

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impact of Work Environment on Academic Staff Job Performance: Case of a Uganda University

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Abstract

The problems of insufficient working environment coupled with low performance of academic staff in the high education sector in low and middle-income countries like Uganda, is receiving increased global attention. As such, this study was conducted to establish the impact of the prevalent work environment on academic staff job performance in Ugandan public universities, using Kyambogo University as a case. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to academic staff (n = 294) and analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation coefficient test. The study profiles several important work environment factors that enhance don's job performance. However, it has been established that at Kyambogo University such factors exist at a low level, this situation ought to be alleviated. It has also been established that the prevalent work environment significantly affect the job performance of dons. Accordingly, university management as a matter of top priority, should endeavour to put in place favourable work environment, if they want their institutions to be effective and efficient. This is buttressed by the presupposition that lack of good work environment, without any reasonable doubt, grossly impairs work performance of employees in any institution, regardless of context. Consequently, the institution in question more often than not, is likely to suffer from chronicle ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Thus, Kyambogo University management should: put in place good physical facilities, equipment and working spaces for academic staff; promote and/or reinforce healthier working practices and lifestyle choices; create favourable and flexible working conditions such as improved teamwork, among other things.

Keywords: *academic staff, job Performance, Uganda, University, work environment.*

Introduction

The problems of insufficient working environment coupled with low performance of academic staff in the high education sector in low and middle-income countries like Uganda, is receiving increased global attention [1]. Hitherto, in the ever changing global knowledge and innovation economy, it is incontestable that higher education institutions ought to make it a top priority to attract, deploy, motivate, develop and retain talented academic staff. This is based on the supposition that a competitive workforce is key to organisational success [2]. A conducive work environment has been singled out as one of the critical factors that can enable any organisation, regardless of context, attract, deploy and retain talented employees [3]. Ruchi & Surinder [4] describe work environment as comprising of: physical scenery (e.g. noise, equipment, heat); fundamentals of the job itself (e.g. workload, task, complexity); extensive business features (e.g. culture, history); and even extra business background (e.g. industry setting, workers relation).

Put succinctly, work environment can be perceived as those processes, systems, structures, tools or conditions in the workplace that influence favourably or unfavourably individual employee performance. In addition, work environment encompasses policies, rules, culture, resources, working relationships, work location, and internal and external environmental factors, all of which influence the ways employees perform their job functions [3]. The aforementioned authors assert that it is the quality of the employee's workplace environment that most impacts on the level of employee's motivation and subsequent performance. It is indisputable that how well employees engage with the organization, especially with their immediate environment, impacts to a great extent their error rate, level of innovation and collaboration with other employees, absenteeism, overall job performance, and ultimately, how long they stay in the organisation [3]. This correspond with Kiruja & Karanja [5] assertion that due attention should be given to employees' well-being because this is

vital if the institution is to achieve its goals, mission and vision.

In the ever changing global knowledge-based economy, job performance is increasingly becoming a very significant factor affecting profitability of an organization [6-7]. As argued by Viswesvaran & Ones [8], job Performance is the core construct of the 21st century's work place. Besides, inefficient job performance more often than not, is likely to bring about a tragedy to the organization as is associated with lower productivity, profitability and impairment of overall organizational effectiveness [9, 7, 10]. Job performance can be perceived as behaviours or activities that are performed towards achieving the organisation's goals and objectives [11]. It is incontestable that good job performance is important for the organization and the individual employee as it leads to organizational success and source of job satisfaction respectively [7, 12].

In today's competitive higher education environment, universities can no longer afford to waste the potential of their workforce, especially the academic staff. The workplace environment that is set in place, more often than not, impacts academic staff morale, productivity and engagement - both positively and negatively. Besides, it is not just coincidence that new programmes addressing lifestyle changes, work/life balance, health and fitness - previously not considered key benefits - are now primary considerations of potential employees, and common practices among the most admired organisations [13]. However, it is important to note that in most Ugandan universities, little attention has been paid towards the implementation of a number of practices such as performance based pay, employment security agreements, practices to help balance work and family, as well as various forms of information sharing. Yet, this is key if we want academic staff to do their job in improved and/or new ways that meet the expectations of students, employers and society as a whole.

