

Work Strategy and Employees Performance Among Academic Staff of FUIO: A Comparative Study of Hard Work and Smart Work

¹Bribebe Akpobere Smile, ²Zibokifi Racheal Ghandi Olumani & ³Olomu, Oyintonyo

^{1,2&3}Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Federal University Otuoke, PMB 126, Nigeria.

Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijsrpaop.v4.i1.12

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between work strategies—hard work and smart work—and employee performance among academic staff at the Federal University Otuoke (FUIO). The aim is to understand how these strategies affect the efficiency and effectiveness of academics in their roles. Guided by the Job Demand-Resource Model, a mixed-method research design involving 239 quantitative surveys and 20 qualitative interviews was utilized, capturing diverse voices from the academic population. The findings reveal that heavy workloads (28.5%) and insufficient resources (16.3%) are primary challenges faced by staff. While 35.1% of respondents acknowledged the positive impact of hard work, a significant 40.2% disputed its effectiveness, highlighting concern over burnout. Technology utilization emerged as the most prevalent smart work strategy (42.7%), but prioritization received no recognition, suggesting areas for improvement. Interestingly, a balanced approach combining both hard and smart work was preferred by 45.2% of respondents, indicating a growing recognition of integrating effort with efficiency. Overall, the study concludes that a hybrid strategy fosters better job performance, and it recommends that the university enhance resource allocation, offer time management training, and promote collaborative efforts to support faculty in achieving a sustainable balance between hard work and smart work.

Keywords: *Hard work, Smart work, Job performance, Academic staff, Work strategies*

Corresponding Author: **Bribebe Akpobere Smile**

Background to the Study

Human existence is fundamentally intertwined with work, and each task performed is governed by guiding principles or strategies that ensure optimal performance. Ross and Kami (2011) argue that organizations lacking a strategic framework resemble aimless ships, resulting in ineffective operations akin to a tramp. Hence, work strategy emerges as a crucial element in enhancing employee performance across various organizations. Within the academic sector, universities uniquely combine the twin core functions of knowledge creation and knowledge transmission through research and teaching (Bersin, 2023). Jenkins (2004) further notes that the commitments academic staff make in teaching and research are complex, manifesting as synergistic, complementary, antagonistic, or competing. He posits that the interplay between research, teaching, wider work expectations, and rewards necessitates clear definitional and management strategies at the institutional, departmental, and individual levels to mitigate potentially undesirable effects and counterproductive behaviors.

At a global level, contemporary labor market reports highlight the pressing need for industries to prioritize work strategies that foster transformation and allow organizations to transcend barriers, effectively realizing their business objectives (World Economic Forum, 2023). Indeed, organizations are increasingly prioritizing work strategies over capital investments, reflecting a significant shift in strategic focus towards human capital in the era of technological advancement (Bersin, 2023). This transformation is critical as organizations seek to adopt workforce strategies that embrace both industriousness and efficiency. Notably, nearly 81% of organizations worldwide are poised to invest in on-the-job training to boost their employees' smart work skills, while 80% foresee enhancements in hard work performance within the next five years (World Economic Forum, 2023). This bifurcation underscores the dual necessity for employers to harness both labor-intensive and intelligent methodologies while fostering a workforce that actively engages with and leverages new innovations. Examining strategic focuses from a sectorial perspective reveals that different organizations adopt unique orientations. Non-academic institutions may emphasize hard work, while academic institutions typically incorporate both hard and smart work strategies, a result of their dual functional mandates (World Economic Forum, 2023). This variance complicates the global conversation surrounding workforce transformation, particularly at the regional and national levels.

In this case, the regional discourse becomes more dichotomized, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where smart work strategies face significant challenges. Approximately 70% of organizations in this region report constraints posed by traditional hard work beliefs, surpassing the global average by around 11 percentage points (McKinsey & Company, 2022). National variances further illustrate this disparity; while only 40% of Japanese organizations perceive limitations due to smart work policies, given their employees are generally equipped with smart initiatives over 80% of companies in the Philippines, Colombia, Sweden, and a majority of Sub-Saharan African nations anticipate a deficient smart workforce pipeline by 2027 (World Economic Forum, 2023). These highlights pronounced regional differences in the adoption and understanding of work strategies within organizations. Narrowing the scope

to Nigeria, the concept of hard work is traditionally understood as comprising long hours, considerable effort, and a dedication to task completion. This approach embodies traits such as persistence, resilience, and a pronounced work ethic. Conversely, smart work is characterized by efficiency, task prioritization, and strategic approaches to enhance productivity with reduced effort (Adeniyi & Adeyemi, 2020), with a focus on effectiveness, time management, and goal setting.

