

EFFECT OF WORK ETHICS ON PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effect of work ethics on performance of academic staff of public universities in North-Central, Nigeria, addressing the declining academic staff performance of public universities due to unfavorable work conditions and ethics as evident in severally extant studies. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design which included the administration of structured questionnaire among the target population. The population of the study comprised academic staff among 13 universities in North Central, Nigeria. A sample of 501 was determined using Yamane sample size model with an attrition of 30%. Data were analyzed using both descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential (simple and multiple regression) for hypotheses testing. After questionnaire administration, a total of 381 questionnaire were returned and used for the analysis representing 76% response rate. The Findings indicate that, for every ethical improvement measure taken on academic staff conduct, their performance level is likely to improve by 91.4% as indicated by the beta value of 0.914. The study therefore concluded among others that, work ethics contribute significantly to improving performance of academic staff of public universities in North Central, Nigeria. It was recommended that, University management should encourage work ethics such as hard work, morality, leisure, centrality of work, time management, self-reliance, non-delay of gratification that improve employees morale or motivation to be self-reliant and independent to take decisions that will ultimately improve performance of staff..

Keywords: Academic Staff, Performance, Public University, Work Ethics.

Introduction

Work ethics is a component of work environment that addresses a segment of an employee needs in the work place. All stakeholders in an organization have the responsibility of providing ethical environment. Work ethics enables people to perform works without any protest by seeing act as norm (Osibanjo, Akinbode, Falola & Oludayo, 2015). Since 1904 when Max Weber used the concept of work ethics to describe work values that support the spirit of continuance hard work and provision of moral justification for the accumulation of wealth, some employee still pursue wealth and material gains at work places for its own sake and not because of necessity. This shows the two sides of ethics coin at work place. So, its demonstration at work place no doubt has influenced employee performance including academic staff members in universities. For example, the expression of friendly behaviour and compliance with rules and regulations at work place boost employee confidence, genuine gains, morale for commitment and eventual improvement in job performance.

On the other hand, where both colleagues and students frequently complain of uncooperative or alienated attitude of a staff, such staff may be showing poor approach to work like avoiding students' requests (except where he/she expect immediate gains), lateness to work, frequent and unnecessary complain, myopic and self-centered view of situation etc. All of these might reduce staff performance. Work ethics therefore, can be seen as an attitudinal construct that reflects deeply- held values regarding the fundamental place of work in one's life (Oyelade, 2017). Basically, its dimensions could include but not limited to integrity, sense of responsibility, quality work, self-discipline and sense of teamwork in work discharge. Whether the staff cadre mediates the relationship between work ethics and performance of academic staff or not is still a subject of intellectual debate. So, it is not out of place to also investigate whether senior staff that have long work experience and conversant with ethics of the academic work possess and practice those attributes than the junior and young academic staff.

The overall essence of this study is that, it focused on the work ethics aspects of university education which is important for National development. The policy makers and administrator in the educational sector will benefit from the findings of this as this study will further enrich the provisions of the legal framework regulating the academic staff performance in terms of scientific research and innovation, teaching and supervision, and consultancy.

The reason for declining ranking of the Nigeria universities global ranking is a cause for concern and one that needs assessment. Unfortunately, today, in the global ranking of universities, Nigerian universities are not progressing admirably and are not known to have been. None of the 170 public and private universities in Nigeria were among the best 1,000 universities on the planet regardless of making a few forward leap and research grants. The devaluation of work ethics in universities is no longer news as many unethical issues like indiscipline, sexual harassment; extortion and bribery have been reported as seen and read in both traditional and social media. Empirical studies such as; Bamiro and Adedeji, (2010), Aiyedun, Aiyedun & Ogunode, (2021) have alluded to the assertion that bad work ethics has limited the ability of the academic staff of the Nigerian universities to effectively and efficiently perform their duties, particularly the traditional roles of academic and research. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the aforementioned concerns have not been addressed holistically by any previous empirical study. Partly, Odunayo et al., (2020) looked at work environment and staff retention, Also, Oyewole, et al., (2019) investigated the relationship between work environment and provision of instructional facilities on academic staff in South-West Nigeria while Michael and Stephen (2019) looked at work environment (power supply) and job performance in both public and private universities in Nigeria.

Research Questions

What is the effect of work ethics on the performance of academic staff in public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria?

