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JOB AUTONOMY ON THE PERFORMANCE OF EMPLOYEES IN PRIVATE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NASARAWA STATE

[1]HALILU, Haruna Pai

[2]Dr. MOHAMMED Mahmuda Khalifa
mmahmudakhalifa@nsuk.edu.ng

[3]ABDULLAHI Bashir Idris
abdullahibidris@nsuk.edu.ng

[1-2]Department of Business Administration
Nasarawa State University, Keffi

[3]Department of Sociology
Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Abstract

This study examines the effect of job autonomy on the performance of employees in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, Nigeria, focusing on decision-making autonomy and work scheduling autonomy. The study's population comprised all academic and non-academic staff in registered private tertiary in Nasarawa State: Bingham University (New Karu), Ave Maria University (Piyanko), and Mewar International University (Masaka). The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1963) formula, which produced 384 respondents; to account for possible non-responses, the sample was increased by 30%, resulting in a final sample of 499 respondents. A multistage sampling technique was employed, using proportionate allocation across the universities, stratified random sampling to group staff into academic and non-academic categories, and simple random

sampling to select respondents from each stratum. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This study shows that both decision-making autonomy and work scheduling autonomy had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance. The findings showed that both dimensions had a positively and significantly affect employee performance. Based on the findings, the study recommends that private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State adopt policies that enhance employee participation in decision-making and provide flexible scheduling arrangements to boost motivation, engagement, and productivity.

Keywords: Job Autonomy, Decision-Making Autonomy, Work Scheduling Autonomy, Employee Performance, Private Tertiary Institutions.

Introduction

Employee Performance in private tertiary institutions has been increasingly linked to the degree of job autonomy granted to staff. Globally, research has shown that organizations that provide employees with greater control over their work schedules, decision-making processes, and methods of task execution tend to experience higher productivity, job satisfaction, and innovative behaviour (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Job autonomy has been recognized as a critical job resource that enhances intrinsic motivation, fosters engagement, and improves overall organizational outcomes by empowering employees to take ownership of their roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Studies have consistently demonstrated that granting employees freedom in decision-making and flexibility in work scheduling enhances responsibility, creativity, and commitment, thereby improving organizational performance (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006; Juyumaya et al., 2024).

In developing economies like Nigeria, particularly in the education sector, Job Autonomy has become more pronounced due to the dynamics of institutional environments, limited resources, and high demand for improved academic quality. Employees in such contexts often face challenges associated with heavy workloads, administrative bottlenecks, and

limited participation in decision-making. Combining job designs that may increase employees' control over their tasks and decision-making has been shown to enhance engagement, innovation, and institutional effectiveness (Alvi et al., 2013; Zychová et al., 2024). Onuegbu et al. (2022) suggests that employees who experience higher autonomy demonstrate greater job satisfaction, proactive behaviour, and commitment to organizational goals, all of which are vital for institutional growth and sustainability.

In Private Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State Nigeria, staff performance is critical for achieving institutional objectives such as improved teaching quality, research output, and administrative efficiency. However, many institutions in Nasarawa State continue to experience challenges of low employee motivation, high turnover, and limited organizational innovation. Academic and Non-academic staff often operate in an inflexible administrative structure with minimal autonomy to decision-making, work scheduling and task execution. Institutions that grant employees greater job autonomy have been found to benefit from enhanced staff engagement, improved service delivery, and better student satisfaction (Juyumaya et al., 2024 and Zychová et al., 2024). From the foregoing, Job Autonomy therefore, becomes a vital factor for promoting employee ownership, accountability and their overall performance across all section in an organization. However, employee's performance in private tertiary institutions is basically measured through teaching effectiveness, research output, administrative efficiency, and service delivery, is closely influenced by two key dimensions of job autonomy.

i. Decision-making Autonomy directly impacts performance by empowering employees to make choices on how to execute their tasks, set priorities, and solve problems independently. This freedom enhances responsibility, creativity, and a sense of ownership, which translates into better outcomes for the institution (Alvi et al., 2013).

ii. Work scheduling autonomy similarly affects performance by allowing employees to determine when and in what order to complete tasks. Flexible scheduling fosters

job satisfaction, reduces burnout, and enhances efficiency, ultimately improving institutional productivity and service quality (Zychová et al., 2024).