Research suggests that an interplay of both hard and smart work is essential for improving job performance among academic staff. For instance, Afolabi and Ogunleye (2018) underscore the significance of balancing these two approaches for optimal professional output, noting that effective time management, goal-setting, and ongoing professional development contribute positively to academic performance within Nigerian higher education contexts. Similarly, Adeniyi and Adeyemi (2020) examined how workload distribution and job engagement affect academic staff performance, concluding that effective workload management strategies and employee engagement practices enhance job satisfaction and performance among academic personnel. Another relevant study by Adeyemi and Akanbi (2018) explored the relationship between workload and job performance specifically within Nigerian universities, revealing that excessive workloads often lead to burnout and diminutive job performance. Such findings highlight the urgent need for balanced strategies and regular support systems for academic staff to achieve peak performance levels while indicating that academic staff who successfully integrate both traits tend to perform better in fulfilling their teaching, research, and service obligations compared to those who rely predominantly on either hard work or smart work. This finding emphasizes the necessity of a combined approach in thriving within the academic space.

The case of Federal University Otuoke offers a context-specific narrative for investigating the nuances of hard work and smart work particularly owing to the demands by the institution. Issues such as work overload may necessitate a given approach which could be an adoption of smart strategy to mitigate such situation, while hard work may come to play when it comes to balancing academic and administrative duties. Whichever case, understanding the experiences, challenges, and work strategies of academic staff at Federal University Otuoke will contribute valuable insights to the broader discourse surrounding the roles of hard work and smart work in enhancing job performance.

Literature Review

Based on simple understanding, work strategy is essentially a plan that outlines how tasks should be organized and executed to meet specific objectives. It helps in guiding employees and teams towards effective performance. One important aspect of work strategy is alignment with organizational goals. According to Adeyemi and Olorunsola (2020), having a clear strategy ensures that everyone in the organization understands their role and how it contributes to the overall success of the organization. This alignment fosters teamwork and collaboration because when everyone is on the same page, they can work more effectively together. Another key point is the adaptability of work strategies. With the fast pace of change in today's world, organizations must be flexible. As Emeka (2022) notes, a good work strategy

is not set in stone; it should evolve based on new information and changing circumstances. This flexibility allows organizations to respond better to challenges and seize opportunities as they arise.

Additionally, effective communication is central to implementing a successful work strategy. Okwudire (2021) emphasizes that when there is open communication about the strategy, employees feel more engaged and are likely to contribute positively. This engagement enhances motivation and can lead to higher productivity levels in the workplace. Not to forget measurement and assessment of work strategies which are by all standards crucial for accounting for either the success or failure of any firm. Measurement and assessment help organizations to evaluate whether their strategies are working. As Agboola (2023) points out, regular assessment helps identify areas for improvement, ensuring the strategy remains effective and relevant over time.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts several performance theories as theoretical framework and they are listed underneath.

Employee Performance

Employee performance, otherwise viewed as job performance, is a crucial aspect of employee behavior in the workplace, with implications for individual and organizational success. It is generally defined as the extent to which an employee successfully fulfills job requirements and accomplishes organizational goals (Adeyemi & Olorunsola, 2020). Job performance is commonly measured through various indicators such as task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behaviors (Agboola, 2023).

Task performance refers to the core duties and responsibilities that are outlined in a job description, such as completing assignments, meeting deadlines, and achieving targets (Emeka, 2022). Contextual performance, on the other hand, involves behaviors that support the overall functioning of the organization, such as helping colleagues, volunteering for extra work, and following company policies (Okwudire, 2021). Adaptive performance refers to the ability to adjust to changing circumstances and learn new skills to effectively respond to new challenges (Adeyemi & Olorunsola, 2020). Counterproductive work behaviors, on the other hand, are actions that harm the organization, such as theft, absenteeism, and workplace aggression (Agboola, 2023).