Statement of the Problem

The State of Higher Education and Training in Uganda Report (2012) indicated that Ugandan universities hardly: conduct research and innovation; engage in community development activities and the quality of education provided is relatively low, as is more theoretical and less pragmatic. In most cases, the biggest part of the blame, goes first to the dons for failing to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. However,

the work place environment in a majority of Ugandan universities is appalling and little has been done to mitigate the situation. This is supported by the fact most of the universities in question have: poor organisational climate; educational facilities and equipment that are dilapidated; lecture rooms that are overcrowded; poorly designed lecture rooms and laboratories; unsuitable furniture; inappropriate lighting; insufficient safety measures in fire emergencies; and lack of personal protective equipment for staff, among others. Academic staff working in such environment is prone to occupational hazards, leave a lone, impairing effective delivery of university education and service. This inevitably in one way or the other is likely to have impact on academic staff's job performance. However, no empirical study has been conducted to establish the impact of the prevalent work environment on academic staff job performance in Uganda. Thus, study is set to address this literature gap.

Theoretical Framework

It is unquestionable that conducive work environment ensures the well-being of employees which invariably enable them to perform their roles with all vigour. Thus, leading to high productivity in the institution [14]. The work environment can be perceived in three perspectives which include: the technical environment, the human environment and the organisational environment. Technical environment refers to tools, equipment, technological infrastructure and other physical or technical elements. This environment creates elements that enable employees perform their respective responsibilities and activities. The human environment refers to peers, others with whom employees relates, team and work groups, interactional issues, the leadership and management. Human environment should be designed in such a manner that encourages informal interaction in the work place so that the opportunity to share knowledge and exchange ideas could be enhanced. Organisational environment include, systems, procedures, practices, values and philosophies [15].

Recent human resource management literature suggest that workplace environment is one of the most critical factor in keeping an employee satisfied in today's business world other factors remaining constant [3]. It is indisputable that work environment has a direct and /or indirect effect on the performance of employees in any organisation regardless of context. Moreover, the

type of work environment in which employees operate, determines the way in which such an organisation prospers [14]. This is buttressed by Brenner [16] assertion that the ability of employees within an organisation to share knowledge throughout the system depends on the conditions of their work environment. However, for the case of most universities in Uganda, this is far from real, as they are characterised by staff strikes mainly attributed to lack of appropriate conditions of their work environment and poor organisational climate.

Productivity in an organisation can be influenced by a wide range of internal and external factors, which may be categorised as: general factors (climate, geographic distribution of raw materials, fiscal and credit policies, adequacy of public utilities and infrastructural facilities, etc.); organisational and technical factors (the degree of integration, percentage of capacity, size and stability of production, etc.); human factors (labour- management relations, social and psychological conditions of work, wage incentives, physical fatigue, trade union practices, etc.) [14]. In light of the aforementioned, there is no doubt that improved work environment enhances employee productivity. This is supported by voluminous work environment literature which indicates that employees are satisfied with reference to specific workspace features. These include: lighting, ventilation rates, access to natural light and acoustic environment [17, 18]. Lighting and other factors like executive furniture has been found to have positive influence on employees health [19] and consequently on productivity. This therefore implies that universities like Kyambogo have to seriously give due attention to the work place in which the staff operate. This is attributed to the supposition that conducive features in office environment such as: furniture, lighting, temperature, computer, printer coffee/tea/water dispensing machine etc., suggest that these elements of the physical environment influence employee's work attitudes, behaviours, satisfaction, and ultimately job performance and productivity [20].