Research Objectives

To examine the effect of work ethics on performance of academic staff in public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

Research Hypotheses

H0₁: Work ethics has no significant effect on performance of academic staff in public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

Work Ethics

Ethics is the adaptation of standard rules, regulations, and codes of conduct in a particular institution or profession known as work ethics. To achieve the success of the goals and objectives of any institution, established rules and regulations are relevant in shaping the attitudes and behavior of employees within organizations (Agi, 2017). Work ethics is an important concept necessary to be absorbed in any action and responsibility of a public servant (Abdullah & Halim, 2016). Human resource research has played an important role in promoting ethical conduct in organizations (Khan, Abbas, Gul & Raja, 2015).

A positive attitude is expected from employees to “ensure effectiveness, efficiency and increase work productivity and good service” (Abdullah & Halim, 2016). Individuals approach, feeling, and principles towards organizational responsibilities are seen as the work ethics of such individuals, either positive or negative (Oyelade, 2017) According to Heelas (2002), “work ethics of any variety involve the attribution of value to work. Work is valued as a means to an end.” For example, work ethic is commonly mentioned as a trait of being a good player in a sporting activity.

Work ethics is commonly linked to people who behave hard work and doing a good job. Morality involves a person's belief system. Ushie & Agba (2015) see it as “involving personal responsibility and responsibility of an employee in work performed”. Reeves (2015) sees it as when an act of will to get the job done efficiently and in a timely manner without any complaints and a good work ethic depends

on honesty, accountability, personal integrity and hard work. Agi (2017) identifies work ethics as "the principles to be followed by workers in a workplace where they receive wages and salaries.

He stated that these principles involve everything surrounding the type of work performed by each employee, such as; dress codes, working conditions, labor relations, hours of work, work permit, teamwork, work order, justification of wages/salaries, etc. responsibility and accountability for assigned tasks supported by the organization. Owuor, et al., (2020) see it as connected with behaviorism. It involves the behavioral approach of employees and the involvement of moral positivism to do a great job through loyalty, honesty and compassion. Organizational work ethics helps in disciplining workers and gives them an environment of honesty, fairness, and integrity (Hayat, Shakeel & Chen, 2021).

A worker who exhibits good working ethics in an ideal organization is usually picked for better positions, promotions and great opportunities. In contrast, workers who don't exhibit good working ethics are regarded as those who have failed to give fair value for the salary being paid to them by their employees. Therefore, they won't be promoted or given great opportunities (Rahman, 1956; Omisore, 2015). Examples of such work unethical behaviours are: absenteeism, lateness and practices that result in community dissimilarities (Robinson & Bennett, 2000).

The performance of the work was one of the important variables designed for a long decade (Jankingthong & Rurkkhum, 2012). This interaction provides for the behavioral aspect of work (analysis of the content of the work) that, if not guided correctly, could lead to the detour of its planned initial activity in the form of predefined services. Numerous studies have confirmed that excellent or good employee performance is linked to a strong work ethic (Herman, 2002). People with a strong work ethic tend to work longer hours and spend less time on leisure enjoying better performance (Chu, et al., 2012). Herman (2002) agreed that effective and constructive use of time is compatible with a strong work ethic. Delaying or avoiding the execution of a task undoubtedly contributes to poor job performance of the employee (Van-Eerde, 2003).

Performance of Academic Staff in Universities

The demand for job satisfaction is determined as one of the main requirements of the academic staff of the university. Moreover, the presence of this important human need is tangible and must be attended to in the workplace. Job satisfaction is an influential factor in the performance of academic staff, as are the signs of its presence measured by the degree of responsibility, attitude, job involvement, behavior, reactions and relationships with other staff (Sohail & Delin, 2013). Moreover, a precise distinction of

job satisfaction has a positive influence on the attitude of academic staff within the university. Indeed, there is a significant association between job satisfaction and unconscious behavior (Ahsan *et al.*, 2009). In a major study, Wan Ahmad & Abdurahman (2015) focused on the role of job satisfaction among academics. Researchers have found that staff that have a high level of job satisfaction exhibit acceptable organizational behavior and prefer to continue at university. In this regard, job satisfaction is measured as an important subject in the field of human resources and has a lot of practice in public research universities (Sadeghi, et al., 2012). Job satisfaction refers to the feeling of pleasure that derives from job performance and motivations that influence staff attitudes and beliefs (Noordin & Jusoff, 2009). On the basis of these explanations on work satisfaction and its role in the attitude of academic staff, Worrall (2004) highlighted the role that work satisfaction carries out in the presentation and activities of the staff.

