

Work Environment and Employee's Performance in Nigerian Public Universities

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Abstract: This study evaluated the impacts of work environment such as poor incentive and payment systems, as well as inadequate physical workspaces, on academic staff performance in Nigerian Universities. Utilizing descriptive method, twelve academic staff from six Nigerian public universities was interviewed to gather information about the subject under study. The work also relied on documentary evidence to establish the relation between environment and employee's performance. The finding revealed that poor physical workspaces characterized by cramped offices, outdated furniture, and insufficient facilities negatively affect the teaching preparation and delivery. The study underscored the urgent need in Nigerian Universities to address these systemic issues by revising its incentive and payment structures while investing in enhancing physical workspaces. Recommendations included establishing timely salary payments, increasing research funding, and improving workspace conditions to foster a comfortable academic environment.

Keywords: Work Environment, Employee's Performance, Job Satisfaction, Incentive Systems, Physical Workspaces

Introduction

The workplace environment plays a pivotal role in shaping human experiences, as it directly influences safety, well-being, and productivity. It encompasses the setting where tasks are carried out, and a well-managed workplace is one where management's expectations for results are met consistently (Mike, 2010). The physical setup of an organization significantly affects how employees perform their duties, interact with one another, and respond to leadership. This environment impacts human senses and can subtly shape interpersonal relationships, which, in turn, influences employee commitment (Ajala, 2012). For instance, the design and layout of workspaces and meeting areas can have profound effects on employee engagement and overall satisfaction.

In today's dynamic business world, maintaining a conducive work environment has become crucial for ensuring employee satisfaction. The modern workplace is increasingly diverse, continuously evolving, and characterized by a rapidly expanding economy that offers numerous career opportunities. This shift has placed greater reliance on employees rather than on the traditional view of employees depending entirely on their employers (Smith, 2011). To meet organizational objectives, companies are focused on attracting skilled, dedicated, and high-performing staff. Creating a work environment that is not only positive but also appealing is essential to draw top talent. A clean, safe, and comfortable workspace supports employee relaxation and job satisfaction, thereby promoting organizational success (Ramli, 2017). In fact, supportive working conditions are recognized as key drivers of job satisfaction, which significantly impacts employees' abilities to perform effectively (Ramli, 2012; Ramli & Sjahrudin, 2015).

The workplace environment is a crucial determinant of employee productivity and the quality of their work. When a workplace effectively engages employees, it boosts their motivation to learn new skills and enhances their commitment to performing well. As global competition intensifies in both the public and private sectors, strong

human resource performance is becoming increasingly vital. Research has demonstrated that employees' primary motivation for working is not merely financial; self-satisfaction and personal fulfillment are also critical factors (Suwati, Minarsih, & Gagah, 2016). However, achieving these goals is often impeded by poor workplace conditions and inadequate management. The challenges are not due to a lack of institutions or firms, but rather to the ineffective management and suboptimal work environments provided by leaders. Since organizations consist of people, the overall performance of these individuals directly affects organizational outcomes (Bin Dost, Shafi, & Shaheen, 2011; Solomon, Hashim, Mehdi, & Ajabe, 2012). Hence, when employees underperform, it often results in institutional shortcomings.

Studies, such as those by Tella, Ayeni, and Popoola (2007), show that well-managed organizations recognize employees as the primary source of quality and productivity, rather than focusing solely on capital investments. Such organizations view employee well-being as central to driving improvement and growth. Thus, there is an increasing need to foster job satisfaction and commitment across various levels and departments to achieve organizational excellence. In the 21st century, the importance of a well-considered workplace environment for organizational sustainability cannot be overemphasized. Although Nigerian organizations, like their counterparts worldwide, function within diverse environments, there is a noticeable gap in local research examining the impact of workplace conditions on employee's performance. This gap, particularly evident in institutions such as the University of Uyo, leaves unresolved questions about how workplace factors influence productivity in the Nigerian context.

