

## Human Resource Management Practices and Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria

Vincent, Etienne Albert, PhD<sup>1</sup> and Inyang, Mfon Udobong, PhD<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Curriculum Studies,  
Educational Management and Planning,  
Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Nigeria  
+2348032623178<sup>1</sup> and +2348035103018<sup>2</sup>  
vincentetiene5@gmail.com<sup>1</sup> and nehdu.14@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>  
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### Abstract

*The study examined the extent to which Human Resource Management Practices predicted Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, three research objectives were structured, three research questions raised and three null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all the 7615 academic staff who taught in all the 7 Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria at the time of this research. 381 respondents were drawn from the population to participate in the study using proportionate and stratified sampling techniques. Two instruments entitled, "Human Resource Management Practices Questionnaire" (HRMPQ) and "Job Commitment Questionnaire" (JCQ) were used to gather data for the study. JCQ was adapted from Allen and Mayer (1990) Job Commitment Scale. The instruments were validated by three validates; two from The Department of Curriculum Studies, Educational Management and Planning and one from The Department of Psychological Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo. The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach Alpha Analysis with reliability coefficients of .968 for HRMPQ and .899 for JCQ. The reliability indices for the sub-variables were .797, .806 and .770 for job security, staff development and discipline respectively. Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used to answer the research questions and to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that job security, staff development and discipline are significant independent predictors of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. Based on these findings, it was concluded that human resource management practices significantly predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. It was recommended, amongst others that, university management should adopt an integrated human resource management approach that combines job security, development and discipline as a retention strategy, rather than treating them in isolation.*

**Keywords:** Human Resource Management, Academic Staff, Staff Commitment, Job Security, Staff Development and Discipline

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## Introduction

### Background of the Study

University is an educational organization dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. It is universally recognized as an institution for advanced learning, high-level manpower development, research, innovation, and community service for socio-economic transformation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). In Nigeria, university education represents the apex of the tertiary education system and is charged with producing the critical human capital required for national development, technological advancement and global competitiveness (National Universities Commission, 2023). The core mandates of universities are teaching, research, and community service, with particular emphasis on research relevant to environmental challenges, oil and gas technology, and sustainable development (Okoro and Ekanem, 2023). However, despite the strategic roles of universities and interventions from Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), these institutions face persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructural deficits, incessant industrial actions by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), brain drain, and low academic staff morale and commitment (Udom and Bassey, 2023). These challenges underscore the need to examine the factors that influence the commitment of the core drivers of the universities - the academic staff. Therefore, the university as an organization cannot exist or achieve its tripartite mandate without academic staff.

Academic staff are stewards of knowledge and can be regarded as the wheel on which the pivot of university education revolves. They are individuals employed by the university to contribute to the institution's core functions. They are the engine room, heart and main drivers of every university system (Noe *et al.*, 2022). Academic staff are responsible for curriculum delivery, student mentorship, research productivity, grant attraction, and community development services which define university relevance. Subair and Adebola, (2019) stated that, the success or failure of any university is contingent on the attitude and commitment of academic staff to work. There is a symbiotic relationship between the university and academic staff. On one hand, the university provides the platform, structure, job security, conditions of service, staff development opportunities and disciplinary framework for academic staff to build their career (Akinyemi and Ifah, 2024). On the other hand, academic staff provide the intellectual capital, skills and commitment required to transform university goals into reality. Meyer and Allen (1991) argued that organizational success depends on having committed employees who identify with organizational goals. Therefore, the extent to which academic staff are committed to discharging their duties in the university determines the success of such university.

