

EFFECT OF JOB MORALE AND JOB COMMITMENT ON ACADEMIC STAFF PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY EDUCATION DELIVERY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH ARTICLE

This study investigated the influence of job morale and job commitment on academic staff productivity and quality of education delivery in public and private universities in Edo State, Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research explored the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of 30 academic staff across three public universities (University of Benin, Edo State University, Uzairue) and one private university (Igbinedion University, Okada). Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, designed to elicit insights into motivational drivers, institutional support, and professional engagement. The data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, with both inductive coding to capture emergent themes and deductive coding informed by motivation theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Expectancy Theory. Four major themes emerged: (1) job morale as a determinant of engagement and productivity, (2) job commitment and its impact on sustained quality education delivery, (3) institutional practices as moderators of morale and commitment, and (4) contextual differences between public and private universities. Findings indicate that intrinsic motivators—such as recognition, autonomy, and professional development—enhance morale, while affective and normative commitment strengthens institutional loyalty and quality teaching. Leadership practices, equitable policies, and resource availability were identified as critical moderators that either reinforce or constrain motivation. Public and private universities exhibited distinct motivational dynamics, underscoring the need for context-specific management strategies. The study provides actionable implications for educational managers and policymakers, advocating for integrated motivational frameworks, participatory leadership, and tailored strategies to enhance academic staff engagement, productivity, and the quality of education delivery.

KEYWORDS: Job Morale, Job Commitment, Academic Productivity, Quality Education Delivery, Motivation Theories, Public Universities, Private Universities

Introduction

Academic staff are critical drivers of teaching, research, and community engagement in higher education institutions. In Nigeria, universities face persistent challenges related to fluctuating morale, inconsistent institutional support, and variable levels of job commitment, all of which negatively impact academic productivity and quality of education delivery. Research indicates that academic staff productivity and the quality of education are inextricably linked to psychological and organizational antecedents, particularly job morale and job commitment (Smith & Riley, 2020). Job morale refers to the overall emotional and psychological well-being and attitudes held by employees toward their work environment, whereas job commitment reflects the emotional attachment and loyalty of staff to their institution. Low morale and poor commitment often manifest as burnout, reduced productivity, and compromised educational quality (Abubakar, 2023; Tijjani, 2025).

Academic staff simultaneously function as teachers, researchers, and institutional ambassadors, and their performance shapes both institutional reputation and national human capital development. Within many Nigerian public universities, including the University of Benin (UNIBEN)—the sixth federal university in Nigeria and a major research hub in Edo State—industrial actions, infrastructural decay, and excessive workload pressures have historically undermined staff morale, thereby negatively affecting teaching quality and research output (Adewale & Okonkwo, 2023; Ajibade et al., 2025). Conversely, private universities such as Igbinedion University, Okada, and Mudiame University operate under different motivational dynamics, including market competition, resource investment, and performance expectations, which shape both staff engagement and productivity (Okeke & Eze, 2024; Nwachukwu et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, motivational factors influencing morale and commitment are best understood through multiple, complementary frameworks. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs posits that unmet foundational needs, such as financial security and safe working conditions, inhibit the realization of higher-order needs, including esteem and self-actualization, which are critical to academic excellence (Maslow, 1943). Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory further distinguishes hygiene factors—which prevent dissatisfaction—from motivators, such as recognition and achievement, that actively enhance engagement (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). In the Nigerian context, where non-financial motivators—including recognition, research support, and autonomy—can be as influential as salary, educational managers must strategically address both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers (Fehintola et al., 2023). Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are foundational to deep engagement and sustained motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), while Expectancy Theory highlights the importance of perceived relationships between effort, performance, and rewards in shaping initiative and productivity (Vroom, 1964).

Against this backdrop, Nigeria's higher education system faces challenges in staff retention, productivity, and quality assurance, often linked to motivational deficits. Evidence suggests that morale and commitment issues are not merely individual psychological phenomena but reflect institutional culture, reward structures, leadership practices, and broader economic constraints (Umar et al., 2025; Tijjani, 2025). Addressing these challenges requires an educational management perspective that extends beyond salary adjustments to encompass organizational justice, professional development, and leadership effectiveness as central levers for enhancing motivation, sustaining academic productivity, and ensuring the delivery of high-quality education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study

- 1) How do academic staff in public and private universities in Edo State describe the influence of job morale on their productivity and quality of education delivery?
- 2) What role does job commitment play in shaping academic staff productivity and quality teaching?
- 3) Which institutional and managerial practices enhance or undermine job morale and job commitment?

