

IMPACT OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP ON THE JOB PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCIENCE EDUCATORS

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Abstract:

The paper examined the impact of economic hardship on the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, implications for science educators. It examined the impact of economic hardship on the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities with a focus on how it affects their teaching, research, and contributions to science education. The paper reviewed secondary data, which were collected from print and online publications. Content analysis was used in the study. The study revealed that that economic hardship affected the implementation of teaching programme of the academic staff, which is one of their cardinal functions in the universities. It also discovered that the research and science education contributions of the academic staff were negatively affected because of high living standard in the country. Based on these findings, the paper, suggest that addressing economic hardship is essential to improving job performance and enabling science educators to fulfill their role in fostering innovation and critical thinking in students. Recommendations were made for better funding, policy reforms, and university-industry partnerships to mitigate these challenges and enhance the overall quality of science education. In addition, increment in the salaries and allowances of academic staff of Nigerian universities should be consider as it relate to the present standard of living in the country among others recommendation.

Keywords: Economic Hardship, Job Performance, Academic Staff, Science Educators, Universities.

Introduction

The educational sector in Nigeria, particularly in the realm of higher education, faces significant challenges due to the economic hardship that has plagued the country in recent years. Academic staff, especially those in the science disciplines, are directly affected by these economic conditions, which hinder their job performance and contributions to science education. The problem of underfunding, poor remuneration, and inadequate infrastructure continues to undermine the effectiveness of academic staff in Nigerian universities. As Aregbesola (2022) points out, the economic environment has a direct influence on the quality of education delivered by academic professionals, particularly in fields requiring substantial investment in researches, such as science education. Economic hardship creates a ripple effect on various aspects of academic performance, including teaching quality, research output, and overall job satisfaction.

Science academics are those professional lecturers with specialization in the field of sciences. Science academics are science teachers that specialized in programs like Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Environmental Sciences, Biochemistry, Biotechnology,, Zoology, Botany, Agricultural Science, Geology, Statistics,, Computerm Science and so on (Blessing & Rowland,2023). Science educators, who rely heavily on laboratory work, technological tools, and practical learning experiences, often find themselves constrained by the lack of necessary resources (Aregbesola, 2022). This shortfall not only hampers their ability to deliver quality education but also affects students' understanding of complex scientific concepts, which are crucial for national development in a knowledge-driven economy. Despite not being in a state of recession, Nigeria is currently facing difficult economic challenges. The weakening of the naira, coupled with a high inflation rate, has made it tough for many Nigerians to make ends meet. Food prices have skyrocketed due to insecurity in the country's food belts, which has prevented farmers from going to their farms (Etuk, 2024). Public universities, which run at a cost subsidy for students presently, are becoming unavoidable. Parent and guidance pay through all means to give their wards quality education.

Aregbesola et al (2023) observed that universities are place where students diversify their knowledge into creativity and innovation. Knowledge is a huge amount of capital that the bank could not save; it builds a mental framework where money could be generated endlessly. However, teaching of science education today in the universities are tending towards mirage due to the cost of living. The question is, should cost of living be revisited for the sake of the learners, educators or both? National calls for job performance is not to be diminished by educators. This is to fertilize productivity to abolish lack of prestige, unemployment, and low commitment to output and research. Adeleye, (2024) noted that the prices of every commodity have skyrocketed in the markets, including sachets of water. The costs of goods and services have multiplied incredibly. Even fees for both private and public schools have been outrageously on increase.

Despite low usage, electricity bills have gone up. Medical drugs have become out of reach for the poor. The economic hardship has affected every institutions in Nigeria. In addition to the lack of funding for research and teaching resources, delayed salaries, insufficient benefits, and an overwhelming workload, which further affects their morale and productivity burden academic staff (Aregbesola, 2023). These conditions lead to a deterioration in their ability to engage effectively with students, conduct innovative research, and contribute to the development of science education. Moreover, economic hardship influences the retention of qualified science educators, as many seek better opportunities elsewhere, contributing to a brain drain in the sector (Aregbesola, 2022). This study aims to investigate how these economic challenges specifically impact the job performance of science educators in Nigerian universities, with a focus on teaching, research, and overall contributions to the development of science education in the country.