Despite efforts by Private Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State to enhance staff performance through training, technology utilization and improved remuneration, many Institutions still experience sub-optimal outcomes, such like low job satisfaction, poor retention rates and limited innovation remain prevalent. The absence of adequate job autonomy in task execution and decision-making has been identified as a key barrier to employee engagement and organizational effectiveness in private tertiary institutions (Onuegbu et al., 2022).

Job Autonomy has the potential to significantly improve employee performance by enhancing motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. However, there is limited empirical research that examines its specific effect on staff performance within the context of Private Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State. Addressing this gap, this study is designed to achieve the following objectives:

i. To examine the effect of Decision-Making Autonomy on the Performance of Employees in Private Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State.
ii. To assess how work scheduling autonomy affects the performance of employees in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

In line with these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated for testing:

H_{01}: Decision-making autonomy does not have a significant effect on the performance of employees in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

H_{02}: Work scheduling autonomy does not have a significant effect on the performance of employees in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

Conceptual Review

Job Autonomy

Job Autonomy is extensively described as the extent to which employees have the freedom, independence, and discretion to plan, schedule, and execute their tasks in ways that align with their preferences and capabilities. It is a core component of job design that expressively influence motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance of an organization (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Zychová et al. (2024) contended that Job Autonomy enables employees to exercise control over their work pace, methods, and decision-making, allowing them to feel responsible and accountable for outcomes. In a similar vein, Bakker and Demerouti, (2017) and Gagné and Deci (2005) argues that Job Autonomy fosters intrinsic motivation, engagement, and creativity, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness. From these viewpoints, this paper sees Job Autonomy as the ability for an employee or group of employees to exert their powers and effort in the decision-making process of their organizations, to include work schedule, review of organizational mission and vision, setting up objectives and aspect that will improve the performance of the organization. This is so because it dimensions are measurable and practically relevant to employees in academic institutions, which aligns with the focus of the study on improving staff performance.

Decision-Making Autonomy

Decision-making Autonomy connote the extent to which employees feel empowered to make choices about their tasks, priorities, and the procedures they follow in their roles. It reflects the degree to which employees have control over work-related decisions, thereby influencing their sense of responsibility, ownership, and job satisfaction (Alvi et al., 2013). Juyumaya et al. (2024) argues that employees with greater decision-making autonomy exhibit higher motivation, innovation, and commitment, which translate into better organizational performance. This study therefore see Decision-making Autonomy as the

level of freedom and authority employees exert to make decisions regarding how they execute their duties in furtherance to achieving organizational objectives. This definition is appropriate as it captures the empowering role of autonomy in enhancing employee engagement and effectiveness in tertiary institutions.

Work Scheduling Autonomy

Work Scheduling Autonomy refers to the degree to which employees have control over when, how and in what ordinance they complete their tasks. It encompasses the freedom to set work pace, organize daily responsibilities, and determine task priorities without rigid managerial oversight (Zychová et al., 2024). For instance, Onuegbu et al. (2022) believe that employees with higher scheduling autonomy tend to be more satisfied with their job, limited stress and recorded high performance due to their ability to balance workload demands and personal preferences. This paper further describe Work Scheduling Autonomy as the extent to which employees can determine the timing, sequence, and pace of their work activities. Hence, this definition is relevant for private tertiary institutions, where academic and administrative tasks often require flexibility to enhance efficiency, creativity, and job satisfaction.