Literature Review

In contemporary higher education, academic staff productivity and the quality of education delivery are deeply shaped by psychological motivation and organizational factors such as job morale and job commitment. Academic staff—simultaneously teachers, researchers, and institutional ambassadors—play a central role in shaping both institutional reputation and national human capital development. In Nigeria, challenges such as chronic underfunding, infrastructural decay, and frequent industrial actions have been identified as key constraints undermining staff morale and productivity, particularly within public institutions (Aidiaborkpa, Akindele, & Ogbogu, 2025). Public universities in Edo State, for example, like the University of Benin (UNIBEN), have experienced persistent workload pressures and governance inconsistencies that negatively impact staff engagement and instructional quality (Ajibade et al., 2025). In contrast, private institutions such as Igbinedion University, Okada and Mudiame University operate within highly competitive environments that, while offering different resource bases, also introduce performance pressures tied to market expectations and continual output (Okeke & Eze, 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, motivational factors influencing morale and commitment are best understood through multiple complementary frameworks that acknowledge both intrapersonal needs and organizational contexts. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs posits that unmet foundational needs—such as financial security and safe working conditions—impede fulfillment of higher-order needs like esteem and self-actualization, which are critical for professional excellence (Maslow, 1943). Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory further distinguishes between hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction (e.g., salary, working environment) and motivators (such as recognition and achievement) that actively promote engagement (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Research in Nigerian tertiary contexts suggests that non-financial motivators such as professional recognition, research support, and academic autonomy can be as consequential as direct remuneration for sustaining morale (Nwachukwu, Shadare, & Chidi, 2025). Moreover, Self-Determination Theory emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundational to sustained intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), while Expectancy Theory foregrounds the belief that effort leads to performance and valued outcomes as a critical determinant of individual initiative and productivity (Vroom, 1964).

Within the Nigerian context, organizational commitment—defined as the psychological attachment and loyalty of employees to their institutions—is widely recognized as a predictor of performance outcomes. Empirical research at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University in Katsina State revealed that affective, continuance, and normative commitment dimensions each exert significant positive effects on academic performance, with affective commitment emerging as

the strongest predictor of productivity (Tijjani, 2025). Similarly, research within Edo State highlights that organizational justice, loyalty, and internal communication are positively associated with higher morale in private universities compared to public counterparts, underscoring the mediating role of institutional culture and management practices on motivational experiences (Fehintola et al., 2023; Nwachukwu et al., 2025).

Empirical studies in Nigeria consistently demonstrate that work environment, professional support, and leadership practices significantly affect academic staff commitment and productivity. For instance, research in public universities in Lagos State found that quality work environment and work–life balance significantly predict affective commitment, supporting the claims of Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JDR) model (Nwachukwu et al., 2025). Likewise, broader studies on organizational support underscore that inadequate salaries, poor infrastructure, limited research funding, and lack of involvement in decision-making are key barriers to staff motivation in Nigerian universities (Ajibade et al., 2025; Okeke & Eze, 2024).

At a localized level in Edo State, investigations show that perceived employer and supervisor support significantly influences job involvement and commitment among university employees, highlighting the centrality of supportive institutional cultures for sustaining morale and engagement. Studies on organizational justice further demonstrate that perceptions of fairness in procedures and rewards are positively associated with commitment among academic staff, reinforcing the idea that equitable management practices are fundamental to fostering loyalty and sustained academic efforts (Fehintola et al., 2023; Tijjani, 2025). Despite the diversity of institutional settings—ranging from well-established federal universities like UNIBEN to emerging private institutions—the literature converges on the conclusion that integrated motivational frameworks that incorporate both psychological and systemic determinants are necessary for enhancing academic productivity and ensuring quality education delivery. This body of evidence underscores the importance of reconciling motivation theory with internal governance practices and the contextual realities of Nigerian and Edo State universities.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings of academic staff regarding job morale, job commitment, and academic productivity in both public and private universities in Edo State. Phenomenology is ideal because it emphasizes understanding participants’ subjective experiences, allowing for in-depth insights into motivation, engagement, and perceived quality of teaching and research delivery. This approach aligns with prior qualitative studies on academic staff motivation in Nigeria (Fehintola et al., 2023; Sani Kasimu et al., 2024).