Studies have identified various factors that influence job performance, including individual characteristics, job characteristics, organizational context, and the interaction between these factors. For example, personality traits, cognitive abilities, motivation, and self-efficacy have been found to significantly impact job performance (Emeka, 2022). Job characteristics such as task variety, autonomy, and feedback also play a role in determining employee performance (Okwudire, 2021). Moreover, organizational factors such as leadership, organizational culture, and job design can have a significant impact on job performance (Adeyemi & Olorunsola, 2020). There are various theoretical models that have been developed to explain

job performance, including role theory, expectancy theory, social exchange theory, and equity theory. Role theory suggests that individuals perform their jobs based on their perceived role expectations and obligations (Agboola, 2023). Expectancy theory posits that individuals are motivated to perform based on their beliefs about their ability to achieve desired outcomes (Emeka, 2022). Social exchange theory suggests that employees engage in positive behaviors in exchange for rewards and recognition from the organization. Equity theory argues that employees compare their inputs and outcomes to those of others and seek to achieve fairness in their work relationships (Adeyemi & Olorunsola, 2020). Thus, job performance can be said to be a multifaceted construct that is influenced by various individual, job, and organizational factors. Understanding and enhancing job performance is essential for organizational success and employee well-being. Researchers and practitioners continue to explore new ways to measure, predict, and improve job performance to maximize productivity and foster a positive work environment.

Work Strategy and Employee Performance among Academic Staff

Work strategy can be defined as the plans and actions that an organization uses to achieve specific goals. In an academic setting, this involves how institutions set their objectives and guide staff in their roles. Research shows that a clear and well-structured work strategy can significantly enhance the performance of academic staff. According to Ojo, Alao, & Atolagbe, (2024), when universities implement effective strategies, staff members become more engaged and motivated. This alignment between institutional goals and individual responsibilities not only boosts performance but also fosters job satisfaction. Furthermore, Adeyemi (2016) points out that involving academic staff in the development of work strategies can lead to better outcomes. When staff feel their ideas and needs are considered, they are more likely to be committed to achieving the set objectives. This sense of ownership can create a more productive work environment where employees strive to excel in their teaching and research roles. On the other hand, if an institution lacks a clear work strategy, academic staff may feel lost or unmotivated. A study by Eze (2017) indicates that ambiguity in roles can lead to decreased performance and job dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial for academic institutions to communicate their strategy clearly and ensure that all staff understand how they can contribute.

Hard Work and Smart Work Approach in Organization

When it comes to hard work and smart work approach in any organization, including academic institutions, it is important to understand the balance between the two. Hard work refers to putting in a lot of effort and time into tasks, while smart work focuses on efficiency and effectiveness, using strategies to achieve the same results with less effort.

In many cases, hard work is necessary. For instance, in several academic settings, hard work is often a fundamental requirement. Academic staffs are frequently called upon to devote long hours not only to teaching but also to researching and fulfilling various administrative responsibilities. This dedication is essential for maintaining the standards of education and ensuring that students receive a quality learning experience. Olaniyan (2016) highlights this commitment by noting that many educators often go above and beyond, spending extra time

preparing lectures, conducting research, or correcting assignments. Such dedication is commendable, as it plays a crucial role in fostering an environment of academic excellence. The willingness of educators to invest their time and effort directly correlates with the success of their students and the institution's reputation Olaniyan (2016).

However, it is important to recognize that solely relying on hard work can lead to serious drawbacks such as burnout. While the dedication to hard work is admirable, excessive effort without considering more efficient methodologies can undermine effectiveness. In academic institutions, where the pressures of research deadlines, teaching evaluations, and administrative duties can pile up, relying exclusively on hard work can become unsustainable. Staff members who work excessively often find themselves overwhelmed, which can diminish both their enthusiasm for teaching and their overall productivity. Consequently, it's crucial for academic staff to balance hard work with smarter strategies to ensure their long-term viability and effectiveness in their roles. Balancing hard work with smart work strategies can significantly aid academic staff in managing their workloads more effectively. Smart work promotes the idea of working intelligently rather than just hard. This approach encompasses leveraging technology and adopting innovative teaching methods to enhance learning experiences without disproportionately taxing staff members. For example, incorporating online platforms for lectures can reduce the time needed for in-person sessions while broadening the accessibility of materials for students. This not only improves student outcomes by allowing for more flexible learning options but also alleviates some of the pressures academic staff face.