The term academic is usually associated with a school, university or other college. It involves human academic activities in a structured educational environment. Performance, on the other hand, is activity, implementation and production. The mechanism of knowledge acquisition and use and the structure of skills, as well as a series of success, motivation and style factors influence final responses or academic outcome in institutions of learning (Fletcher & Williams, 1996). Armstrong (2010) defines performance as the execution, success and efficiency of anything ordered or done that contributes to results (performance). Jameel & Ahmad (2019) defined performance as the execution of specific tasks calculated on the basis of reliability, integrity, cost and predetermined requirements (Ahmad & Jameel, 2018).

Research is one of the reasons for the creation of universities, leading to the discovery of new information, the production of technologies, a better quality of services, greater educational prestige and greater economic value. It is a common knowledge that, the performance of universities is mainly calculated on the basis of the efforts of academic and non-academic personnel. The academic staff of a university is made up of people who carry out educational activities within the university, including teaching, research and sometimes even administration. Therefore, academic activity is the main criterion for evaluating the academic performance of a university (Igbojekwe & Ugo-Okoro, 2015; Tinuke, 2015; Adaobi & Uju, 2017; Thabit & Raewf, 2018; Jameel & Ahmad, 2019). According to Abba & Mugizi (2018) determinants of academic achievement include staff skills, material resources, teaching, publishing, and research and community service. Editing is an important part of the work of scientific staff. High levels of organizational stress seem to decrease with publishing efforts (Jameel & Ahmad, 2019). However, the value of education allows colleges to prepare students and lay the foundation for their career performance potential.

Labour Process Theory by Karl Marx (1954)

The relationship between organizational ethics and employee job performance can be best explained by the Labour Process Theory, which was originally formulated by Karl Marx and expanded by Newton & Findlay (1996). The 'labour process' perspective on the ordering of work suggests that managerial action is chiefly motivated by capital-labour relations, by strategies of employers and their agents to try and control and stabilize the 'unruly' element/factor of production, namely living labour. It is assumed that employer buys a mere capacity to work when a worker is hired; an embodied capacity that walks into and out of the workplace and must be managed with consent. Management must control or manage this capacity. In this context, exercises this control in form of laid down organizational ethics that are to be adhered to by employees. This theory is conventionally and rightly listed as one of the analytical resources for Critical Management Studies. Consequently, this gives a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the study variables and ultimately proffering some insight as to improved change. The theory argued for how organization can move away from the belief in freedom of employees to act the way they want and establish control mechanisms at their disposal. According Adewale, et al., (2015) organizations are constantly seeking ways to improve the effectiveness of control mechanisms to achieve job performance. This in a way promote what work behavior will bring about desired level of job performance in the form of organizational ethics.

Empirical Review

Jia et al., (2022) investigated the role of ethical leadership in determining innovative work behaviour. Specifically, the relationship between ethical leadership (EL), work engagement (WE), well-being, and innovative work behavior (IWB) were mentioned. The study was necessitated by the increasing significance of the variables in the current era when the influence of technology is exponentially increasing in the education sector. The study used a questionnaire survey approach to collect data. The target population of this study was the academic personnel, i.e., senior professors, lecturers, and supporting staff associated with the higher education sector located in Zhejiang Province, China. Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, 300 copies of questionnaire were sent and received 251 responses. In the second phase, after a three-month interval, 200 copies of questionnaire were sent and received 162 responses. However, over the two phases, the study collected a total of 413 copies of questionnaire; 43 were discarded. Therefore, for analysis, the study used 370 copies of questionnaire. The data were analyzed using the structural equation modeling through Smart PLS 3.2.2. First, in the direct relationship, results confirm that EL positively influences the IWB. Secondly, WB has a positive and moderating relationship between EL and IWB. Thirdly, the study addressed the relationship

between EL and WE. The outcome indicates that there is a positive and significant relationship. Fourth, the results of the study indicated that there is positive and significant relationship between work engagement (WE), well-being, and innovative work behavior (IWB). Finally, the outcomes imply that WE positively mediated between EL and IWB. Ethical leadership and well-being are important for innovative work behavior that supports managers in introducing a supportive workplace environment that promotes good interpersonal relationships with subordinates. Therefore, it was concluded that, a good interpersonal relationship between managers and subordinates enhances the work quality. So, ethical leaders provide a supportive work environment to all subordinates regarding their work. This is different from the present study in terms of location, sector, and the indicators of both work ethics and performance of academic staff.