Purpose of the study

This paper examined the impact of economic hardship on the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, with a focus on how it affects their teaching, research, and contributions to science education.

Research Questions

This question guides the investigation toward understanding the specific effects of economic conditions on science educators and their roles in academia.

1. How does economic hardship impact the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, particularly in terms of their teaching, research, and contributions to science education?

Concept of University Education

University education is a critical pillar in the development of individuals and societies, playing a key role in fostering intellectual growth, innovation, and national development. It provides advanced learning that equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to various fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), which are essential for economic growth and societal advancement (Aina, 2020). University education offers both theoretical and practical learning experiences, preparing graduates not only to enter the workforce but also to become critical thinkers, innovators, and leaders in their respective disciplines.

In the context of science education, universities serve as hubs for scientific discovery and innovation, where students and faculty engage in research that can address national and global challenges. According to Aregbesola (2023), university education in Nigeria is particularly vital in producing the next generation of scientists and educators who will contribute to technological advancements and sustainable development. Universities also facilitate the development of a knowledge-based economy, which is key to a nation's global competitiveness in an increasingly technology-driven world. However, for university education to fulfill its role effectively, government policies, infrastructure, and resources must adequately support it. Science education, in particular, requires significant investment in laboratory equipment, research funding, and technological tools to provide students with the practical skills they need to thrive in their careers. Without these investments, the quality of education diminishes, and students graduate without the competencies needed for the global job market.

The concept of university education goes beyond mere acquisition of knowledge; it is about shaping individuals who can think critically, solve complex problems, and contribute to the advancement of society (Aina, 2020). In Nigeria, however, economic hardship and underfunding have posed challenges to the optimal functioning of universities, affecting both the quality of education and the job performance of academic staff, particularly in the sciences (Aregbesola, 2023). University education is fundamentally geared toward developing individuals who can contribute to the social, economic, and intellectual advancement of a nation. It encompasses the cultivation of a broad range of skills, from critical thinking and problem-solving to advanced knowledge in specialized fields, including the sciences, humanities, and social sciences (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2018). In the Nigerian context, university education is crucial for producing skilled professionals who can address the nation's diverse developmental challenges. Universities are tasked with providing both education and training that empower students to become innovative leaders and productive citizens capable of driving national progress.

In addition to providing theoretical knowledge, universities are expected to foster practical skills through research and hands-on learning experiences. This is especially important in the science and technology sectors, where students must be equipped with the practical competencies to solve real-world problems. Science education, in particular, is vital for innovation, industrialization, and the development of a sustainable economy (Aregbesola, 2024). Universities, therefore, serve as breeding grounds for scientific inquiry and innovation, preparing students to meet the demands of an ever-evolving global workforce. However, the effectiveness of university education, particularly in science fields, hinges on the availability of adequate resources, infrastructure, and well-trained academic staff. As Aregbesola (2024) highlights, economic hardship can severely affect the quality of education offered by Nigerian universities. Limited funding has resulted in poor infrastructure, insufficient laboratory facilities, and outdated teaching materials, all of which hamper the ability of educators to provide quality education, particularly in science-related courses. The performance of academic staff is directly link to these challenges, as they often lack the necessary tools to engage students effectively in both teaching and research.

Moreover, university education in Nigeria is central to building a knowledge-based economy, where innovation and scientific research drive economic growth and development (Okebukola, 2015). However, economic challenges, including delayed salaries, inadequate benefits, and poor working conditions, diminish the capacity of academic staff to contribute effectively to this goal (Aregbesola, 2022). As universities struggle to maintain their operational standards, the ability of academic staff to foster creativity, innovation, and critical thinking in students is greatly diminished. Via summation of challenges posed by economic hardship in Nigerian universities as they affect both the educators' ability to perform their duties and the overall quality of science education delivered to students. Therefore, this paper tends to examine the impact of economic hardship on the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, implications for science educators.

Concept of Economic Hardship

Economic hardship in this paper is an economic situation whereby there are difficulties faced by individuals, institutions and organizations due to income loss, unemployment, job instability, and economic insecurity. Economic hardship can also be seen as an economic condition that is characterized by inflation, high unemployment, high debt rate, low income and reduced standard of living of the people (Ogunode, Afolabi, & Adi 2024a). Economic hardship and economic activities decrease substantially, and the decline affects wide portions of the economy and it has some permanence (Sabitu, 2023).