However, the work place environment in a majority of institutions whether public or private is considered unsafe and unhealthy especially in developing countries, Uganda being no exception (Chandrasekhar [13]). This is based on the fact that most of the institutions in question are faced with the problems of: poorly designed workstations; lack of and/or poor ICT infrastructure; unsuitable furniture; poor

ventilation; inappropriate lighting; excessive noise; insufficient safety measures in fire emergencies; and lack of personal protective equipment, among other things. This certainly suggests that people working in such environment are prone to occupational disease which in turn can greatly impact employee job performance. Hitherto, the quality of the employee's workplace environment to influence employee level of motivation and subsequent performance cannot be exaggerated (Chandrasekhar [13]). In today's competitive global knowledge and innovation economy, universities regardless of context, can no longer afford to waste the potential of their academic staff force.

The significance of a conducive work environment in a university cannot be overstated, as creating a favourable work environment for the university staff is key if we want to positively influence the staff's attitudes, behaviours and mind-set to effective and efficient execution of university tasks. It is vital to note that productive work environments can be built by incorporating simple physical changes and employing appropriate management styles. It is advanced that, once employees feel that the institutions care about them, they will reciprocate with higher levels of efficiency and productivity [14]). In view of the foregoing observation, university managers ought to create a work environment where academic staff feels proud and happy for being part of the institution. However, Kyambogo University's management has been characterised with intrigue, mistrust, incompetence and abuse of office [21]. This is not healthy at all and grossly impairs peak performance from the academic staff and the overall institutional performance.

Chandrasekhar [13] and Akinyele [14], advance fundamental steps that could be followed in creating work environment that can enhance employee productivity. These include: providing ample rewards and recognition to employees, thus, creating an environment where employees can realise the full value of their contribution to the organisation; appoint mentors for the employees to assist them in setting achievable goals and evaluate their career objectives; keep a balance between formal and casual work environments so that employees don't get bored at work; for a start-up or growing organisation, democratic methods of deciding workplace policies can be very motivating; giving employees an overview of the organisation's current status, changes planned and the road map ahead;

initiatives like ‘employee of the month’, office outings, etc. also go a long way in adding value to the work environment; hang motivational posters or legends across the work place; keep office with vibrant colours, good lighting, ventilation work space kept clean; and provide a library, a recreational zone, child care, travel and other useful facilities in the office that can contribute to a motivating and productive environment.

From the aforementioned literature on the relationship between work environment and employee performance, it can be fairly inferred that proper management of work environment creates highly motivated, productive and engaged employees, thus, resulting in low attrition and lower cost of talent acquisition; a win-win situation for both employer and employee. To this end, Ugandan universities like Kyambogo to ignore putting in place good work environment for the university staff is not considered judicious, if they want to achieve their goals, missions and visions. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1. which work environment factors do academic staff perceive as being important during task execution at Kyambogo University?; 2. To what extent are the identified important work environment factors in enhancing academic staff job performance prevalent at Kyambogo University? and 3. What is the potential effect of the important work environment factors on academic staff job performance at Kyambogo University?

Methods

Design of the Study

Apparently, there is no empirical study spelling out the impact of work environment on academic staff job performance in Ugandan universities. As such, this study used an exploratory research design through a cross-sectional survey to

establish: which work environment factors academic staff perceives as being important during task execution; the prevalence level of the identified important work environment factors during task execution; and the potential effect of the important work environment factors on academic staff job performance in Ugandan universities. This design is considered appropriate because it makes it possible to gain basic insights about occurrence of a phenomena, situation, problem, attitude or issue [22, 23].