Academic staff commitment is the degree of positive and affective bond between the academic staff and the university. It is the psychological attachment, loyalty and willingness of lecturers to remain and contribute meaningfully to the growth of their university (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Academic staff commitment can be demonstrated in the area of affective commitment (emotional attachment to university), normative commitment (feelings of obligation to stay with the university) and continuance commitment to job (awareness of the cost associated with leaving the university). In federal universities in South-South Nigeria, commitment is demonstrated through regular class attendance, effective research productivity, mentorship of students, participation in departmental and university activities, and low intention to leave the system despite external attractions (Okon *et al.*, 2022). When academic staff are affectively committed, they develop emotional attachment to the university; when they are continuance committed, they weigh the cost of leaving; and when they are normatively committed, they feel a moral obligation to stay (Ekpang *et al.*, 2023). Recent evidence shows a decline in commitment among academic

staff in South-South federal universities, manifested in brain drain, engagement in multiple adjunct appointments, low research output and frequent participation in industrial actions (NUC, 2023; Oyewole *et al.*, 2024). This decline has been attributed to poor human resource practices such as job insecurity, inadequate staff development opportunities and inconsistent disciplinary procedures, which weaken the bond between the academic and the institution (Udom and Bassey, 2023).

Human resources refer to the people who make up the workforce of an organization, including their knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, and experiences that are harnessed to achieve organizational goals (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). In the context of universities, human resources constitute academic and non-academic staff whose intellectual capital drives teaching, research and community service (Noe *et al.*, 2022). Human resource management practices (HRMP) could therefore be defined as the formal systems, policies and activities developed and implemented by an organization to effectively manage its human resources for competitive advantage (Boxall and Purcell, 2022). Ibe *et al.* (2023) noted that HRM practices are institutional mechanisms for ensuring that academic staff are attracted, retained, developed and disciplined fairly to enhance commitment and performance. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2023), HRMP encompass all activities related to acquisition, development, motivation and maintenance of employees in an organization. In Nigerian universities, HRMP include practices such as recruitment and selection, job security, staff development, performance appraisal, compensation, and discipline management (Okon *et al.*, 2022). In this study, the researchers considered job security, staff development and discipline as human resource management practices which could influence academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

Job security is defined as the assurance that an employee will retain his or her job without fear of arbitrary termination or loss of employment (Edeh and Nwaji, 2022). In the university context, it relates to timely confirmation of appointment, regular employment as opposed to casualization, and protection from politically motivated dismissal. When academic staff perceive their jobs as secure, they are more likely to be emotionally attached and committed to the university. They could also be psychologically stable and more willing to invest in long-term career growth within the institution. Okon *et al.* (2022) argued that job security creates the enabling environment for staff to embrace development opportunities.

Staff development refers to systematic efforts to improve the knowledge, skills and competencies of academic staff through training, conferences, workshops, TETFund sponsorship for higher degrees, and career progression opportunities (Ekpang *et al.*, 2023). Federal universities in South-South Nigeria, benefit from TETFund interventions for staff development which is often perceived as inadequate and selective. Okon *et al.* (2022) noted that staff development enhances competence, job satisfaction and commitment, as staff who are developed feel valued and obligated to reciprocate. When academic staff are exposed to regular training, workshops and seminars, they become more knowledgeable about university rules, code of conducts, ethics of the teaching profession and the consequences of misconduct (Akinyemi and Ifah, 2024). This increased knowledge reduces cases of ignorance-driven indiscipline such as plagiarism, examination malpractice, absenteeism and abuse of office which are common triggers of disciplinary actions in universities. In this case, staff development can lead to discipline by equipping academic staff with knowledge of rules, building professional self-regulation, and creating a moral and contractual obligation to conform to university standards.

Discipline as a dimension of HRMP refers to the fairness, consistency, transparency and justice in the enforcement of rules and regulations guiding staff conduct. It provides the regulatory

framework that ensures fairness, order and justice in the management of both job security and staff development (Oyewole *et al.*, 2024). In federal universities, discipline is managed through Staff Disciplinary Committees, Governing Councils and adherence to conditions of service. When disciplinary procedures are perceived as fair, objective and developmental rather than punitive and selective, academic staff trust management and show higher normative commitment. Conversely, when discipline is politicized or selective, even secured and well-developed academic staff may feel threatened and may exhibit low commitment, leading to brain drain and industrial disputes (Okoro and Ekanem, 2023).