Accordingly, work environment includes more than just physical conditions; it encompasses processes, policies, organizational culture, resources, working relationships, and even the geographical location. Both internal and external factors within this environment play crucial roles in shaping employee behavior and performance. Despite some organizations' efforts to enhance workplace conditions, a substantial gap remains in understanding the full impact of these environments on employee productivity. In public Universities in Nigeria, for example, the work environment falls short of what is found in other countries. Many offices have limited space, and materials such as furniture, files, and equipment are often disorganized. The lack of adequate facilities, such as proper ventilation, air conditioning, and appropriate lighting, contributes to a depressing and uninviting atmosphere in some departments. Additionally, the Universities often impose heavy workloads on employees to meet deadlines, resulting in both physical and psychological strain. This has unintended consequences, leading to outcomes contrary to the institutional objectives. As demands on employees increase without corresponding growth in staffing or resources, the pressure become overwhelming. The expectation to deliver world-class services with limited resources often results in burnout and deteriorating performance. By so doing, staff is burdened with excessive workloads, lack of recognition for their efforts, and face threats of dismissal if performance expectations are not met. This underscores the need for empirical research to pinpoint the specific factors that most significantly hinder performance and to develop targeted strategies to address these challenges. By examining the various facets of the workplace environment and their effects on employee productivity, this research aims to provide actionable insights for organizations seeking to boost productivity, employee well-being, and overall effectiveness. Based on the above raised problem, the study seeks to be guided by the following objectives:

1.3.1 To examine the impact of poor incentive and payment system on Academic Staff performance in the Nigerian Universities.

1.3.2 To determine how poor physical work space influences Academic staff performance in the Nigerian Universities.

Methodology

The research utilized descriptive method and relied heavily on documentary evidence to investigate the impact of the work environment on employee's performance in Nigerian Universities. The descriptive design focused on identifying the current workplace conditions, while the qualitative approach provided insights into interviewees' experiences and perspectives. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, with primary data obtained through interviews involving staff from six Nigerian public universities and secondary data derived from documents such as university records and performance reports. The data from the interview were analyzed qualitatively supported by documentary evidence to explore the connection between the work environment and employee's performance.

Theoretical Framework

To provide a solid theoretical foundation for this study, the researchers selected Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, developed by Frederick Herzberg in 1959, as the guiding framework. This theory focuses on various assumptions about employee motivation and satisfaction, which are crucial for analyzing the influence of the work environment on performance. It categorizes factors into hygiene elements and intrinsic motivators, with the former being essential for preventing dissatisfaction but not necessarily for motivating employees (Herzberg, 1959). Hygiene factors, such as salary, job security, and workplace safety, must be adequately addressed; otherwise, they can lead to a negative atmosphere. For instance, in universities inadequate salaries or concerns about job security could foster dissatisfaction among staff, highlighting the necessity for the administration to ensure that these basic needs are met to maintain morale.

In contrast, intrinsic motivators play a vital role in enhancing job satisfaction and performance. These motivators include opportunities for professional growth, recognition for academic contributions, and meaningful engagement in teaching and research activities (Herzberg et al., 1959). When such factors are effectively integrated into the work environment in Nigerian Universities, they significantly elevate employee morale, leading to greater engagement and a sense of accomplishment.

By applying Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this study can effectively investigate how hygiene factors and intrinsic motivators interact to influence employee's performance within the university setting. Addressing the essential hygiene factors while simultaneously fostering motivational elements can lead to a supportive environment that enhances employee satisfaction. This comprehensive approach not only satisfies basic employee needs but also cultivates intrinsic motivation, ultimately contributing to a vibrant and productive academic community.