Economic hardship; the inability to meet reasonable basic living expenses is caused by many factors (Fenn, n.d). Economic hardship means an onerous and excessive financial burden that destroys reasonable and beneficial use of property and that would amount to the taking of property without just compensation, or failure to achieve a reasonable economic return in the case of income-producing properties (Lawinsider, 2022). Economic hardship is defined as the inability or struggle to meet reasonable basic living expenses such as food and shelter (Cunningham, 2019).

There are many factors responsible for economic hardship. One of the factors according to (Fenn, n.d) in recent times is the outbreak of COVID-19. This outbreak has resulted to low access to basic needs and loss of jobs. A high rate of households reported income loss since mid-March 2020, as 79% of households reported that their total income decreased. Basically, while income from all sources were affected, the rate was highest for income from non-farm family business (85%) compared to household farming, livestock or fishing (73%) and wage employment (58%). The commerce, services and agricultural sector was recorded to have the highest number of layoffs. It was also revealed that a high percentage of households could not afford needs such as staple foods, soap and cleaning supplies and access to treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic has increase the hardship in Nigeria.

Another major cause of economic hardship in Nigeria is Corruption. In 2012, Nigeria was estimated to have lost over \$400 billion to corruption since independence. In January 2020, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranked Nigeria 146 out of 180 countries surveyed. Corruption reduces the overall wealth in a country since it can discourage business from operating in such a corrupt setting. Moreover, corruption harms society by damaging economic development and reforms and hinders the growth of democratic institutions. It impedes the ability of developing countries to attract foreign investors and distorts capital allocation as well as impedes international trade. Corruption has also led to the lack of trust in Nigerian government. Money that was supposed to feed the poor was embezzled because of the high rate of corruption in Nigeria (Fenn, n.d).

Furthermore, the massive drop in international oil price has played a major part in causing economic hardship. This majorly happened because Nigeria as a country was heavily dependent on crude oil. Ever since the drop in Nigeria's revenue, it has been battling with the evident decline in money supply, and this has greatly halted many economic activities. Existing businesses are finding it difficult to survive because the money is not flowing, and it barely flows towards their direction. This means less revenue for existing businesses; and for new businesses. As they will barely spring up, because there is no motivation for them to spring up, and not just that, should they want to secure a loan facility, it will be very difficult for them, because the access to finance is tight, and interest rate is on the high side (Fenn, n.d).

Concept of Academic Staff Job Performance

Academic staff are professional personnel in charge of teaching or lecturing in the higher institutions. The Academic staff members are the teaching staff of the tertiary institutions. They are called lecturers. They are involved in three major functions in the institutions which are teaching and researching and community services. The academic staff are categorized into Graduate Assistant, Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, senior Lecturer, Associate professor/Reader and Professors. Academic staff are critical factors in the higher education goals attainment. Without them, the goals of higher education in the country cannot be achieved (Watts, & Robertson, 2011; Yohanna, & Simon, 2013; Uchenna, Maureen, & Anthony, 2018; Ogunode, & Adamu, 2021).

Academic job is not as juicy as said or held. It is a professional occupation done in schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities whose job description hinges either on teaching or research or the combination of the two depending on the terms of the employment. It is a wider profession that involves teaching, research, administrative tasks and even extra-curricular activities such as community services unlike other professions (The University of Edinburgh, 2016; Collins, 2020). Ogunode, ThankGod and Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) stated that the academic staff job performance constitutes all activities and functions it is expected of an academic to execute within a specific time.

Academic staff job performance is the total performance of teaching, researching and community services responsibilities an academic staff has carried out and still carrying in the institutions they are employed at a particular time. Academic staff job performance is the general record of tasks carried out by an academic staff to be compared to the assigned responsibilities and functions given to them (Ogunode, & Eimuhi, 2023). Academic staff performance is a performance result that can be achieved by a person or group in an organization quantitatively (Robbins and Judge 2017; Ogunode and Ayeni 2023).