As observed previously, academic staff remain the most strategic human resources of federal universities in South-South Nigeria, and their commitment is critical for the realization of teaching, research and community service mandates. However, evidence from universities indicates declining affective, continuance and normative commitment, manifested in brain drain, moonlighting, low research productivity and frequent industrial actions. This decline is traceable to lapses in human resource management practices, particularly in the areas of job security, staff development and discipline. While previous studies have examined these practices in isolation or in other regions, there is limited empirical evidence on how they jointly and individually influence academic staff commitment specifically in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the extent to which job security, staff development and discipline predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria, with a view to providing empirical data that will guide university management, NUC and policymakers in formulating effective retention strategies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria were established to provide equitable access to university education, promote research and contribute to national development. Despite huge government investment through Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and other interventions, these universities continue to experience low levels of academic staff commitment, which threatens the attainment of their core mandates. For instance, Ekundayo and Ayodele, (2019) observed that 18.6% of lecturers in Nigerian universities show low level of job performance. The 18.6% of lecturers who showed low level of job performance might have exhibited low research output, poor professional development, negative attitude about the university and its policies. The manifestations of low commitment are evident. Many young academics in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria show high intention to leave, either to private universities, other public universities outside the region, or abroad in search of better job security and career growth. There is also an increasing trend of academic staff engaging in multiple adjunct appointments, low participation in departmental activities, delayed grading of scripts, and low research productivity. The National Universities Commission (2023) statistical digest reported that staff turnover and brain drain is highest in the South-South region compared to other zones, raising concerns about sustainability.

These problems appear to be linked to perceived poor human resource management practices. Many academic staff complain of job insecurity arising from delayed confirmation of appointment, prolonged probation, and increasing casualization through contract and adjunct appointments. Staff development opportunities are perceived as inadequate, with limited sponsorship for conferences and postgraduate studies, and alleged favouritism in selection for TETFund scholarships. Additionally, disciplinary procedures are often perceived as inconsistent, punitive and influenced by internal politics, leading to mistrust and low normative commitment.

While several studies have investigated HRM practices and organizational commitment, most of the studies have been conducted in South-West, South-East and North-Central Nigeria, leaving a geographical gap for Federal Universities in South-South. Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies that jointly examine job security, staff development and discipline as dimensions of HRM practices in relation to academic staff commitment in this region. This knowledge gap and the practical challenges observed by the researchers justify the need for this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which human resource management practices predicts academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the extent to which:

- i. job security predicts academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria
- ii. staff development predicts academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria
- iii. discipline predicts academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. To what extent does job security predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent does staff development predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria?
- iii. To what extent does discipline predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H0<sub>1</sub> Job security is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.
- H0<sub>2</sub> Staff development is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.
- H0<sub>3</sub> Discipline is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

### **Research Method**

#### **Design of the Study**

The study adopted a correlational research design. This research design is considered most appropriate because the study examines the extent of relationship between existing human resource management practices variables; and how they relate to academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

#### **Area of the Study**

The study was conducted in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. South-South Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria which comprises six states namely: Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of this study consisted of 7414 academic staff from all the federal universities in South-South Nigeria, which are: Federal University, Otuoke, Federal University of Petroleum Resources Effurun, Maritime University, Okerenkoko, Delta State, University of Benin, University of Calabar, University of Port Harcourt and University of Uyo, Uyo.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

A sample size of 381 academic staff which represents 5% of the population was randomly selected for the study. The choice of 5% was in line with Nwana (1981) who recommends that if the population is a few hundreds (200 – 499), a 40% or more sample will do; if many hundreds (500 – 999), a 20% sample will do; if a few thousands (1000 – 4999), a 10% sample will do and if several thousands (5000 – 9999), a 5% or less sample will do. To enhance the effectiveness of this study sample, hat and draw method was used to select four Universities out of the seven Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. This represents 57% of Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. Multi stage sampling techniques (proportionate and stratified sampling techniques) were used to select 381 academic staff from the selected four Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. This represents 5 % of academic staff in the selected Universities. The choice of proportionate sampling technique was to give each selected university equal representation in the study. The choice of Stratified sampling technique was also considered appropriate as most of human resource management practices are position specific. Also, only Senior lecturers from the Faculty of Education in the four universities were sampled for the study.