Work Environment

The work environment involves job-specific characteristics such as workload, task complexity, and job autonomy, as well as broader organizational attributes like culture, history, and labor market conditions. According to Ismail and Mohammed (2016), physical elements like layout, comfort, and aesthetics play a crucial role in employee's performance. A conducive environment, whether through private office spaces or well-designed open plans, promotes concentration, creativity, and collaboration (Vischer, 2017). Factors like wages, working hours, autonomy, organizational structure, and communication also influence job satisfaction and performance (Lane et al., 2010). Poor supervisory relationships and lack of respect from managers often demotivate employees, preventing them from sharing innovative ideas. Effective communication and teamwork are essential for achieving organizational goals (Pettersson, 2018).

Studies have shown that specific work environment features, such as ventilation, lighting, and ergonomic furniture, significantly impact employee health and productivity (Humphries, 2015; Dilani, 2004; Milton, Glencross, & Walters, 2000; Veitch & Newsham, 2000). For instance, Hameed and Amjad (2009) found that ergonomic office design in bank branches enhanced employee's performance, while Chandrasekar (2011) highlighted the negative effects of poor ventilation, noise, and inadequate lighting on productivity.

This understanding of the work environment's multifaceted nature and its impact on employee's performance is crucial for creating effective and supportive workplaces. Organizations must focus on improving both physical and psychological aspects of the work environment to foster employee satisfaction and high performance.

There are two types of work environment according to Kyko (2005), which are conducive and toxic work environments.

Kyko (2005) identified six factors which contribute to a toxic work environment hence contributing to low performance and productivity of workers. The factors are: Opaque management, Biased boss, Company's policies, working conditions, Interpersonal relationship and Pay. The characteristics of a Positive Work Environment also include: Transparent and Open Communication, Management/Leadership Style, Work life balance, Workplace Environmental factors, Training and Development Focused, Recognition for Hard Work, Shower praises:

Components of on Work Environment

The work environment comprises several interrelated components that significantly influence employee's performance, well-being, and job satisfaction. These components can be categorized into physical, social, organizational, psychological, and technological factors.

The physical work environment includes tangible aspects such as office layout, equipment, noise levels, lighting, temperature, and air quality. Research indicates that elements like adequate lighting and ergonomic furniture can enhance productivity and reduce health issues among workers (Chandrasekar, 2011). A well-designed physical environment fosters better employee engagement and mitigates fatigue, ultimately leading to higher performance levels.

The social work environment pertains to the relationships and interactions between employees and management, encompassing teamwork, communication, support from colleagues, and workplace culture. Social support from peers and superiors can enhance job satisfaction, alleviate stress, and promote a positive attitude toward work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Effective communication and collaboration are crucial for creating a supportive workplace culture that positively impacts performance.

The organizational work environment involves the policies, procedures, and organizational culture that shape the workplace. This includes leadership style, management practices, workload, career development opportunities, and reward systems. An environment characterized by fair management practices and opportunities for growth tends to foster higher job commitment and motivation (Armstrong, 2012). Conversely, a poor organizational climate, marked by excessive workloads and unclear policies, can lead to job dissatisfaction and increased turnover rates.

Psychological factors within the work environment include mental and emotional aspects such as job security, stress levels, and recognition for achievements. A supportive psychological environment is essential for employee well-being and helps to reduce burnout, which negatively affects productivity (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994). High stress and lack of recognition can demotivate employees, ultimately impacting their overall performance.

Finally, the technological environment encompasses the availability and quality of technological resources, including tools, equipment, and software. The adoption of modern technologies can streamline tasks, enhance communication, and improve efficiency (Davis, 1989). Employees with access to updated technology are often more productive and satisfied with their work conditions. Together, these components shape the overall work environment, playing a crucial role in maintaining high levels of productivity and employee satisfaction.

Employee's Performance

Employee's performance is a multifaceted concept in organizational behaviour and human resource management, and contemporary scholars have provided various definitions that reflect its complexity. For instance, Wang et al. (2019) define employee's performance as "the degree to which employees fulfill their work responsibilities, contribute to organisational goals, and enhance overall productivity." This definition underscores the link between individual contributions and organisational effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of aligning employee goals with the broader mission of the organization. In a similar vein, Sonnentag (2018) describes employee's performance as "a dynamic process that involves the integration of individual behaviors, skills, and contextual factors that influence work outcomes," highlighting that performance is not static but evolves based on various influences, including employee engagement and environmental factors.