Context and Participants

This study was conducted at Kyambogo University. As earlier pointed out, for more than a decade, Kyambogo University’s management has been characterised with intrigue, mistrust, incompetence and abuse of office [21]. For instance, the University in the last two years has experienced frequent staff strikes especially because of poor working conditions and poor remuneration (see e.g. Striking Kyambogo University lecturers want IGG to intervene. Available at: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/mobile/Detail.aspx?NewsID=634492&CatID=1>). This study involved academic staff at Kyambogo University (n = 420). The academic staff were selected for this study because their job performance, just like any other type of employees in the different job fields, is largely dependent and/or affected by work place environment (Hertzberg et al [17]). Thus, it was believed that they can give relevant opinions regarding what constitutes a conducive work environment for the dons and the potential effect of the prevalent work environment factors on their job performance. The sample percentage distribution in terms of gender, highest academic qualification, designation, years of university service, and academic staff specialisation, is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (n = 294)

Demographic variable	Percentage distribution
Gender	Male: 65.3%; Female: 34.7%
Age	24-30 yrs- 18.0%; 31-40 yrs- 29.9%; 41-50 yrs- 36.4%; 51 yrs and above- 15.6%
Highest academic qualification	Bachelor’s degree- 29.6%; Post graduate diploma- 6.8%; Master’s degree- 50.7%; PhD- 12.9%
Designation	Teaching Assistant- 34.0%; Assistant Lecturer- 17.0%; Lecturer- 40.8%; Senior Lecturer- 8.2%
Years of university service	1-5 yrs- 22.1%; 6-10 yrs- 23.5%; 11 yrs and above- 54.4%
Specialisation	Education- 20.7%; Arts and Social Science- 32.0%; Science- 10.5%; Management and Entrepreneurship- 20.4%; Engineering- 16.3%

Source: Kyambogo University Teaching Staff

Instrument

The academic staff responded to 30 close-ended questionnaire items along a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was developed basing on work environment variables (interpersonal

relationships, participative management, formalisation and standardisation, training and development, monetary benefits, objectivity and rationality, Physical environment, supervision, employee welfare, safety and security) as

presented by Ollukkaran & Gunaseelan [3]. The purpose of the questionnaire was to establish the degree of disagreement or agreement on the importance of the work environment factors in enhancing academic staff's job performance. The questionnaire also aimed at establishing the extent the identified important work environment factors in enhancing academic staff job performance are prevalent at Kyambogo University. In addition, the questionnaire also aimed at establishing whether there was a significant relationship between the identified important work environment factors and potential effect on academic staff job performance.

Kyambogo University has 420 academic staff. Krejcie & Morgan [24] advance that in a research population of 420 people, it is considered sufficient to involve at least 201 participants. This study met this criterion and tried to involve as many respondents as possible because in a survey research, the more people participate in the survey, the better for the results to be generalisable to the entire population. After checking for missing data, of the 350 questionnaires administered to the sample population, 294 questionnaires were returned and considered usable. This represents 84% response rate, thus, making the results generalisable to the sample population.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise and describe the participants' responses regarding their degree of disagreement or agreement on the importance of the work environment factors in enhancing academic staff's job performance (Table 2). The descriptive statistic values regarding the degree of disagreement or agreement on the importance of the work environment factors in enhancing academic staff's job performance in

this study were interpreted as follows: 1.00 - 1.99 = Not important; 2.00 - 2.99 = Slightly important; 3.00 - 3.99 = Moderately important; 4.00 - 4.99 = Important; 5.00 = Very important. Meanwhile, the descriptive statistic values regarding the extent, the identified important work environment factors in enhancing academic staff job performance are prevalent at Kyambogo University (Table 3), were construed as follows: 1.00 - 1.99 = Very low extent; 2.00 - 2.99 = Low extent; 3.00 - 3.99 = Moderate extent; 4.00 - 4.99 = High extent; 5.00 = Very high extent. Thereafter, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test was conducted. The correlation results were interpreted as follows: Very weak = 0 - .19; Weak = .20 - .39; Moderate = .40 - .59; Strong = .60 - .79; and Very strong = .80 - 1.00. This aimed at establishing whether there was a significant relationship between the identified important work environment factors and potential effect on academic staff job performance (Table 4).