### **Instrumentation**

Two researcher developed instruments titled "Human Resource Management Practices Questionnaire" (HRMPQ) and "Job Commitment Questionnaire" (JCQ) were used to obtain information from respondents. 15 items on HRMPQ were developed in line with the constructs of the human resource management practices (job security, staff development and discipline) to elicit information from academic staff on how human resource management practices are carried out in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. JCQ was adapted from Allen and Mayer (1990) Job Commitment Scale and had 20 items. It was designed to obtain information from academic staff about their level of commitment to their universities. Both instruments were constructed on a declarative statement and on a four-point rating scale. HRMPQ was scored as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) - 4, High Extent (HE) - 3, Low Extent (LE) - 2 and Very Low Extent (VLE) - 1 while JCQ was scored as follows: All the Time (ATT) - 4, Most of the Time (MOT) - 3, Some of the Time (SOT) - 2 and Not at All (NAA) - 1.

### **Validation of the Instrument**

The researchers sought the opinion and advice of three validates, who were made acquainted with the objectives, problems of the study, research questions and hypotheses. The language, contents and the structure of the items were examined critically and necessary corrections and suggestions made by the validates were affected by the researchers.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

To ascertain the reliability of the instruments, the instruments were administered on 30 academic staff who are in the study area but not part of the main study sample. The data collected were subjected to Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test to ascertain the internal consistency of the

instruments. A reliability coefficient of .968 was obtained for HRMPQ and .899 for JCQ. For the sub-scales, the reliability indices of .797, .806 and .770 were obtained for job security, staff development and discipline respectively. These reliability coefficients were high enough to justify the use of the research instruments because Hussey *et al.*, (2025) recommended that, a coefficient value of .70 and above is adequate for any research work.

### Method of Data Collection

A letter of introduction was presented to the authorities of the respective universities. Thereafter, the instruments: HRMPQ and JCQ were administered to the respondents in their various universities by the researchers with the help of the Head of Departments within two weeks. Out of 381 instruments sent out, 370 copies were returned. This represents 97% return. Out of 370 instruments returned, 3 instruments were wrongly filled and were not useful for analysis. 97 % response rate was highly acceptable because it aligns with Sataloff and Vontela (2021) who opined that a response rate of at least 60% is deemed appropriate and responses exceeding 70% are considered excellent. All the completed and returned copies of the instruments were subjected to statistical analysis.

### Method of Data Analysis

Simple Linear and Multiple Linear Regression Analyses were used in answering research questions and to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Discussion of Findings

### Results

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does job security predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria?

**Table 1** Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the extent to which Job Security predict Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria

| Variable     | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Extent of Prediction | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|--------------|------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Job Security | .389 | .151           | 15.1%                | 7.45856                    |

Academic Staff  
Commitment

The output in Table 1 shows the strength of relationship R and the determination of the extent to which job security predicts academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. The R value of .389 indicates a low extent of prediction of academic staff commitment by job security. The calculated R<sup>2</sup> of .151 which is the coefficient of determination indicates that only 15.1% of academic staff commitment is predicted or determined by job security. This implies that 15.1% of the variation in staff commitment is due to job security enjoyed by academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent does staff development predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria?

**Table 2 Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the extent to which Staff Development predict Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria**

| Variable                  | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Extent of Prediction | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---------------------------|------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Staff Development         |      |                |                      |                            |
| Academic Staff Commitment | .156 | .024           | 2.4%                 | 7.99622                    |

Entries in Table 2 show the R for the strength of relationship and R<sup>2</sup> for the determination of the extent of prediction between staff development and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. The R-value of .156 indicates a low extent of prediction of academic staff commitment by staff development. The calculated R<sup>2</sup> of .024 which is the coefficient of determination indicates that only 2.4 % of academic staff commitment is predicted by staff development. This implies that 2.4% of the variation in staff commitment is due to staff development enjoyed by academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent does discipline predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria?