Besides, a smart work approach includes careful planning and prioritization of tasks. Olaniyan (2016) highlights the effectiveness of using organizational tools such as calendars and project management software. According to him, employing these tools by academic staff can better outline their responsibilities, identify key priorities, and allocate their time wisely. When educators can visualize their tasks and deadlines, they can focus on what is most impactful, thus enhancing their productivity. This structured approach helps to minimize stress, enabling staff to dedicate their energy to significant projects while managing routine duties more efficiently.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a mixed-method approach as its research design. The mixed method design is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. A structured questionnaire titled; Work Strategy and Employees Performance among Academic Staff of FUIO: a comparative study of hard work and smart work was designed and administered to five hundred and ninety (590) staff. The quantitative method provided a systematic analysis using numerical and statistical data to elicit and quantify behaviours and attitudes of people while qualitative method offered a detailed insight into people's experiences using Key Informant Interview (KII) method. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study overcame the limitations associated with using only one approach.

Presentation of Quantitative Data and Analyses

Table 1: Table showing the socio-demographic distribution of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Under 25	0	0
25–34	4	1.7
35–44	160	66.9
45–54	51	21.3
55–64	19	7.9
65 and above	5	2.1
Gender		
Male	181	75.7
Female	59	24.3
Academic Rank		
Assistant Lecturer	0	0
Lecturer II	61	25.5
Lecturer I	36	15.1
Senior Lecturer	85	35.6
Associate Professor	37	15.5
Professor	20	8.4
Years of work experience		
Less than 2 years	1	0.4
2–5 years	51	21.3
6–10 years	133	55.6
More than 10 years	54	22.6
Faculty		
Humanities	27	11.3
Social Sciences	27	11.3
Natural Sciences	27	11.3
Engineering	27	11.3
Others	131	54.8
Total	239	100

Table 2: Table showing the existing hard work and smart work strategies in enhancing job performance

Variables	Responses	Frequency	Percentage
What are the existing smart work strategies that academic staff are used to in FUO?	Collaboration	87	36.4
	Technology Utilization	102	42.7
	Prioritization	0	0
	Others	50	20.9
	Total	239	100
What are the existing hard work strategies that academic staff are used to in FUO?	Teaching multiple courses, a day	60	25.1
	Working late nights to prepare for lectures and script grading	60	25.1
	Taking more than the required amount of time for lectures to meet job expectations	60	25.1
	Sacrificing personal and family time to meet non-teaching duties.	59	24.7
	Total	239	100
	Job performance is influenced by efforts put into work and the total hours dedicated to working on tasks.	Strongly Agree	56
Agree		28	11.7
Neutral		59	24.7
Disagree		31	13
Strongly Disagree		65	27.2
Total		239	100
Smart work vs. hard work: staff preference for enhancing job performance.	Exclusively hard work focused	13	5.4
	Primarily hard work with some smart work	27	11.3
	Balanced approach of both smart work and hard work	108	45.2
	Primarily smart work with some hard work	70	29.3
	Exclusively smart work focused	21	21
	Total	239	100
Participant's view on hard work strategies and job performance	Very Effective	41	17.2
	Effective	59	24.7
	Moderately Effective	97	40.6
	Not Effective	42	17.5
	Total	239	100
Participant's view on smart work strategies and job performance	Very Effective	78	32.6
	Effective	91	38.1
	Moderately Effective	61	25.5
	Not Effective	9	3.8
	Total	239	100
Primary work challenges impacting on job delivery.	Heavy workload	68	28.5
	Lack of resources	39	16.3
	Insufficient administrative support	27	11.3
	Limited time for research	42	17.6
	Balancing teaching and administrative duties	63	26.3
	Total	239	100

Source: Field work 2024

Table 2 above revealed the existing smart work strategies adopted by academic staff of FUO to enhance job performance as Utilization of technology, Collaboration, Prioritization and