The study targeted academic staff across ranks (Lecturer II to Professors) in three public universities—University of Benin (UNIBEN), Edo State University, Uzairue, and one private university—Igbinedion University, Okada. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who have a minimum of five years of teaching experience, ensuring that respondents could reflect on institutional practices and their impact on productivity and morale. Total participants are 30 academic staff (20 from Public and 10 staff from private universities). Purposive sampling ensures rich qualitative data from individuals most familiar with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Data were collected using: Semi-structured interviews – allowing participants to describe experiences of morale, commitment, and productivity in their own words. Also, Focus Group

Discussions (FGDs) was conducted separately for public and private university staff to explore shared meanings and collective experiences. Interview and FGD guides included questions such as:

- “Can you describe an experience at your university where you felt highly motivated to teach or conduct research?”
- “How do institutional practices or leadership styles affect your commitment to the university?”
- “What factors influence your productivity and quality of teaching?”

All sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and validated by participants for accuracy (member checking). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step framework: Familiarization with data, Generating initial codes, Searching for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining and naming themes and Producing the report. Themes were derived both inductively from participant narratives and deductively based on motivation theories (Maslow, Herzberg, SDT, Expectancy Theory). NVivo 12 software was used to assist in coding, pattern identification, and thematic mapping.

Results

The qualitative analysis of interviews and focus group discussions revealed four major themes regarding the influence of job morale and job commitment on academic staff productivity and quality of education delivery in Edo State universities. Thematic patterns were examined through both inductive and deductive approaches, integrating participants’ lived experiences with motivation theories.

Theme 1: Job Morale as a Key Driver of Academic Productivity

Across both public and private universities, participants emphasized that job morale—defined as the psychological and emotional disposition toward work—directly influenced engagement, research output, and quality of teaching. High morale was associated with enthusiasm, proactive engagement, and innovation in academic responsibilities.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“Whenever my research or teaching is acknowledged by management or peers, I am inspired to invest more time and effort. Recognition motivates me beyond the salary I receive.”* – Lecturer II, UNIBEN.
- *“In our private university, awards for best teaching performance or research excellence really push me to innovate my lectures and supervise students more actively.”* – Senior Lecturer, Igbinedion University.
- *“Sometimes, just knowing that students and colleagues appreciate your effort is enough to keep you productive, even when the infrastructure is lacking.”* – Associate Professor, Edo State University.

Analytical Insight: These narratives underscore that intrinsic motivators, including recognition, respect, and a sense of professional achievement, are critical for maintaining morale. This aligns with Herzberg’s motivator factors and Self-Determination Theory, highlighting that intrinsic satisfaction can often override deficiencies in extrinsic rewards, particularly in resource-constrained public university settings.

Theme 2: Job Commitment and Quality Education Delivery

Job commitment emerged as a significant determinant of quality teaching, research engagement, and institutional loyalty. Commitment reflected both affective attachment (emotional investment in the institution) and normative obligation (sense of duty to uphold educational standards).

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“Even when funding is scarce, I continue to mentor students and maintain high teaching standards because I feel a personal responsibility to the university.”* – Associate Professor, Edo State University.
- *“I remain committed when management practices fairness in promotions and workload allocation. It makes me feel invested in the institution’s success.”* – Lecturer I, UNIBEN.
- *“Some of my colleagues are disengaged because they feel their efforts don’t count. For me, I choose to stay committed because students’ success is more important than administrative challenges.”* – Senior Lecturer, Igbinedion University.

Analytical Insight: These observations support Meyer and Allen’s (1991) affective and normative commitment framework, emphasizing that emotional attachment and ethical responsibility underpin sustained engagement and high-quality educational delivery. Commitment is not merely a product of job security but is shaped by organizational justice, participatory governance, and perceived value of one’s contributions.