**Table 3 Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the extent to which Discipline predict Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria**

| Variable                  | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Extent of Prediction | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---------------------------|------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Discipline                |      |                |                      |                            |
| Academic Staff Commitment | .199 | .039           | 3.9%                 | 7.93414                    |

Result in Table 3 shows the R for the strength of relationship and R<sup>2</sup> for the determination of the extent of prediction between staff discipline and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. The R-value of .199 indicates a low extent of prediction of academic staff commitment by discipline. The calculated R<sup>2</sup> of .039 which is the coefficient of determination indicates that only 3.9 % of academic staff commitment is predicted by staff discipline. This implies that 3.9% of the variation in staff commitment is due to discipline enjoyed by academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** Job security is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

**Table 4: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the extent to which Job Security predicts Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria**

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F-Cal   | Sig of F |
|---------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|----------|
| Regression          | 3626.228       | 1   | 3626.228    | 65.185* | .000     |
| Residual            | 20360.598      | 366 | 55.630      |         |          |
| Total               | 23986.826      | 367 |             |         |          |

\* Significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

Source: Research Field Data (2024)

The result in Table 4 shows that job security is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria ( $F = 65.185$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). With this result, the null hypothesis which claims that job security is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria is rejected.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** Staff development is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

**Table 5 Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the extent to which Staff Development predicts Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria**

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F-Cal  | Sig of F |
|---------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|----------|
| Regression          | 584.935        | 1   | 584.935     | 9.148* | .003     |
| Residual            | 23401.891      | 366 | 63.940      |        |          |
| Total               | 23986.826      | 367 |             |        |          |

\* Significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

Source: Research Field Data (2024)

The result in Table 5 shows that staff development is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria ( $F = 9.148$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ). The null hypothesis which states that staff development is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria is rejected.

**H0<sub>3</sub>:** Discipline is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

**Table 6 Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the extent to which Discipline predicts Academic Staff Commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria**

| Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F-Cal   | Sig of F |
|---------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|----------|
| Regression          | 946.898        | 1   | 946.898     | 15.042* | .000     |
| Residual            | 23039.928      | 366 | 62.951      |         |          |
| Total               | 23986.826      | 367 |             |         |          |

\* Significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

Source: Research Field Data (2024)

The result in Table 6 shows that discipline is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria ( $F = 15.042$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). With this result, the null hypothesis which states that discipline is not a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria is rejected.

### Findings of the Study

As a result of testing the hypotheses, the following findings are made:

1. Job security is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.
2. Staff development is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.
3. Discipline is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

#### Job Security and Academic Staff Commitment

The result of analysis reveals a low positive relationship between job security and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. The corresponding hypothesis reveals a significant prediction between job security and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. This result could be attributed to the fact that once the job of academic staff in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria is confirmed, they will have the confidence that their positions are stable, secured and protected from arbitrary dismissal. They will feel a sense of belonging, greater sense of regard for the university and consider the university to be their own. This will also create an environment of trust, which in turn encourages academic staff to develop a strong emotional bond with their organization, leading to higher levels of motivation, productivity, engagement and commitment.

Contrary to the general expectation, Ene *et al.*, (2022) found that job security did not significantly predict organizational commitment among academic staff in Cross River State universities ( $\beta = 0.051$ ,  $p = 0.459$ ). The finding of this result also disagrees with Oyewale and Adeyemi (2023) who found that job security does not significantly predict academic staff commitment ( $r = .14$ ,  $p = .18$ ;  $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .44$ ). Contrary, this finding is in tandem with Ghimire *et al.* (2023) who found in their study that organizational commitment is significantly impacted by job security. With the result of this study, improving job security measures will lead to higher levels of commitment since job security is known to foster a sense of stability thus enabling staff to invest their energy and time in their work without the lingering fear of losing their position.

Unsettled employees cannot be productive in an organization. When a worker feels their job security is threatened, they will find other employment opportunities.

### **Staff Development and Academic Staff Commitment**

The result of the analysis shows a low positive relationship between staff development and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. The corresponding hypothesis reveals a significant prediction between staff development and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. This result seems to have come out this way probably because staff development serves as a catalyst for growth, learning and dedication. When university invests in the professional and personal development of academic staff, such staff are equipped with tools and resources needed to grow and expand their knowledge and skills. This will result in academic staff being rooted in their work and discharging their duties professionally which will make them committed.