Nusair and Waqas (2021) characterize employee's performance as "the extent to which an employee meets or exceeds the expectations of their role within the organizational framework," focusing on the alignment between job expectations and individual performance. Jiang et al. (2020) refer to employee's performance as "the collective outcomes of employee behaviours that contribute to achieving organisational objectives," emphasizing the collaborative aspect of performance and suggesting that individual actions collectively influence organizational success. Additionally, Aguinis (2019) defines employee's performance as "the results of behaviors that contribute to organizational goals, encompassing both task performance and contextual performance," which incorporates the distinction between specific tasks and broader contextual factors affecting contributions. Mmakwe and Ojiabo

(2018) highlighted that performance depends on internal motivation and the presence of necessary skills, intellectual capacity, and resources. Employers must provide suitable working conditions to ensure employees meet performance standards. Employee's performance is linked to commitment, productivity, work efficiency, and work attitude.

Furthermore, Pulakos et al. (2019) assert that "employee's performance encompasses the behaviours and outcomes expected of an employee in their role, influenced by personal, contextual, and organisational factors," indicating that both individual characteristics and external factors must be optimized for improved effectiveness.

Factors that influence employee's performance include leadership, (Adebakin and Gbadamosi, 2017), organizational culture, Incentives, organizational structure, (Duru and Shimawua, 2017; Saidu et al., 2021), motivation (Maslow, 1943; Herzberg, 1966; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Other factors include work environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Chandrasekar 2011), employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Gallup, 2016) training and development (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Noe 2017), as well as effective performance management System (Armstrong, 2012).

Empirical Studies

Hope, Arachie, Ibrahim, and Okoli (2018) conducted an empirical study to explore the relationship between the physical working environment and employee's performance in breweries located in Anambra State. The research employed a survey method, targeting a population of 550 individuals. The sample size was determined to be 233 using the Taro Yamane formula, and the questionnaire was distributed according to Bowley's proportion allocation formula. To test the hypotheses, the researchers utilized Pearson's Product Moment Correlation statistics. The findings indicated a significant relationship between ergonomics and job satisfaction among the companies examined, suggesting that improvements in the physical working environment could enhance employee's performance. Based on the finding, the study recommended among others that management should invest in ergonomic assessments and modifications of the physical work environment to improve employee comfort and productivity. This may include providing adjustable workstations, proper seating, and adequate lighting. Additionally, organizations should implement regular feedback mechanisms to gather employee input regarding the working environment. This approach will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that changes made align with employee needs and preferences, ultimately fostering job satisfaction and enhancing performance.

Similarly, Putri (2019) investigated the effect of the work environment on employee's performance through work discipline. The study focused on a sample of 208 employees from PT. Gatra Mapan in Indonesia. Data were collected using a questionnaire, which was subsequently analyzed using path analysis. The findings revealed that work discipline serves as a mediating factor between the work environment and employee's performance. Additionally, the study established that the work environment itself significantly influences both employee's performance and discipline within the workplace. To enhance employee's performance, it is recommended that PT. Gatra Mapan invest in creating a more supportive work environment that fosters discipline. This could involve offering training programs focused on work ethics and accountability. Furthermore, management should establish regular assessments of the workplace conditions to ensure they remain conducive to productivity, thus promoting a culture of discipline and high performance among employees.

