

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND FLEXIBLE WORKLOAD AND ACADEMIC STAFF JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the relationship between training, development and flexible workload and academic staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State. The study population comprised 2,985 academic staff from three public universities: University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State University (RSU), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE). A stratified random sample of 746 lecturers was drawn, representing 25% of the population. Data were collected using two researcher-designed instruments: the Training and Flexible Workload Questionnaire (TFWCSQ) and the Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (SJPQ). The instruments, structured on a 4-point Likert scale, were validated by experts and confirmed reliable with coefficients of .892 and .834. Out of 746 distributed questionnaires, 627 were retrieved and used for analysis, yielding an 84% response rate. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to analyze research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation tested the hypotheses at a .05 significance level using SPSS version 25. The findings provided insight into how training and development, and flexible workload significantly influence job performance among university academic staff. The study recommended among others that university management and relevant government bodies should encourage training and development of employees through clear contractual agreements and adherence to labor laws.

Keywords: Training and Development, Flexible Workload, Staff, Job Performance, Public Universities, Rivers State.

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INTRODUCTION

The performance of academic staff in public universities plays a crucial role in the success of higher education institutions, particularly in Nigeria, where education is a central pillar for national development. However, academic staff performance is often influenced by the conditions under which they work. Among the key factors shaping job performance are training and development opportunities, as well as flexible workload arrangements. In the context of public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, the interplay between training, development and flexible workload and academic staff performance has become increasingly significant, especially given the rising demands on university education, expanding student populations, and evolving academic responsibilities.

Training and development refer to structured efforts by institutions to enhance the skills, knowledge, and competencies of their employees (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). For academic staff, this includes support for attending conferences, workshops, postgraduate studies, sabbatical leave, and research grants. These opportunities not only improve the individual's capacity to deliver quality teaching and research but also contribute to overall institutional effectiveness. Research shows that continuous professional development is essential for improving academic delivery, staying current with global trends, and maintaining relevance in teaching and research activities (Okorie & Uche, 2020).

On the other hand, flexible workload arrangements involve the structuring of teaching, research, and administrative duties in a manner that accommodates staff preferences, capacities, and personal circumstances. These may include flexible lecture schedules, reduced class loads for staff engaged in research, and consideration of work-life balance. The concept of flexible workload has gained traction in many higher institutions as a strategy for promoting job satisfaction and enhancing productivity (Ofoegbu & Ojogwu, 2017). In the Nigerian university context, rigid workload policies have been identified as a source of stress and burnout, particularly when academic staff are burdened with excessive teaching loads, administrative duties, and large class sizes (Eze & Eze, 2021).

The Nigerian University Commission (NUC) and individual universities have established guidelines on staff workload and professional development. However, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent across institutions. In Rivers State, where institutions such as the University of Port Harcourt and Rivers State University serve as academic hubs, staff face challenges related to limited access to training opportunities, poorly structured workload systems, and insufficient support for academic growth (Nwokocha, 2020). These challenges have raised concerns about how well academic staff can perform their core duties, which include teaching, research, community service, and mentoring students.

Academic staff performance is multidimensional and is typically assessed through research output, teaching effectiveness, involvement in community service, and professional development. Several studies have found a positive relationship between supportive work conditions and staff performance. For instance, Igbinedion and Oyekan (2018) found that universities that invested in training and offered flexible work schedules experienced improved staff engagement and higher research output. Similarly, Olowu and Hassan (2019) observed that academic staff who benefited from developmental opportunities were more likely to contribute meaningfully to curriculum innovation, student mentoring, and institutional research goals.

Despite the growing recognition of these factors, there remains a significant gap in empirical studies focused on the specific context of Rivers State public universities. The

dynamics of staff development and workload flexibility may vary depending on institutional management styles, resource availability, and policy frameworks. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the relationship between training/development and flexible workload and their influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State.

This investigation is critical in identifying strategies to enhance academic staff effectiveness, reduce turnover intentions, and improve the overall quality of education. Understanding how these service conditions impact performance can inform evidence-based policies and foster a more conducive academic environment that supports sustainable educational development.

Statement of the Problem

Academic staff performance is central to the success of higher education institutions, particularly in Nigeria's public universities. However, persistent challenges related to poor conditions of service have raised concerns about the capacity of academic staff to perform optimally. In Rivers State, issues such as limited access to training and professional development opportunities, rigid and overloaded workload schedules, and insufficient institutional support continue to hinder staff effectiveness in teaching, research, and community service.