Employee Performance

Employee Performance represent the degree to which employees effectively achieve job-specific task efficiently and organizational goals. It is typically assessed using both quantitative indicators, such as productivity, efficiency, and output, and qualitative measures, including teaching quality, research contributions, and service delivery in academic institutions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

This study sees employee performance as the extent to which staff in private tertiary institutions achieve their assigned responsibilities efficiently and contribute to the overall goals of their institutions. This definition is suitable as it recognizes the direct link between

employee autonomy and the quality of institutional outcomes as well as navigating Job Autonomy to positively influence these outcomes by increasing motivation, engagement, and accountability (Juyumaya et al., 2024).

Empirical Review

Mworia et al. (2021) investigated decision making autonomy and employee performance in the County Government of Isiolo, Kenya, employing a descriptive research design with a mixed-method approach. The study integrated both quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 140 respondents from different departments, ensuring representation across various job functions. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires containing structured and semi-structured questions, as well as in-depth interviews with selected employees and managers. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis to establish the relationship between job autonomy and employee performance. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which provided deeper insights into employee perceptions of job autonomy. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between job autonomy and performance, indicating that increased decision-making freedom enhances motivation and efficiency. However, the study's limitations included its narrow focus on the public sector, making it difficult to generalize the results to private organizations. Additionally, while the research used stratified sampling, the study did not sufficiently address potential biases related to self-reporting, which could have influenced the validity of the findings.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, which was advanced by Demerouti et al. (2001) and further refined by Bakker and Demerouti (2017).

The JD-R theory posits that every job has specific demands and resources, and that job resources play a crucial role in enhancing motivation, engagement, and performance. Job resources are aspects of the work environment that support employees in achieving their goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development. The theory assumes that when employees have adequate resources such as autonomy, feedback, and support, they experience higher motivation and engagement, which in turn lead to improved job performance.

Within the context of this study, decision-making autonomy and work scheduling autonomy are conceptualized as key job resources that empower employees in private tertiary institutions to take ownership of their roles and make meaningful contributions to institutional goals. These resources are valuable because they foster intrinsic motivation, creativity, and accountability. They are rare in many academic settings where rigid administrative structures often limit staff independence. They are inimitable because the trust and organizational culture that support autonomy cannot be easily replicated by competing institutions. They are also non-substitutable since they directly influence job satisfaction, engagement, and overall employee effectiveness.

The JD-R theory is therefore appropriate for explaining how granting employees' greater autonomy can enhance their motivation, engagement, and performance, providing employees with decision-making and scheduling autonomy, institutions create an enabling environment that supports personal growth, reduces burnout, and improves organizational outcomes. This theoretical lens underscores the strategic importance of autonomy as a critical resource that can drive superior performance in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design, which was considered appropriate as it enabled the collection of primary data from a large number of academic and non-academic staff within a short period. The design was suitable for obtaining first-hand information on employees' perceptions of job autonomy and its effect on their performance in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

The study population comprised all Academic and Non-academic Staff in Private registered Universities in Nasarawa State as documented by the National Universities Commission (NUC). The private universities selected for the study were Bingham University (New Karu), Ave Maria University (Piyanko), and Mewar International University (Masaka).

The sample size is 384 as obtained Cochran's (1963) formula, which is widely applied in studies with large populations to obtain a representative sample at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. To minimize the risk of non-responses, the sample size was increased by 30%, resulting in a final sample size of 499 respondents.