Elok, Vivin, Achmad, and Zaim (2019) conducted a study titled The Effect of Work Environment on Employee's performance Through Work Discipline. The study asserted that a conducive and comfortable work environment fosters enthusiasm among employees, thereby enhancing their performance and discipline in their roles. When employees are satisfied with their work environment characterized by adequate facilities and positive relationships with colleagues their overall performance improves. A comfortable workplace promotes discipline and motivates employees to effectively achieve the organization's goals. The study aimed to investigate three main aspects: (1) the effect of the work environment on employee's performance, (2) the effect of the work environment on work discipline, and (3) the role of work discipline as a mediator in the relationship between the work environment and employee's performance. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the research focused on the population and samples within PT. GatraMapan, employing proportional random sampling techniques. The study comprised a total population of 208 employees, from which a sample of 137 respondents was drawn. Data were collected through

questionnaires and analyzed using Path Analysis. The findings revealed that work discipline effectively mediated the relationship between the work environment and employee's performance.

Agaba, Ssebagala, Micheal, Pastor, and Osunsan (2020) investigated the impact of the workplace environment on employee's performance among healthcare providers, specifically focusing on Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital. The study aimed to determine the effects of the physical environment, psychological environment, and work-life balance on employee's performance among healthcare providers at the hospital. Data on the study variables were collected simultaneously using a cross-sectional research methodology. The research included a total of 324 healthcare providers, of whom 140 were considered for the study; however, only 122 responded. Participants included administrative employees, doctors, nurses, lab officers, and pharmacists. The findings revealed a significant impact of the work environment on employee's performance at Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital ($R^2 = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$). based on the findings, the study recommended among others that the management at Fort Portal Regional Referral Hospital should invest in improving both the physical and psychological work environments. This could involve upgrading facilities and equipment to ensure comfort and safety, as well as implementing initiatives that promote mental well-being. Additionally, establishing flexible work-life balance policies could further improve employee satisfaction and productivity, ultimately leading to better performance outcomes among healthcare providers.

Onwunyi and Mba (2021) conducted a study titled Work Environment and Employee's performance in the Public Service: A Study of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria. This research examined the effect of the work environment on employee's performance at the university, with a particular focus on determining whether the social environment affects the productivity of its workers. To effectively articulate the study, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, including questionnaires, interviews, journals, periodicals, and textbooks. The findings were displayed using tables and percentages, and data analysis was conducted using the chi-square statistical method. Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula was utilized to establish a sample size of 150 respondents. Victor Vroom's Valence Expectancy Theory served as the theoretical framework for the analysis. The study revealed that the working environment at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University significantly impacted employee's performance, indicating a need for improvement in the physical work environment to encourage employees to remain engaged and perform effectively. Among the recommendations made, the university should implement a robust work-life balance program for employees, as this can significantly motivate and retain staff. Additionally, management is urged to create a work environment that attracts, retains, and motivates employees to enhance comfort and productivity. Employers should ensure optimal working conditions to boost employee morale and efficiency. Finally, the management should establish effective communication strategies to convey their goals and objectives to employees, ensuring alignment with the organization's mission and vision.

Onwuzuligbo and Nwobodo (2022) conducted a study titled Work Environment and Employee's performance: A Study of Pharmaceutical Firms in Enugu State, Nigeria. This research specifically aimed to ascertain the relationship between personal protective equipment (PPE) and employee output through commitment. A survey design method was adopted, targeting a population of 416 employees from the three largest pharmaceutical manufacturing firms in Enugu State. Data were collected using a complete enumeration sampling technique, employing a structured instrument based on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Spearman-Brown coefficient reliability test, which yielded a coefficient of 0.991. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient, analyzed with SPSS version 20. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between the variables under investigation, concluding that the work environment has substantial implications for employee's performance. Based on these conclusions, the study recommended that management should provide a conducive work environment to significantly enhance organizational output. Furthermore, it suggested that organizations maximize employee output by ensuring the provision of all necessary safety measures and personal protective equipment. Inadequate or unavailable safety measures and PPE can create an unsafe and unhealthy workplace, leading to employee dissatisfaction, complaints, absenteeism, and increased turnover. Therefore, prioritizing employee safety and comfort is essential for improving overall performance and commitment.