Despite national policies emphasizing staff development and fair workload distribution, the practical implementation within public universities in Rivers State remains inadequate. Many academic staff report being overwhelmed by heavy teaching loads and administrative responsibilities, leaving little time for research or professional growth. Furthermore, training programs are often inconsistently provided or poorly funded, reducing staff morale and motivation.

These challenges, if not addressed, can negatively impact academic quality, research output, and institutional performance. Although several studies have explored staff performance generally, there is limited empirical research specifically examining the combined influence of training/development and flexible workload on academic staff performance in this region. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how these factors relate to staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate training/development and flexible and staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The specific objectives seek to:

- Investigate the extent to which staff training/development relates to staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State.
- Assess the extent to which flexible workload relates to staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent does staff training/development relate with staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State?
- To what extent does flexible workload relate with staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

- There is no significant relationship between staff training/development as a condition of service and staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between flexible workload and staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Academic Staff Training and Development and Job Performance in Nigerian Public Universities

Academic staff training and development play a crucial role in enhancing job performance in Nigerian public universities. According to Ololube and Mmom (2025), the rapidly changing demands in higher education and global academic standards, the continuous professional development of lecturers and researchers is essential for maintaining quality education, promote innovation, and boost institutional performance. However, in Nigeria, public universities face unique challenges, including underfunding, infrastructural decay, and staff shortages. Amidst these issues, well-structured training and development programs are important towards ensuring academic staff are adequately equipped to meet teaching, research, and administrative expectations (Igbinedion & Oyekan, 2018; Noe, 2017; Cheta-Maclean & Ololube, 2025).

Training and development refer to the systematic improvement of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of employees to enable them to perform their duties more effectively (Armstrong, 2014). For academic staff, this may include pedagogical training, research capacity-building workshops, conferences, seminars, mentorship, and postgraduate sponsorships. Such interventions not only enhance subject matter expertise but also promote the adoption of new teaching strategies and research methodologies that improve student learning outcomes and research productivity.

The link between academic staff development and job performance has been established in several empirical studies. For example, Ezeani and Oladele (2013) and Ololube (2024) observed that academic staff who participate in regular training programs demonstrate improved teaching efficiency, better curriculum delivery, and increased motivation. Similarly, Uzochukwu and Nwosu (2020) found that training contributes positively to job satisfaction, commitment, and goal alignment among lecturers in public universities. These improvements are crucial in institutions where resource constraints often limit innovation and professional growth.

Despite the clear benefits, academic staff training in Nigerian public universities is often constrained by inadequate funding and policy gaps. Government allocations to education frequently fall short of international benchmarks. For instance, Nigeria's education budget consistently remains below the UNESCO-recommended 26% of total national expenditure

(Okebukola, 2012). As a result, universities often struggle to sponsor staff to attend academic conferences, enroll in doctoral programs, or acquire certifications in modern teaching tools and digital technologies.

Additionally, the absence of clearly defined training policies in many public universities hinders effective staff development. According to Ijeoma and Lawal (2011), several universities lack frameworks for identifying training needs, implementing relevant programs, and evaluating outcomes. Consequently, training efforts may be sporadic, generic, or misaligned with both institutional goals and individual career paths. This gap often leads to stagnation in professional development and suboptimal job performance among academic staff.

Nevertheless, some progress has been made through intervention agencies such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). TETFund has provided significant support for academic staff development through sponsorships for postgraduate studies, international conferences, and academic research. According to TETFund (2020), thousands of university lecturers have benefited from these initiatives, resulting in enhanced research output and teaching quality. These contributions have helped mitigate some of the challenges posed by insufficient university budgets.

To fully realize the benefits of training and development on academic staff performance, a more strategic approach is necessary. Universities must prioritize staff development as a long-term investment and incorporate it into their institutional development plans. This includes conducting regular training needs assessments, encouraging mentorship and peer learning, and leveraging technology for continuous professional education. Furthermore, policies should ensure that training is not only accessible but also tailored to the diverse roles and career stages of academic staff.

Flexible Work Load and Academic Staff Job Performance in Nigerian Public Universities

The structure of academic workload plays a critical role in determining the performance, motivation, and overall job satisfaction of academic staff in higher education institutions. In Nigerian public universities, where increasing student populations, inadequate staffing, and bureaucratic constraints are common, workload flexibility has emerged as a significant factor influencing job performance. The concept of flexible workload refers to the capacity of academic staff to manage their teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities with a degree of autonomy and balance that supports optimal productivity and well-being (Ofoegbu, 2004).