Others. The study revealed that a greater percentage (42.7%) of respondents utilized technology in enhancing job performance while 36.4% adopts the collaborative method which allows staff to collaborate on departmental levels, across departments, faculties and even institutions. Interestingly, the data shows that prioritization received no (0%) response, indicating that none of the academic staff identified this as a smart work strategy they use. While 20.9% of participants adopted the category labeled "others" which accounts for time management, mindfulness and stress management and blended teaching technique. Some of the hard work strategies adopted by respondents were listed as Teaching multiple courses a day (25.1%), Working late nights to prepare for lectures and script grading (25.1%), Taking more than the required amount of time for lectures to meet job expectations (25.1%) and Sacrificing personal and family time to meet non-teaching duties (24.7%). Majority of participants 27.2% strongly disagreed to the view that efforts put into work and the total hours dedicated to working on tasks influences job performance. While 23.4% strongly agreed and 24.7% were neutral to the assertion. 45.2% which accounts for a greater percentage of respondents adopts the balanced approach of both smart work and hard work to enhance job performance. On enquiry into participant's view on hard work strategies and job performance, 40.6% of respondents making up the majority of iterates that hard work strategies are moderately effective. While 38.1% saw smart work as an effective work strategy. Finally, Heavy workload (28.5%), Lack of resources (16.3), Insufficient administrative support, (11.3%), Limited time for research (17.6%) and Balancing teaching and administrative duties (26.3%) respectively were highlighted as some of the primary work challenges impacting on job delivery by FUU staff.

Qualitative Data on Work Strategies and Employee Performance

In other to get a clear cut and understanding on participant's subjective view, four main themes were derived to get proper qualitative data from respondents.

Theme 1: Knowledge and Adoption of Smart Work Strategies

Majority of respondents have knowledge on different smart work strategies and adopt these strategies.

Particular to this respondent is prioritization.

I have knowledge of many smart work tools. However, I have started to use a tool called a planner to manage my tasks, and it has really changed how I work. Instead of just writing down everything I have to do, I have learned to prioritize my tasks. For example, I now focus on what's most important for my classes first, like preparing lectures and grading, before moving on to other tasks. This way, I feel more accomplished at the end of the day instead of just busy. (KII/ Female, Senior lecturer / 52years)

Another participant shared thus:

I believe in the power of teamwork. Instead of trying to handle everything on my own, I collaborate more with my colleagues. For example, we share resources for teaching and even discuss ways to help our students together. This not only takes some pressure off me but also leads to richer and more engaging classes because we

share different ideas. It also helps me in effectively managing my unit as head from the management angle. (KII/ Male/ Associate Professor/ Age undisclosed)

Theme 2: Smart Work vs. Hard work: Staff Preference for Enhancing Job Performance

Majority of respondents iterates challenges faced by solely depending on hard work strategies and are of the opinion that balancing both smart work and hard work strategies are more effective and enhances job performance.

I think that relying only on hard work can sometimes actually hurt how well we do our jobs. Sure, putting in long hours might make us feel busy, but it doesn't always mean we're being effective. For example, I often stay late grading papers or planning lessons, but if I don't take breaks or think about smarter ways to teach, I end up exhausted. When I'm tired, I can't give my students the energy and attention they deserve. (KII/Male/Professor/ 59years).

In my experience, focusing only on hard work can sometimes make it hard for me to see the bigger picture. When I'm buried in endless tasks, like reading articles or preparing reports, I forget to think about better strategies that could save me time. For instance, I've found that if I don't step back and reevaluate what I'm doing, I can waste hours on something that could've been done in half the time with a different approach. (KII/Female/Senior lecturer/46years)

I believe that smart work is way more effective than just hard work. In the classroom, I can spend hours lecturing, but let us say I use engaging tools like videos and group activities, the students learn better. For example, instead of talking for an hour, I might set up a project where students work in teams. They get to collaborate, and I can see how much they understand. This way, I feel like I'm truly teaching and not just filling time with my voice. These are approaching that other civilized societies are already making us of, but lack of such facilities hampers these ideas. (KII/Male/Senior Lecturer/ Age Undisclosed).

For me, balancing hard work and smart work is important. I used to think that staying in the lab late hours showed dedication. But that often meant I was too tired to think clearly. Now, I work hard on my projects, but I also make time to plan and think through my experiments during regular hours. That way, I put in the effort where it really counts, and I actually getting better results without feeling overwhelmed. (KII/Male/Lecturer II/ Age Undisclosed).

Theme 3: Challenges Impacting on Job Delivery

To garner information on the challenges experienced by academic staff of FOU a lot of respondents expressed their grievance at the poor working conditions and ill treatments from the Federal government.

I believe one of the biggest challenges we face as academic staff is the pressure to publish research frequently. The academic world seems to revolve around publication metrics, and if you're not constantly producing articles or books, you feel like you're falling behind. This pressure can lead to stress and even burnout because it often feels more important than teaching or interacting with students. (KII/Male/Lecturer II/37years).