Work Environment and Employee's Performance in Nigerian Public Universities

The evaluation of the impacts of poor incentive and payment systems on academic staff performance in Nigerian Universities reveals a significant correlation between financial motivation, job satisfaction, and overall academic effectiveness. Insights gathered from interview with academic staff underscore that delayed salaries and inadequate incentives negatively affect their motivation and engagement with students and research efforts. This sentiment is echoed in scholarly literature, which emphasizes that financial stability is crucial for job satisfaction and employee's performance in academic settings (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The pressure of managing personal finances can overshadow the passion for teaching, ultimately affecting classroom quality and student engagement (Friedman et al., 2018).

Some academic staff noted that limited access to research funding hampers their ability to contribute to scholarly activities and reduces the overall quality of research output. Other academic staff pointed out that they finance their research out of pocket, which is not only unsustainable but demotivating. Research supports this view, indicating that adequate institutional support is essential for fostering a thriving research environment (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The relationship between the work environment and employee's performance has been extensively studied, revealing that various aspects of the work setting significantly impact how employees perform their tasks. A positive work environment is often characterized by factors such as adequate resources, supportive leadership, effective communication, and a culture of collaboration. According to Tanskanen et al. (2020), a conducive work environment fosters employee engagement and satisfaction, which, in turn, leads to enhanced performance. Their research indicates that when employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to be motivated to contribute effectively to their organizations.

Similarly, a study by Han et al. (2019) highlights that well-designed workspaces that promote comfort, safety, and accessibility can significantly enhance productivity and job satisfaction. This is in line with what an academic staff in one of the Nigeria universities reported when interviewed. He lamented;

When our workspaces are cramped and uncomfortable, it becomes challenging to focus on our research and teaching responsibilities. The lack of proper ventilation and outdated furniture lead to physical discomfort, making it hard to be productive. It's frustrating to be in an environment that doesn't support our work. A better physical workspace would not only enhance our comfort but also boost our motivation and effectiveness in engaging with students and conducting research."

These findings suggest that the physical layout, lighting, and ergonomics of a workplace can directly affect employees' ability to perform efficiently.

Furthermore, the psychological aspects of the work environment, such as organizational culture and social support, have been shown to influence employee's performance. According to Chen et al. (2021), a strong organizational culture that promotes teamwork, innovation, and open communication positively affects employee morale and performance. They found that employees who perceive their workplace culture as supportive and inclusive are more likely to exhibit higher levels of performance and commitment to their organization. Supporting this fact, an academic staff interviewed explained;

Without adequate research funding or recognition for publishing, it feels like our efforts are not valued. This discourages us from pursuing meaningful research projects, as the time and resources invested yield little reward. It's hard to stay motivated when there's no support or incentive for advancing knowledge through research and scholarly contributions."

Additionally, research by Javed et al. (2019) emphasizes the importance of management practices in shaping the work environment. Their study indicates that effective leadership and management practices, such as providing regular feedback, recognizing employee contributions, and offering professional development opportunities, are crucial for enhancing employee's performance.

It's frustrating to see dedicated individuals hindered by such bureaucratic issues, especially when their hard work and potential contributions are at stake. These situations are demoralizing, as they create an environment where academic staff feel unsupported and undervalued. When funding commitments are not honored, it discourages many from pursuing ambitious research projects and undermines overall morale within the department.

Employees who feel their leaders are invested in their growth tend to be more engaged and perform better.

Furthermore, some academic staff expressed concern over the brain drain phenomenon. They noted that many talented academics have left Nigerian universities for better opportunities abroad due to uncomfortable working environment. This loss of skilled personnel severely affects the universities' academic strength and reputation. Research shows that supportive environments are critical factors in retaining talented faculty (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The frustrations of undervalued staff often lead to decreased morale and productivity, creating a cycle that further perpetuates turnover and loss of institutional knowledge (Koster et al., 2011). On the effect of poor working environment on teaching effectiveness and student outcomes, those interviewed maintained that poor working environment has enormous impact on staff performance such as teaching effectiveness. Many members reported taking on additional jobs due to financial pressures, which significantly reduces the time available for academic responsibilities, such as preparing lectures and providing student support. This dual burden compromises the quality of education delivered to students.