Academic staff in Nigerian universities are generally expected to perform multiple roles, including lecturing, supervising students, conducting research, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, engaging in community service, and participating in administrative duties. These expectations are often placed on a workforce already grappling with limited resources and poor working conditions (Okebukola, 2012). Without flexibility in managing these responsibilities, staff may become overwhelmed, leading to reduced efficiency and burnout, which negatively affects job performance.

Research has shown that flexible workload arrangements contribute positively to academic staff performance. According to Adebayo and Ojetunde (2019), universities that allow faculty members to structure their schedules, prioritize tasks, and choose research paths aligned with their expertise report higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. Flexibility enables staff to allocate adequate time for core academic activities such as teaching preparation and research, which enhances both teaching quality and scholarly output.

Moreover, flexible workload policies help reduce stress and fatigue associated with rigid schedules and unrealistic expectations. In a study by Nwagwu (2014), academic staff who reported greater autonomy in managing their time and workload also demonstrated higher levels of engagement and job satisfaction. These staff were more likely to meet publication targets, mentor students effectively, and contribute meaningfully to institutional development.

However, the implementation of flexible workload systems in Nigerian public universities remains limited. Most institutions still adhere to rigid workload allocation models, often based on outdated norms that do not reflect current realities. For instance, the standard teaching load for lecturers does not always account for additional duties such as large class sizes, project supervision, or administrative roles (Fadeyi et al., 2018). As a result, many academic staff are overburdened, with little time left for research or professional development.

Another barrier to flexibility is the bureaucratic culture prevalent in many public universities, where administrative decisions are centralized and staff input in workload planning is minimal. This lack of participatory decision-making not only reduces morale but also limits the adaptability of workload policies to the diverse needs of academic departments and individuals (Ogunode & Abubakar, 2021).

To address these challenges, it is imperative for university management and regulatory bodies to adopt more dynamic and context-sensitive workload policies. Institutions should consider implementing workload models that account for variations in department size, student enrollment, research output expectations, and individual staff capacities. Additionally, the introduction of workload planning tools and performance-based appraisal systems can ensure accountability while promoting flexibility (Eze, 2016; Adebayo & Obi, 2019).

Furthermore, digital technologies and remote work options, which gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, offer new opportunities for workload flexibility in academic environments. Academic staff can manage their responsibilities more efficiently and maintain work-life balance, thereby enhancing job performance when they leveraging online platforms for teaching, collaboration, and research dissemination (Akinyemi & Abiddin, 2020).

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive and correlational research design, which is used to examine the relationship between variables without any manipulation or control by the researcher. Correlational research helps to determine the strength and direction of associations between two or more variables, which can either be positive or negative. According to Megan (2021), correlational design is particularly useful in understanding complex relationships between variables when measured in natural settings.

The population of the study comprised academic staff across the three public universities in Rivers State: University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State University (RSU), and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE). The total population was 2,985 lecturers, distributed as follows: 1,462 from UNIPORT, 1,099 from RSU, and 424 from IAUE. A sample of 746 academic staff was selected using simple random sampling, and the respondents were stratified by gender. The distribution of the sample was as follows: 398 from UNIPORT, 296 from RSU, and 52 from IAUE. This sample represents 25% of the total population.

Data were collected using two self-developed instruments titled: Training and Flexible Workload Questionnaire (TFWQ) and Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (ASJPQ). The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section 'A' gathered demographic

information of respondents. Section ‘B’ contained items addressing the five research questions. Section ‘C’ focused on staff job performance. A modified 4-point Likert scale was used to rate responses, with the following scale: Very High Extent (VHE) – 4 points, High Extent (HE) – 3 points, Less Extent (LE) – 2 points, Very Less Extent (VLE) – 1 point

To determine the benchmark for interpretation, the total weight ($4+3+2+1 = 10$) was divided by the number of options (4), giving a criterion mean of 2.5. Items scoring below 2.5 were considered disagreed, while those scoring above 2.5 were considered agreed. To ensure validity, the instruments were subjected to face and content validation by the research supervisor and two other experts in Educational Management from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Their feedback was used to refine the instrument prior to administration.