For me, the biggest challenge is the lack of resources, such as funding and support staff. You can imagine that at this age and time, we often struggle with outdated technology and limited access to materials. This makes it really hard to provide the best education possible. I want to help my students succeed, but sometimes it feels impossible when I can't get the tools I need to teach effectively. These are some of the issues we continue to fight with the federal government for as a body (ASUU), earned allowances are not even paid let alone providing contemporary tools to aid education in the country. A lot of our natural science students during their research projects travel outside the state to access equipment and resources needed for their research practical, so these challenges hinder overall output from the teaching staff. (KII/ Male / Senior Lecturer / 46years).

Discussion

This research aimed to explore the influence of hard work and smart work strategies on job performance among the academic staff at the Federal University Otuoke. Notably, the demographics of the respondents and the primary challenges they face were crucial in understanding their experiences and perspectives. The socio-demographic data (1) reveals a predominantly middle-aged and male respondent group, with 66.9% of the participants aged between 35 and 44 years and 75.7% identifying as male. This aligns with the literature that noted gender imbalances in academia, indicating a potential gender disparity in the workforce (Abubakar, 2016; Afolabi & Ogunleye, 2018). Interestingly, the respondents displayed varied work experience, with 55.6% having between 6 to 10 years of experience. This level of experience is conducive for inputs into job performance as these individuals have navigated both challenges and strategies in their academic roles over time.

In response to research question 1, the findings indicate significant work challenges for the academic staff. The pressing issues outlined included heavy workloads (28.5%) and insufficient resources (16.3%), which resonate with literature that stresses the importance of adequate resources in ensuring effective academic performance (Adeniyi & Adeyemi, 2020; Adebowale, 2018). The mention of balancing teaching and administrative duties (26.3%) further revealed the complex role of academics, echoing the findings by Ogunleye and Adeyemi (2017), Akinola (2018).

Besides this, comments from interview participants highlighted that academic staff often face pressure to publish consistently, affirming the "publish or perish" mentality prevalent in academia (Bonginkosi, 2023). This pressure may detract from the quality of teaching, as academics struggle to find a balance between meeting publication requirements and engaging with students.

The second research question investigated the role of hard work in job performance. While 23.4% strongly agreed that hard work influences performance, 40.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting a complex relationship between effort and results. This finding aligns with Smith et al. (2018), who noted limitations of a hard work-only approach, which can lead to burnout and diminished productivity. Qualitative insights further supported this as one

interviewee noted that relentless hard work could lead to exhaustion, negatively impacting their teaching effectiveness. Such perspectives suggest that a singular focus on hard work lacks sustainability in the academic context (Ojo, Alao, & Atolagbe, 2024).

Addressing the third research question, the data gotten from field indicates that technology utilization (42.7%) was the most common smart work strategy adopted by academic staff, revealing the shift towards digital platforms for efficiency in teaching and administrative tasks. Interestingly, prioritization received no responses, suggesting that many respondents might not recognize it as a viable strategy for effective work management. However, qualitative feedback illustrated its importance, with one participant reporting improved time management through prioritization. Emphasizing this strategy can foster higher productivity (Adeyemi, 2016). The fourth research question examined the preferred approach to job performance in comparisons were a balanced integration of hard work and smart work, favored by 45.2% of respondents was dominant. This finding emphasizes a holistic perspective, similar to the literature suggesting that blending the two approaches leads to enhanced performance. The qualitative voices echoed this sentiment, with participants attributing their success to a combination of diligent work and the application of smarter strategies in their routines.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interaction between hard work, smart work strategies, and job performance is significant among the academic staff at the Federal University Otuoke. The research reveals that these staff members face many challenges, such as heavy workloads, lack of resources, and pressure to publish their research. These issues can make it difficult for them to perform at their best. The study also shows a gender imbalance among the respondents and highlights that most have quite a bit of work experience, which shapes how they view their jobs and cope with difficulties in academia. Many participants agreed that hard work is important for job performance, but a good number also expressed doubts about relying solely on hard work. This suggests they understand that putting in too much effort can lead to burnout, which can negatively affect their teaching. This indicates that hard work alone isn't enough; a mix of hard work and smart strategies is necessary to improve productivity and maintain well-being. The research points out that technology is recognized as a valuable tool for working smarter. This shows that academic staff need to use modern tools that can help them be more efficient in their teaching and administrative tasks. However, many staff members are unaware of the importance of prioritizing their tasks, which is an area that could be improved with proper training. Helping staff learn to prioritize could significantly improve their time management skills and, in turn, their job performance. Moreover, there's a growing understanding among the participants that combining hard work with smart strategies brings better results. They noted that their successes come from using both approaches, showing that a good balance can lead to more achievements in their academic careers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion reached, the research offers the following recommendations.