Ayobami, (2017) investigated the influence of work ethics on the low productivity of universities workers and its debilitating consequences on their service delivery. He used the non-academic staff of universities in South-West, Nigeria and adopted descriptive survey research method. The sample consisted of 1558 non-academic staff (734 senior and 824 junior). This was selected through the multi-stage proportional stratified random sampling technique for the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile ($r = 0.86$). Analysis of data was done using Multiple Regression Analysis. Results were tested for significance at 0.05 levels. The findings revealed that, work ethics jointly and individually predicted productivity. Work ethics (Beta=-0.016; $t=-.573$; $p>.05$) was not a potent predictor of organizational productivity. The study also observed that, ownership type and staff cadre had no significant moderating influence on the joint and individual contributions of work ethics to the prediction of organizational productivity of staff of the universities in South-West, Nigeria. The study recommended that universities should always strive to establish strong work ethics for their staff. More so, public and private universities should design and circulate code of conduct as well work ethics policy to cover senior and junior staff so as to enhance productivity among their staff. The unit of analysis of this present study being academic staff of only public universities in North Central Nigeria is different from this reviewed study.

Methodology

The study focused on public Universities in North-Central States, Nigeria. The study used descriptive survey design. This design was considered suitable because the study comprehensively demonstrates the causal effect of work ethics on performance of academic staff of public Universities in North-Central.

Table 3.1: Number of Academic Staff in Public Universities in North Central, Nigeria

S/N	Universities/Categories	Professors	Readers	Senior Lecturers	Lecturer 1 and below	Total
1	University of Abuja	121	60	183	128	492
2	Federal University of Technology Minna	139	90	191	489	909
3	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University	40	50	86	193	369
4	Federal University Lafia	66	35	63	265	429
5	Nasarawa State University Keffi	116	61	90	346	613
6	Federal University Lokoja	28	18	85	218	349
7	Prince Abubakar University Anyigba, Kogi state.	38	28	59	174	299
8	University of Ilorin	289	146	296	818	1549
9	Kwara State University	100	61	154	382	697
10	Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi	145	70	136	483	834
11	Benue State University, Makurdi.	129	72	84	427	712
12	University of Jos	503	189	411	1601	2704
13	Plateau State University Bokko.	12	8	9	136	165
	Grand Total	1726	888	1847	5660	10,121

Source: *Nigerian University System Statistical Digest, 2020*

The study adopted Taro Yamane (1967) formula for the sample estimation from the population of 10,121.

The formula for the estimation of the sample is shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

N = total population, n= sample estimate, and e= level of significance.

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= \frac{10,121}{1 + 10,121(0.05)^2} \\
 n &= \frac{10,121}{1 + 10,121(0.0025)} \\
 n &= \frac{10,121}{26.3025} = \mathbf{385}
 \end{aligned}$$

Following the categorization/grouping of the population, the most suitable sampling technique is stratified sampling. This study distributed 501 copies of questionnaire because 30 percent (116) was added to the minimum computed sample size of 385 to take care of non-response bias in line with Isreal (2013) recommendation.

Table 3.2: Sample size of the Study by Cadre Using Proportion

Categories	Population	Sample Size
Professors	1726	85
Readers	888	45
Senior Lecturers	1847	91
Lecturer 1 and below	5660	280
Total	10, 121	501

Source: Researcher's Computation, 2025

Work ethic was measured using the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) Short Form (SF) developed by Miller, Woehrer & Hudspeth (2002) in Wright (2016); MWEP contains seven dimensions as hard work, self-reliance, leisure, centrality of work, morality, delay of gratification, and wasted time with 28 items. Academic staff performance is measured by performance measures dimension for lecturers adapted from Anyango (2023); the performance measure has four sub-constructs namely, quality of teaching, research supervision, research writing and publication, and community outreach. The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical methods for data analysis.

