

Variables	N	r	Df	*P*	Decision
Workload Pressure	309				
		-0.85	307	0.000	Significant Strong Negative Correlation
Academic Staff Job Performance	309				

The result in Table 4 revealed that r = -0.85; df = 307; p-value = 0.000 < 0.05. Since P-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis which states that workload pressure has no significant correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State was therefore rejected. This implies that workload pressure has significant strong negative correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section discussed the findings of the study as follows:

The first finding of the present study revealed that poor working conditions have a significant strong negative correlation with academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State. This implies that deterioration in working conditions is associated with a corresponding decline in lecturers' job performance. The finding is consistent with the finding of Ogunode and Abubakar (2022), that there is a significant negative relationship between poor working conditions and academic staff job performance in public universities in North Central Nigeria. Their study showed that inadequate facilities, poor

remuneration, overcrowded classrooms and unsafe work environments reduced lecturers' effectiveness in teaching, research and community service. This finding supports the present study because both investigations specifically examined poor working conditions as a determinant of academic staff performance using correlational approaches, although the present study provides more localized evidence from public universities in Benue State. The finding also aligns with Adeyemi and Alabi (2020), who established a significant positive relationship between favourable working conditions and academic staff job performance in public universities in South-West Nigeria. Although their study focused on positive working conditions rather than poor working conditions, it logically supports the present finding because improved working conditions enhance performance, whereas poor working conditions diminish performance. The two studies are related because both examined working conditions as an important predictor of lecturers' effectiveness using questionnaire-based survey designs. The finding can be justified by the fact that inadequate office accommodation, poor instructional facilities, insufficient welfare provisions, unreliable electricity, inadequate research infrastructure and unsafe work environments create occupational stress that lowers lecturers' motivation, commitment and productivity. Such conditions hinder effective teaching, quality research and community service. Therefore, improving the physical, social and welfare conditions of academic staff is essential for enhancing job performance in public universities in Benue State.

The second finding revealed that workload pressure has a significant strong negative correlation with academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State, indicating that increasing workload pressure significantly reduces lecturers' effectiveness. This finding agrees with Adegboye and Olatunji (2019), who reported a significant negative relationship between workload pressure and academic staff job performance in public universities in South-West Nigeria. Their findings revealed that excessive teaching loads, large class sizes and numerous administrative responsibilities reduced lecturers' effectiveness in teaching and research. This study relates to the present investigation because both examined workload pressure as an important occupational stress factor influencing academic staff job performance using correlational research designs and questionnaire instruments. The finding is also supported by Ogunode, ThankGod and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2023), who established that excessive teaching responsibilities, research demands and administrative duties significantly reduced lecturers' performance in public universities across North Central Nigeria. Their study complements the present study because both investigated workload pressure and academic staff performance within Nigerian public universities, although the present study focused specifically on Benue State. The finding can be justified because excessive workload often results in physical exhaustion, emotional fatigue, work overload and limited time for adequate lesson preparation, quality research, student mentoring and community engagement. Consequently, lecturers under excessive workload experience reduced efficiency, lower productivity and diminished job satisfaction, all of which negatively affect their overall performance. The consistency between the present finding and previous empirical studies suggests that workload pressure remains a critical occupational stressor affecting lecturers' effectiveness. Therefore, equitable workload allocation, recruitment of additional academic staff and institutional workload management policies are necessary to improve academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State.

CONCLUSION

The study established that occupational stress has significant strong negative correlate with academic staff job performance in Public Universities in Benue State. The findings revealed that poor working conditions and workload pressure have significant strong negative correlation with academic staff job performance in public Universities in Benue State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University governing councils should improve working conditions by providing adequate office accommodation, modern teaching facilities, research resources and staff welfare through increased funding and regular infrastructure maintenance, thereby reducing occupational stress and enhancing academic staff job performance in public universities in Benue State.
2. Vice Chancellors should reduce workload pressure by recruiting additional academic staff, implementing equitable workload allocation and limiting excessive administrative responsibilities, thereby minimizing work-related stress and improving lecturers' effectiveness in teaching, research and community service.

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