On evaluating how poor physical workspaces influence academic staff performance in Nigerian Universities, academic staff interviewed articulated that inadequate physical environments, characterized by cramped offices, lack of proper ventilation, outdated furniture, and insufficient facilities, significantly diminish their ability to perform effectively. Such conditions not only lead to physical discomfort but also hinder focus, resulting in decreased productivity and quality of work. For example, one of such academic staff lamented that the challenges posed by cramped and uncomfortable spaces make it difficult to concentrate on research and teaching responsibilities. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the link between physical work conditions and employee's performance, which argues that a conducive work environment enhances productivity and morale (Oni, 2020).

Moreover, the interviewees highlighted that poor physical workspaces negatively impact teaching preparation and delivery. They also that noted the absence of essential facilities, such as reliable internet and quiet spaces for lesson planning usually force them to prepare lectures at home. This situation disrupts their academic activities and decreases the quality of education provided to students. Research indicates that physical environments with adequate resources are essential for effective teaching and learning outcomes (Donnelly & Houghton, 2017). Consequently, the inability to engage students in meaningful interactions due to inadequate consultation spaces further undermines their academic experiences.

The findings also pointed out that a subpar physical work environment directly affects research activities. Insufficient storage for research materials and lack of collaborative spaces hinder academic staff's ability to engage in productive research, often leading them to conduct work outside the university. This situation is consistent with studies showing that well-equipped workspaces are vital for fostering creativity and collaboration in research settings (Higgins, 2018).

In addition, health and well-being emerged as another critical aspect, with interviewees noting that uncomfortable office furniture contributes to physical ailments, stress, and fatigue, ultimately impacting their performance. Ergonomically designed workspaces are essential for promoting staff health and productivity (Robertson et al., 2013). Additionally, the psychological effects of working in neglected environments were highlighted, with one interviewee stating that an unkempt workspace dampens motivation and enthusiasm. This observation resonates with the findings of a study by Kahn et al. (2019), which suggests that well-maintained environments significantly influence employee morale and engagement.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the impacts of poor incentive and payment systems, alongside inadequate physical workspaces, on academic staff performance in Nigerian Universities highlights a complex interplay between financial motivation, job satisfaction, and environmental conditions. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that delayed salaries and insufficient incentives lead to financial stress, negatively impacting academic staff motivation, teaching effectiveness, and research output. Furthermore, the physical environment—characterized by cramped spaces, outdated furniture, and lack of essential facilities—further compounds these challenges, resulting in decreased productivity and job satisfaction. As a consequence, these factors contribute to issues such as brain drain, reduced staff morale, and compromised student learning outcomes. The insights gathered underscore the urgent need for institutional reform to enhance both financial incentives and physical work conditions, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommended the following:

- I. The university should prioritize the regularization of salary payments and the introduction of competitive financial incentives. Establishing a transparent system for timely compensation will alleviate financial stress among academic staff, fostering greater job satisfaction and commitment.
- II. The University Management Should Increase institutional funding for research initiatives and provide recognition for academic achievements. Establishing grants, awards, and resources for faculty research will encourage innovative projects and improve overall research output.
- III. The universities' management should invest in upgrading physical workspaces to ensure they are conducive to productivity. This includes renovating offices, providing ergonomic furniture, ensuring proper ventilation, and equipping spaces with necessary resources like reliable internet access and quiet areas for lesson planning.
- IV. There is an urgent need to implement both incentive systems and physical workspaces to ensure they meet the needs of academic staff. Hence, regular feedback mechanisms will help the university adapt to changing circumstances and enhance the work environment and workers' productivity in the institution.

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