This finding agrees with the study conducted by Muyiggwa *et al.* (2020) who found that organizational commitment significantly correlates with professional development practices. The finding of this study disagrees with Odo and Anike (2023) who reported that staff development does not significantly predict affective and continuance commitment. The non-significant finding according to the authors was due to inadequate implementation of training policies, politicization of TETFund opportunities, and lack of clear career path after development. With the impact of staff development on academic staff commitment, the universities should however be concerned about the pedagogical training and subject development of their staff as knowledge explosion is taking place round the world. Staff development efforts should focus on course development, methods for improving instructional material, assessment of learning results, evaluation of courses, improvement of supervision skills, ways to improve lectures and small group teaching and teaching of study skills and research methodology.

### **Discipline and Academic Staff Commitment**

The result of the analysis shows a low positive relationship between discipline and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. The corresponding hypothesis reveals a significant prediction between discipline and academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. This result could be attributed to the fact that in the university environment where disciplinary actions are applied fairly and transparently, academic staff understand that their behavior and actions have consequences. This shared understanding, coupled with the university's commitment to uphold its policies, creates a sense of trust and commitment, as staff members recognize that the university values their contributions and holds everyone accountable to the same standards.

The finding of this study disagrees with Sopiah *et al.* (2020) who found that discipline does not significantly predict organizational commitment. Similarly, Olawale and Ogunyomi (2021) in their study reported a non-significant relationship between disciplinary procedure and employee commitment. This contradictory result indicates that discipline may not always translate to commitment, especially when procedural justice is lacking. Contrary, the result of this study is in agreement with Simatupang and Saroyeni, (2018) who in their study found that discipline has a positive and significant effect on the performance and commitment of the employees in the University. From this result, discipline in an organization is necessary in order to improve employee commitment. The main purpose of discipline is to improve efficiency as much as possible preventing and correcting the individual actions. When an organization implements fair

and consistent disciplinary policies, it will not only foster a culture of respect but also engenders a sense of responsibility and loyalty among staff.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that human resource management practices are critical determinants of academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. When academic staff perceive their jobs as secure, free from arbitrary dismissal and politicization, their affective, continuance and normative commitment increases. From the study, staff development through TETFund sponsorship, conference/workshop attendance, research grants and mentoring significantly enhances academic staff commitment. Finally, a fair, transparent, consistent and corrective disciplinary system significantly predicts commitment. Discipline that is perceived as just and not punitive fosters trust and normative commitment. Therefore, the study concluded that human resource management practices (job security, staff development and discipline) significantly predict academic staff commitment in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The Federal Government, National Universities Commission (NUC) and Governing Councils of Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria should enhance job security of academic staff by honouring ASUU agreements, ensuring prompt and regular payment of salaries and allowances, and avoiding arbitrary dismissal. Policies on appointment, promotion and disengagement should be transparent and based on merit to reduce anxiety and brain drain.
- ii. University Managements should improve staff development practices by ensuring equitable and merit-based selection for TETFund sponsorship and conference grants. A robust bonding mechanism and monitoring system should be instituted to ensure that beneficiaries return to serve. Furthermore, annual training needs assessment should be conducted and in-house workshops on pedagogy, research and ICT should be organized regularly for junior academics.
- iii. Disciplinary procedures should be fair, consistent and corrective rather than punitive. The University Council and Staff Disciplinary Committees should ensure due process, timely dispensation of cases and adequate representation. Codes of conduct should be clearly communicated during orientation and reinforced through periodic sensitization to promote self-discipline.
- iv. University Management should adopt an integrated human resource management approach that combines job security, development and discipline as a retention strategy, rather than treating them in isolation.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study has contributed to knowledge by providing empirical evidence from South-South Nigeria, a region previously under-researched, that job security, staff development and discipline are significant predictors of academic staff commitment. It has also validated Social Exchange Theory in the context of Nigerian Federal Universities and provided data for policy formulation.

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