Theme 3: Institutional Practices as Moderators of Morale and Commitment

Participants consistently indicated that leadership, institutional policies, and professional support systems mediate the relationship between morale, commitment, and productivity. Effective leadership and resource availability created a sense of belonging and facilitated professional growth, while lack of support undermined motivation.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“Participatory leadership, where our opinions are considered in curriculum or research planning, enhances my morale. Feeling valued drives me to be more productive.”* – Lecturer II, UNIBEN.
- *“In public universities, delays in promotions and inadequate facilities reduce my motivation. In private universities, resource provision and prompt recognition of achievements create a positive work culture.”* – Senior Lecturer, Igbinedion University.
- *“Opportunities for attending conferences or professional development programs make me feel invested in my career. Without these, my morale drops, and productivity suffers.”* – Lecturer I, Edo State University.

Analytical Insight: These findings highlight that organizational support and equitable practices are not peripheral but central to sustaining academic productivity. They also demonstrate that motivational theories (Maslow, Herzberg, SDT, Expectancy) are best interpreted in a context-specific framework where institutional practices amplify or constrain intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Theme 4: Public vs. Private University Contexts

A comparative analysis revealed distinct motivational landscapes between public and private universities. Public university staff valued job security and tenure, but structural constraints such as strikes, delayed salaries, and bureaucratic bottlenecks often reduced morale. Private university staff faced performance pressures, but these were balanced by resource provision, recognition, and supportive leadership, resulting in higher morale and engagement.

Illustrative Quotes:

- *“In public universities, the security of tenure is reassuring, but frequent strikes and poor infrastructure make it challenging to stay fully motivated.”* – Lecturer II, UNIBEN.
- *“In private institutions, we have higher expectations, but support, recognition, and timely incentives make it rewarding. It motivates me to give my best consistently.”* – Senior Lecturer, Igbinedion University.
- *“I notice that colleagues in private universities are more proactive because they receive regular feedback, resources, and training. In public universities, these factors are irregular or missing.”* – Associate Professor, Edo State University.

Analytical Insight: These differences suggest that institutional context critically shapes motivational dynamics, emphasizing that management strategies must be tailored to public or private university environments. While universal motivational principles apply, their operationalization depends on the organizational culture, resource availability, and leadership practices within each institutional type.

The summary of key findings is as follows:

- Job morale significantly influences engagement in teaching, research output, and innovation.
- Job commitment predicts sustained effort, institutional loyalty, and quality education delivery.
- Institutional leadership, professional support, and fairness act as crucial moderators between motivation, morale, and productivity.
- Public-private differences reveal the need for context-specific strategies to enhance academic staff engagement and performance.

The results demonstrate that academic staff motivation is both a psychological and organizational phenomenon, where intrinsic satisfaction, institutional support, and contextual realities intersect to shape productivity and educational quality. This integrated understanding provides actionable insights for university leadership seeking to improve staff performance and student outcomes. The findings align with motivation theory predictions: satisfying intrinsic and extrinsic conditions enhances job morale and commitment, which are in turn associated with higher academic productivity and quality outcomes (Abubakar, 2023; Okeke & Eze, 2024). For university managers, this means that leadership must actively cultivate motivational environments through supportive practices, participatory decision-making, and fair reward systems. Importantly, academic leadership should balance performance expectations with psychological supports to prevent burnout. This study also highlights differences between public and private institutional contexts, suggesting that educational management strategies should be context-sensitive.

Conclusions

Job morale and job commitment are essential for academic staff productivity and quality education delivery in Edo State universities. High morale enhances engagement and innovation, while strong commitment fosters sustained effort and loyalty. Leadership practices, equitable policies, and institutional support significantly influence both morale and commitment. Public and private universities face unique challenges and opportunities, necessitating integrated, context-specific motivational strategies.

Recommendations

The recommendations are provided as follows

- a) The government and proprietors of private universities should implement recognition and reward systems that acknowledge teaching and research excellence.
- b) The management team of universities should expand opportunities for professional development to enhance staff competence and morale. Also, they should foster participatory leadership practices that involve academic staff in decision making.
- c) The Academic and Promotions Committee body of universities should review promotion and appraisal protocols to ensure transparency and fairness.

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