Table 3.3: Reliability Coefficient for Research Instruments

S/No	Construct	Variable	Measure	Indicators	No of Item	Cronbach Alpha	Author/Year
1	Work ethic	Independent Variable	Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP)	hard work Self-reliance Leisure Centrality of work Morality Delay of gratification Wasted time	4 4 4 4 4 4 4	0.75 0.78 0.76 0.82 0.89 0.85 0.79	Miller, Woehrer, and Hudspeth (2002) in Wright (2016)
2	Academic staff performance	Dependent variable	performance measure for lecturers	Quality of Teaching. Research supervision. Research writing and publication. Community outreach	10 10 10 10	0.70 0.89 0.85 0.87	Anyango (2023)

Source: Literature Reviewed

Test of Hypothesis

Work ethics has no significant effect on performance of academic staff in public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

To test this hypothesis, the respondents' scores on work ethics and performance of academic staff in public universities in North Central, Nigeria were computed and subjected to simple regression analysis.

Table 4.4.6: Effect of Work ethics on performance of academic staff in public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

Model Summary		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1		.914 ^a	.835	.835	8.45361	
ANOVA ^a		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	137350.112	1	137350.112	1921.961	.000 ^b
	Residual	27084.675	379	71.464		
	Total	164434.788	380			
Coefficients ^a		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	11.060	2.434		4.544	.000
	WE	2.146	.049	.914	43.840	.000

a. Dependent Variable: JP

b. Predictors: (Constant), WE

The analysis presented in Table 4.4.6 focuses on the effect of work ethics (WE) on the performance of academic staff in public universities in North-Central Nigeria. The results, derived from a simple linear regression model, show a strong and statistically significant relationship between work ethics and academic staff performance.

The R value of 0.914 indicates a very strong positive correlation between work ethics and academic staff performance. This suggests that work ethics is an important factor that influences how well academic staff perform. The R Square value of 0.835 means that 83.5% of the variation in academic performance can be explained by work ethics. This is a very high percentage, implying that work ethics has a major influence on staff performance. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.835 is nearly identical to the R Square, showing that the model remains robust even after adjusting for the number of

predictors. The standard error of the estimate is 8.45361, which is relatively moderate, indicating that predictions of academic performance based on work ethics are reasonably accurate.

The ANOVA table confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. The F-statistic of 1921.961 and the p-value of 0.000 suggest that the relationship between work ethics and academic performance is not due to random chance, but rather reflects a real, meaningful connection. This further solidifies the conclusion that work ethics significantly affects academic staff performance.

Looking at the Coefficients table, the unstandardized coefficient for work ethics (WE) is 2.146, which means that for each unit increase in work ethics, academic staff performance (JP) increases by 2.146 units. The standardized Beta coefficient of 0.914 indicates a very strong positive influence, suggesting that work ethics has a major impact on academic performance. A t-value of 43.840 and a p-value of 0.000 confirm that this effect is statistically significant, further validating that work ethics is a key predictor of academic staff performance.

In conclusion, the analysis clearly shows that work ethics has a significant and strong effect on the performance of academic staff in public universities in North-Central Nigeria. The results strongly support the idea that academic institutions should foster a culture of strong work ethics to enhance staff performance. Given the high correlation between work ethics and performance, universities should consider developing policies and practices that encourage and support strong work ethics among their academic staff to improve overall performance. The hypothesis that work ethics does not affect academic performance is therefore rejected. Instead, the data suggests that work ethics plays a critical role in shaping the success of academic staff.

The sixth objective sought to achieve the effect of work ethics on performance. The relationship between work ethics and academic performance is overwhelmingly positive in this study. The findings here echo those of Cohen (in Pallant, 2005), who concluded that ethical behavior, such as professionalism, responsibility, and accountability, significantly enhances academic performance. Similarly, studies by Rashida *et al.*, (2019) and Katabaro & Yan (2019) support the notion that strong work ethics improve not only individual performance but also contribute to an overall positive academic environment. Furthermore, research by Aboagye *et al.*, (2021) and Ayobami (2017) aligns with these findings, confirming that adherence to ethical standards is strongly linked to improved work outcomes, particularly in academic settings.

Yet, studies such as those of Al-Omar & Okasheh (2017) suggested that work ethics alone may not fully account for performance, arguing instead that factors like support from colleagues and leadership play a significant role. This divergence highlights the multi-dimensional nature of academic performance, where no single factor can be solely responsible for high performance.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that the work ethics variable that had the strongest significant influence on performance of academic staff in public universities in North Central, Nigeria was self-reliance. This is similar to the need for freedom as stated above. University management should encourage work ethics such as hard work, morality, leisure, centrality of work, time management, self-reliance, non-delay of gratification that improve employees morale or motivation to be self-reliant and independent to take decisions that will ultimately improve performance of staff.

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