1. To tackle the significant challenges of heavy workloads and lack of resources that many staff members face, the university should consider hiring additional faculty or administrative support. This could help distribute the workload more evenly and free up time for teaching and research. Furthermore, securing more funding and resources for teaching materials and technology is crucial. This will empower academics to deliver quality education without feeling overwhelmed.
2. Since there are varying opinions about the impact of hard work on job performance, the university should encourage staff members to adopt a balanced approach. This could involve workshops and training sessions that focus on effective time management and the integration of smart work strategies with hard work. By fostering a culture where both approaches are valued, staff can enhance their performance while maintaining their well-being.
3. As the research indicates a lack of prioritization among academic staff, it is important to offer specific training on effective smart work strategies. This could include techniques for setting priorities, utilizing technology for efficiency, and collaborative practices. This research believes that by teaching these skills, the university can help staff manage their time better and reduce feelings of being overwhelmed. Encouraging the use of planners and digital tools can enhance task management and overall job performance.
4. Given the positive feedback on collaboration as a smart work strategy, the university should create more opportunities for teamwork among academic staff members. This could involve regular meetings to share resources and ideas, as well as establishing cross-disciplinary projects. This fostering of a sense of community can reduce the competition of "who works hardest," the university can enhance job satisfaction and performance, ultimately benefiting both staff and students.

References

- Adeniyi, O., & Adeyemi, T. (2020). Workload distribution, job engagement, and academic staff performance in a Nigerian University, *Journal of Higher Education*, 12(2), 78-92
- Adeyemi, T. O., & Akanbi, P. A. (2018). Workload and job performance among academic staff in Nigerian universities, *International Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 4(2), 45-56.
- Adeyemi, A. (2016). Engaging academic staff in strategy development, *Nigerian Journal of Educational Management*, 34(2), 45-56.
- Adeyemi, A., & Olorunsola, T. (2020). Work strategy alignment and organizational performance, *Journal of Business Management*, 15(2), 123-138.
- Afolabi, F., & Ogunleye, E. (2018). Balancing hard work and smart work: Implication for academic staff performance in Nigerian Universities, *International Journal of Education and Research*, 6(3), 143-156.

- Agboola, M. (2023). Measurement of work strategies in Nigerian organizations, *Nigerian Journal of Business Studies*, 18(1), 45-60.
- Bersin, (2023). *Predictions for 2023: Redefining work, the workforce, and HR* <https://joshbersin.com/2023/01/predictions-for-2023-redefining-work-the-workforce-and-hr>
- Bonginkosi, H., M. (2023). *Pressured to perform: The negative consequences of the 'publish or perish' Phenomenon among junior academics*, [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South](#) 7(2):46-62 DOI:10.36615/sotls.v7i2.301
- Emeka, O. (2012). Emerging Nonstandard employment relations and implications for human resource management functions in Nigeria, *African Journal of Business Management* 6(26) DOI:10.5897/AJBM11.2731
- Jenkins, A. (2004). *Institutional strategies to link teaching and research*, <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/id585>
- McKinsey & Company (2022). *What major themes will we see in global media in 2022? What should we see more of?* <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/what-major-themes-will-we-see-in-global-media-in-2022-what-should-we-see-more-of>
- Ojo, O., J., Alao, B. O. & Atolagbe, A., A. (2024). *Lecturers' engagement and job performance: Experiences from Kwara State tertiary institutions in Nigeria*, Papers in Education and Development (PED) 42(1) of *Indexed by African Journals Online (AJOL)*
- Ross, T. & Kami, U. (2011). *The importance of strategic management A case study of H&M*, Savonia University of Applied Sciences Unit of Business and Administration, Kuopio
- World Economic Forum (2023). *The future of jobs report 2023 explores how jobs and skills will evolve over the next five years*, [The Future of Jobs Report 2023 | World Economic Forum](#)