Results

Importance of Work Environment Factors on Academic Staff Job Performance

As it can be seen in Table 2, the descriptive statistics showed that the means of the respondents were more or less the same regarding the importance of the work environment factors in enhancing academic staff's job performance as perceived by the academic staff themselves. It can also be seen in Table 2 that the academic staff unanimously agreed that all the work environment factors as presented by Ollukkaran & Gunaseelan [3] are important in enhancing academic staff's job performance, save for the supervision factor which was perceived as moderately important.

Table 2: Means, and standard deviations of the importance of work environment factors as perceived by the respondents (N = 294) (N = number of respondents; M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; Range of importance scale: 1 = Not important; 5 = Very important)

Work environment factors	M	SD
Interpersonal relationships	4.54	.59
Participative management	4.51	.57
Formalisation and standardisation	4.31	.54
Training and development	4.75	.43
Lucrative monetary benefits	4.30	.99
Objectivity and rationality	4.10	1.05
Physical environment such as office space, furniture etc.	4.22	.91
Supervision	3.89	.83
Employee welfare	4.50	.50
Safety and security	4.23	1.11

Source: Kyambogo University Teaching Staff

Prevalence of Important Work Environment Factors at Kyambogo University

From Table 3, the descriptive statistics revealed that the means of the respondents were more or less the same regarding the existence of

important work environment factors at Kyambogo University. It can also be seen in Table 3 that the academic staff solidly agreed that the existence of all important work environment factors at

Kyambogo University is to a low extent, except for the physical environment (office space, furniture etc.) factor which was professed as very low extent.

Table 3: Means, and standard deviations of the existence of important work environment factors at Kyambogo university as professed by the respondents (N = 294) (N = number of respondents; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Range of importance scale: 1 = Very low existence; 5 = Very high existence)

Existence of work environment factors	M	SD
Interpersonal relationships	2.60	.75
Participative management	2.29	.66
Formalisation and standardisation	2.76	.86
Training and development	2.88	.93
Lucrative monetary benefits	2.17	.82
Objectivity and rationality	2.48	.67
Physical environment such as office space, furniture etc.	1.96	.75
Supervision	2.22	.81
Employee welfare	2.17	.79
Safety and security	2.16	.94

Source: Kyambogo University Teaching Staff

Relationship between Work Environment Factors and Academic Staff Job Performance

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test results in Table 4 indicate that work environment factors have significant relationship

with academic staff job performance, although, $r = .27^{**}$, $n = 294$, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .07$, can be perceived as a weak relationship. This therefore tend to suggest that there is an array of factors that impact academic staff job performance on top work environment in Ugandan universities like Kyambogo.

Table 4: Correlation results between the work environment factors and potential influence on academic staff job performance (N = 294)

		Work Environment at Kyambogo University		Job Performance of Academic Staff	
Work Environment at Kyambogo University	Pearson Correlation	1		.270**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	
	N	294		294	
Job Performance of Academic Staff	Pearson Correlation		.270**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000		
	N		294		294

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

This study aimed at establishing work environment factors perceived to be important in enhancing academic staff performance in the context of Ugandan universities. Additionally, it was to identify the extent to which the identified important work environment factors exist at Kyambogo University. Furthermore, it was also to establish the potential effect of the work environment factors on academic staff job performance at Kyambogo University. Overall, work environment is key in enhancing academic staff's job performance. As such, it is appalling that Ugandan universities like Kyambogo, the existence of important work environment factors is professed as low to most of the important work environment aspects and very low to the aspect of physical environment (office space, furniture etc.). Hitherto, the present study has established that

there is significant relationship between university work environment and academic staff job performance.

The results of this study are comparable to Rwothumio [25] assertion that most academic staff at Kyambogo University feel that facilitation given to them when working greatly determines their level of performance. The study findings herein, are further in agreement with the aforementioned author's argument, that quality supervision and/or performance appraisal is inadequate at Kyambogo University and in one way or the other; this negatively affects the academic staff job performance. The findings of the present study also correspond with Masum et al [26] that job performance and/or satisfaction of academics is related to a number of variables of complex function such as demographic characters, the work itself, pay, work responsibilities, variety of tasks, promotional opportunities, relationship

with co-workers and others. Put succinctly, there are many factors that should be considered especially with regards to the welfare of human resource in achieving the mission and vision of the universities. One of these factors is work environment, as it is important for retaining employees [25].