Academic staff job performance is the total performance of teaching, researching and community services responsibilities an academic staff has carried out and still carrying out in the institutions where he or she work at a particular time (Geofrey, 2010; Ogunode, Salman, & Ayoko, 2023). Academic staff job performance is the general record of tasks carried out by an academic staff to be compare to the assigned responsibilities and functions given to them (Ogunode & Galadima 2023).

The job performance of academic staff are numerous but limited to only three namely; teaching, researching and community service programme.(Edinoh,Ewhe & Okolie 2023)

Impact of Economic Hardship on Academic Staff Job Performance in Universities

Economic hardship has affected the academic staff of Nigerian tertiary institutions. The economic hardship in the areas of inflation has affected their living standard (Ogunode, 2024a). Economic hardship which led to inflation has a significant influence on the salaries of teachers. Inflation and standard of living have negative impacts on teachers' job performance among teachers according to Giami (2023). Afolabi (2024); Maduka, (2024) and Ogunode, & Agbade, (2023b); Ogunode, Eze & Olumodeji, (2024b) concluded that the inflation in Nigeria has affected the living standard of lecturers. Inflation erodes teachers' income, increased expenditures subject them to receiving loans with high interest, forcing the teachers to take extra income-generating work in an attempt to maintain their normal life, these consequently undermine their living standard (Gagarawa, & Mehrotra 2017; Ogunode, & Ukozor, 2023).

Economic hardship has militated against the job performance of academic staff in various Nigerian tertiary institutions. Teaching, research and provision of community service according to Ayeni, Sani, Idris and Uzoigwe, (2019) are cardinal functions of academic staff. The academic staff also involves the provision of academic services and student supervision, hence the reason why it is the responsibility of the government to provide those amenities that help. The functions and responsibilities of academic staff in tertiary institutions are affected by the economic hardship in Nigeria. The economic hardship of inflation has led to an increment in the cost of infrastructure facilities provision, an increment in the cost of teaching program implementation, an increment in the cost of research programme implementation and an increment in the cost of community programme implementation (Ogunode, Eze & Olumodeji, 2024b; Adebayo, 2024). Many lecturers have reduced class attendance due to the high cost of fuel which has implications on the quality of tertiary education (Afolabi, 2024).

Economic hardship has also affected smooth implementation of research programme and academic staff contribution towards science education. Research programme and contribution of are the second cardinal function of academic staff of universities (Ogunode & Ade, 2023). Economic hardship that propelled inflation in Nigeria has led to increment in the operational cost of conducting researchers in the laboratories and publishing conference papers in both local and international journals (Ogunode & Chukwuemeka, 2023; Peter, 2023). According to some interviews conducted with some lecturers, cutting across different disciplines in the university of Lagos, some of the major issues and challenges faced since the removal of the subsidy on petrol includes: transportation, cost of living, poor and stagnant salary structure, amongst others (Maduka, 2024). The impact of the subsidy removal is also being felt by the tertiary institutions, such as students of the University of Lagos, Akoka; Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, The Polytechnic Ibadan, Oyo State, among others, are lamenting the consequences of the removal (Akintayo, 2023).

Findings

The paper revealed the impact of economic hardship on the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, with a focus on how it affects their teaching, research, and contributions to science education. Specifically, the study disclosed that:

1. The economic hardship severely affects the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, with significant implications for teaching, research, and science education.

Moreover, limited access to resources and outdated equipment has drastically reduced research outputs.

2. Academic staff face challenges in conducting meaningful research, limiting their contributions to scientific innovation. This gap further disconnects academic curricula from the evolving needs of the industry, as educators cannot provide students with current knowledge and skills that align with real-world demands.
3. It also discovered that broader consequence of these economic hardships is on student body as the educators cannot adequately foster the critical thinking, innovation, and technical skills that are essential for thriving in competitive industries due to adequate resources.

Conclusion

Therefore, the paper concluded that economic hardship affects the job performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities, as related to their teaching, research, and contributions towards science education.

Recommendations

Based on this, the paper recommends that:

1. Better funding, enhanced research support, policy reforms, and stronger university-industry partnerships. These changes are essential to improving the teaching, research, and overall contribution of academic staff to science education in Nigeria.
2. Also, an increment in the salaries and allowances of academic staff of Nigerian universities.
3. The university' management should provide school buses with subsidized fees to enable easy transportation of academic staff from campus to their respective homes.

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