For reliability testing, 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered to a group of respondents from the population (but not included in the study sample). After two weeks, the same instruments were re-administered to the same group. The scores from the two administrations were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, which yielded reliability coefficients of .892 and .834, which confirmed the instrument’s reliability. The researcher, assisted by three trained research assistants, distributed 746 copies of the questionnaire. Respondents were adequately briefed on how to complete the instrument and encouraged to respond immediately to ensure a high return rate. For those unable to complete the questionnaire on the spot, follow-up visits were conducted. In total, 627 copies were successfully retrieved, representing a response rate of 84%, and these were used for data analysis.

The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze responses to the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the hypotheses at a .05 level of significance. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 25.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does staff training/development impact staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of how staff training/development impact staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State

s/n	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
1.	Staff are nominated to attend seminars	3.4346	1.12858	High Extent
2.	Staff are allowed to upgrade themselves in regular school programmes to upgrade themselves	3.0423	1.18962	High Extent
3.	Staff are provided financial support for professional development	3.1385	1.22556	High Extent
4.	Staff are allowed study leave to attend regular school programmes.	3.0577	1.08364	High Extent
5.	Staff are allowed to attend programmes at weekends	2.6423	1.26390	High Extent
6.	New certificates obtained while on the job are honored for promotion	2.7808	1.17651	High Extent
Grand Mean				High Extent

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of responses on how staff training and development impact job performance in public universities in Rivers State. The results showed that all the items examined were rated to a high extent, indicating a strong perception among respondents that training and development initiatives positively influence staff performance.

The highest mean score (3.43) was recorded for the item “Staff are nominated to attend seminars,” suggesting that participation in seminars is a common and impactful practice in the institutions surveyed. This is closely followed by support for professional development and study leave opportunities, with mean scores of 3.14 and 3.06 respectively. These findings imply that public universities in the state are committed to enhancing staff capacity through various development initiatives.

Although the item “Staff are allowed to attend programmes at weekends” had the lowest mean score (2.64), it was still rated to a high extent, indicating that while this practice is less frequent compared to others, it still contributes to staff development efforts.

Furthermore, the recognition of newly acquired certificates for promotion also received a moderately high rating (mean = 2.78), suggesting that while the practice exists, it may not be uniformly implemented across institutions.

The grand mean confirms a general consensus that staff training and development have a positive and significant impact on job performance. This highlights the importance of continuous investment in staff development as a strategy for improving institutional effectiveness and service delivery.

Research Question 2: To what extent does flexible workload as a condition of service impact staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of how flexible workload as a condition of service impact staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State

s/n	Items	Mean	SD.	Decision
7.	Flexible workload positively influences job performance	3.3808	1.01970	High Extent
8.	Flexible workload contributes to a better work-life balance	3.1077	1.25354	High Extent
9.	Flexible workload affect your ability to meet job deadlines	3.2269	.94972	High Extent
10.	Flexible workload contribute to a more positive work environment	2.8038	1.23181	High Extent
11.	There are improvement in teamwork and collaboration due to a flexible workload	3.1538	.92550	High Extent
Grand Mean				High Extent

Table 2 revealed the responses of academic and non-academic staff regarding the influence of flexible workload as a condition of service on job performance in public universities in Rivers State. All five items measured received a rating of “High Extent,” as indicated by their mean scores and the overall grand mean.

The item with the highest mean score (3.38) was “Flexible workload positively influences job performance,” indicating that respondents generally believe flexible scheduling enhances their efficiency and effectiveness at work. This suggests that when staff are allowed to manage their workload with some degree of flexibility, it leads to improved job outcomes.

Similarly, the item “Flexible workload contributes to a better work-life balance” recorded a mean score of 3.11, reflecting that staff perceive flexibility in workload distribution as beneficial in balancing personal and professional responsibilities. This balance is a key driver of job satisfaction and overall productivity. The response to “Flexible workload affects your ability to meet job deadlines” also received a relatively high mean score (3.23), indicating that workload flexibility is seen not only as supportive of personal needs but also conducive to meeting professional expectations.

Although the item “Flexible workload contributes to a more positive work environment” had the lowest mean score (2.80), it was still rated to a high extent. This suggests that while the impact of workload flexibility on workplace atmosphere is acknowledged, it may not be as strongly felt as its effect on performance and time management. Finally, the item “There are improvements in teamwork and collaboration due to a flexible workload” received a mean score of 3.15, reflecting staff belief that flexibility encourages better interaction and cooperation among colleagues.

The grand mean for all items supports the conclusion that flexible workload arrangements positively influence staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State. This highlights the importance of institutional policies that support flexible work structures as a means to enhance productivity, morale, and institutional efficiency.