The study findings concur with the supposition that there are many factors which affect the don's job performance and motivation which includes class room environment, rewards/incentives, workload stress and administrative policies etc. Besides, a motivated don is recognised by high level of commitment, hard work, devotion, dedication and becomes a source of inspiration through his exemplary character because a don is always expected to be a role model for students and society as a whole. This is in line with Imrab, et al [27] assertion that academic staff in any university is as important as the pillars of a building which bears the whole of it. To this end, dons are thought to be the nation builders and they are always given the great importance in educated and dignified societies. However, in recent years, especially in developing countries like Uganda, stakeholders are complaining about the performance of academic staff in universities. As such, there is need to find ways of enhancing the job performance of dons so that their competence and commitment is not disputed.

The results of this study also coincide with Ng'ethe, Iravo & Namusonge [28] that work environment is one of the factors that affect employee's decision to stay with the organisation. Moreover, productivity and efficiency are directly affected by how people work, and this equally is affected by their work environment. As already mentioned, this includes issues such as office space, equipment, air conditioning, comfortable chairs, etc. Besides, more often than not, many people become dissatisfied if working conditions are poor in an organization [29]. It unquestionable that working environment that is comfortable, relatively low in physical psychological stress, facilities and attainment of work goals always tend to produce superior performance and/or high levels of satisfaction among employees. In contrast, stressful working environment result to low performance and/or level of satisfaction among employees.

The need for Academic staff in any university regardless of context to have conducive office space, modern ICT infrastructure and equipment, research and book support to be able to access

latest information for their teaching and research outputs cannot be overstated.

Results of this study also agree with Sujit [30] that in any organisation employees are dissatisfied when their expectations are not met and when their working environment is not conducive. Furthermore, the study findings herein also correspond with earlier research of Olaitan [31] who found out that in Nigeria academic staff members are dissatisfied with their working conditions and academic growth. Similarly, the present study findings also correspond with Adelabu [32] who found that in Nigeria academic staff members are dissatisfied with their living and working environment because of the salary structure compared to the other professions and related issues such as low status in society, lack of promotion, lack of career advancement opportunities, and low allowances. Furthermore, the results of this study also coincide with another study in Nigeria by Akpofure, Ikhifa, Imide, & Okokoyo [33] who inferred that dons are dissatisfied with their jobs because of the salary structure.

The findings of this study are also in line with Zainudin, Junaidah, & Nazmi [34] assertion that the majority of dons in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe are dissatisfied because of the high and overwhelming workload, inadequate salaries and allowances, and inability to procure loans for purchase of houses and cars among other things. Therefore, this study posits that if we want to improve the job performance of academic staff, it is judicious for university management to consider putting in place conducive work environment for dons in Ugandan universities like Kyambogo.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study was exploratory in nature and based on perceptions of the study respondents. Thus, this makes the validation of the study difficult. Since, for example, no two individuals may see a situation in exactly the same way. As such, a similar study using a relatively big sample involving research methods such as longitudinal study and observations is suggested. It is hoped this can help in getting the actual influence of work environment on don's job performance.

Similarly, the present study also suggest empirical studies to be undertaken to establish the factors responsible for the low existence of

important work environment factors that enhance don's job performance.

Conclusion

This study has profiled several important work environment factors that enhance don's job performance. However, it has been established that at Kyambogo University such factors are existing at a low level, this situation ought to be alleviated. It has also been established that the prevalent work environment significantly affect the job performance of dons. Accordingly,

university management as a matter of top priority, should endeavour to put in place favourable work environment, if they want their institutions to be effective and efficient.

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