Test of Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between staff training/development as a condition of service and staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State

Table 3: Relationship between staff training/development and staff job performance

		Staff job performance	Staff training/development
Staff job performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.442**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	627	627
Staff training/development	Pearson Correlation	.442**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	627	627

The SPSS output on Table 3 revealed a correlation coefficient of .442** between staff training/development and staff job performance, indicating that the correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient between Staff job performance and staff training/development is .442, with a p-value of .000. This value indicates a significant correlation between these two variables. Thus, the findings contradict the null hypothesis (HO₁), suggesting that there is indeed a significant relationship between staff training/development and staff job performance in the context of public universities in Rivers State.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between flexible workload as a condition of service and staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Relationship between flexible workload and staff job performance

		Staff job performance	Flexible workload
Staff job performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.305**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	627	627
Flexible workload	Pearson Correlation	.305**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	627	627

The data in Table 4 revealed a correlation coefficient of .305^{**} between flexible workload and staff job performance indicates that the correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient between Staff job performance and flexible workload is .305 with a p-value of .000. This values indicates a significant correlation between these two variables. The correlation coefficient of .305 suggests that there is a significant relationship between staff job performance and their flexible workload. This indicates that staff flexible workload contribute to a more positive work environment.

DISCUSSION

Extent staff training/development relate with staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State

The data in Table 3 revealed a correlation coefficient of .442^{**} between staff training/development and academic staff job performance, indicating that the correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient between Staff job performance and staff training/development is .442. This value indicates a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. Thus, the findings contradict the null hypothesis 1, suggesting that there is indeed a significant relationship between staff training/development and staff job performance in the public universities in Rivers State. The findings underscore the significance of staff training and development initiatives in augmenting staff job performance within the academic sector. The correlation coefficient of 0.442 suggests a moderate positive association between staff training/development and staff job performance, indicating that academic staff who undergo regular training and skill enhancement activities are likely to exhibit higher levels of competence and effective job performance (Ezeani & Oladele, 2013; Uzochukwu & Nwosu, 2020). Further analysis of the statistical output revealed that the observed relationship between academic staff training/development and staff job performance is statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of .000. This suggests that the observed correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance, which emphasizes the importance of investing in staff training and development programs as a means to enhance universities performance and effectiveness (Ezeani & Oladele, 2013; Ololube, 2024).

Flexible workload as a condition of service relate with staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State

The results in Table 4 revealed a correlation coefficient of .305^{**} between flexible workload and staff job performance, indicating that the correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. The correlation coefficient between Staff job performance and flexible workload is .305. This value indicates a moderate positive correlation between these two variables. The moderate positive correlation coefficient of .305 suggests that there is a significant and positive relationship between Staff job performance and their flexible workload. This indicates that staff flexible workload contribute to a more positive work environment. The analysis as depicted involves a comprehensive examination of the correlation between flexible workload and staff job performance among a sample size of 627 individuals. The Pearson correlation coefficient, a statistical measure denoting the strength and direction of

the relationship between variables, stands at .372 with a significance level of .000, signifying a statistically significant relationship between the two factors (Adebayo & Ojetunde, 2019). The findings suggest that there exists a moderately positive relationship between flexible workload arrangements and staff job performance within the context of public universities in Rivers State. A correlation coefficient of .372 indicates that as the degree of workload flexibility increases, staff job performance tends to improve accordingly. This highlighted the importance of providing employees with the autonomy and flexibility to manage their work responsibilities in a manner conducive to optimal performance (Nwagwu, 2014).

CONCLUSION

In this study we investigated the relationship between training/development and flexible workload and academic staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State. The findings of this study reveal a significant relationship between staff training/development and staff job performance in public universities in Rivers State. This underscores the importance of continuous professional development in enhancing staff competence and productivity. Similarly, the study identified correlation between flexible workload and staff job performance, suggesting that when staff are afforded flexibility in managing their workload, their performance tends to improve. These insights call for targeted institutional policies that will order capacity building and supportive work environments to drive staff efficiency, motivation, and overall institutional effectiveness in the public university system in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers put forward the following recommendations:

- University management and relevant government bodies should encourage training and development of employees through clear contractual agreements and adherence to labor laws.
- Departmental heads and supervisors should adopt flexible workload management strategies that allow employees to balance their responsibilities effectively.

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