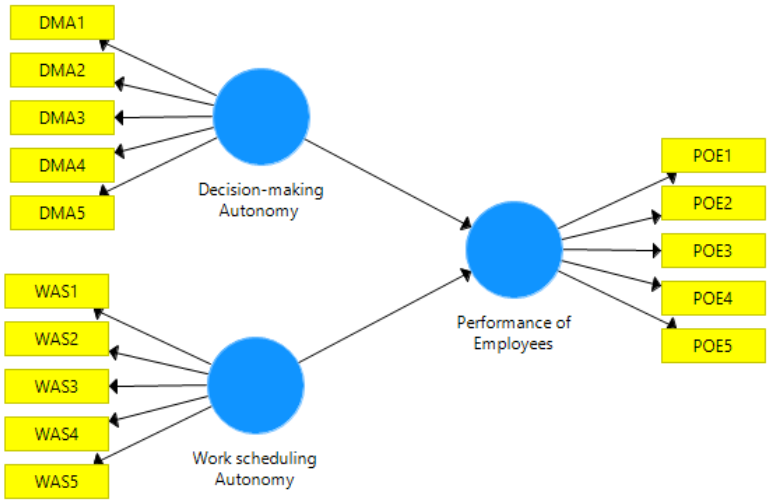
A multi-stage Sampling Technique was adopted. In the first stage, proportionate allocation was used to distribute the sample across the three selected universities based on their staff strength. In the second stage, stratified random sampling was applied to divide the respondents into academic and non-academic staff categories. Finally, simple random sampling was employed to select respondents within each stratum, ensuring that the sample adequately represented staff across different departments and roles.

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument was subjected to face and content validity checks by experts in human resource management and organisational behaviour to ensure clarity and relevance. A pilot test involving 30

respondents from a private tertiary institution outside the study area confirmed the clarity and reliability of the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, indicating good internal consistency.

The data collected was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with Smart PLS software. PLS-SEM was considered appropriate due to its effectiveness in predictive modelling for studies involving multiple constructs. The analysis involved evaluating the measurement model to establish validity and reliability, followed by assessing the structural model to test the hypothesized relationships between decision-making autonomy, work scheduling autonomy, and employee performance.

Figure 1 Specified Model for the Study



Source: Researcher's Compilation Using SmartPLS (version 3).

Results and Discussion

Out of the 499 copies of the questionnaire administered to staff of private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State, 462 were retrieved, and 437 copies were found to be valid and usable after careful screening for completeness and consistency. This response rate was considered satisfactory as it exceeded the minimum required sample size for the study,

thereby providing sufficient data for meaningful analysis of the effect of job autonomy on employee performance.

Both measurement and structural model evaluation were done out in the PLS estimation process carried out. The former involved both reliability and validity measures to ensure construct accuracy. Reliability was determined using factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) statistics, while convergent validity was confirmed with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values (see table 1).

Table 1

Reliability and Convergent Validity Statistics

Indicator	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
DMA1	0.814			
DMA3	0.764	0.713	0.837	0.631
DMA5	0.804			
POE1	0.851			
POE2	0.949	0.942	0.956	0.812
POE3	0.887			
POE4	0.871			
POE5	0.944			
WAS4	0.975			
WAS5	0.977	0.951	0.976	0.953

Source: Mined from Smart PLS Output.

Table 1 presents the indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity statistics for the measurement model. To ensure indicator reliability, items DMA2, DMA4, WAS1, WAS2, and WAS3 were deleted because their outer loadings were below

the acceptable threshold of 0.7, with some falling below 0.4. The retained items all had loadings greater than 0.7, indicating good indicator reliability.

The Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs were above the recommended threshold of 0.7, while the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the minimum requirement of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019). These results confirm the internal consistency reliability and convergent validity of the constructs in the measurement model.

Divergent validity was further assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), values below 0.90 indicate satisfactory discriminant validity. All computed HTMT values were below this threshold, thereby confirming discriminant validity for all constructs in the model.

Table 2

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Performance of Employees'	**Work Scheduling Autonomy**
Decision-Making Autonomy	0.396	0.364
Work Scheduling Autonomy		0.866

Source: mined from Smart PLS Output.

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. As recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT values should be below 0.90 to confirm discriminant

validity. All the computed values in Table 2 were below this threshold, confirming that the constructs are distinct and measure different concepts in the model.

Following the confirmation of the measurement model, the next step was the estimation of the structural model. Before this, multicollinearity among constructs was checked using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The VIF values obtained for the inner model were all below the recommended threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern and that the model could be reliably estimated.

Table 3

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Statistics

Construct	**VIF**
Decision-Making Autonomy	1.103
Work Scheduling Autonomy	1.103

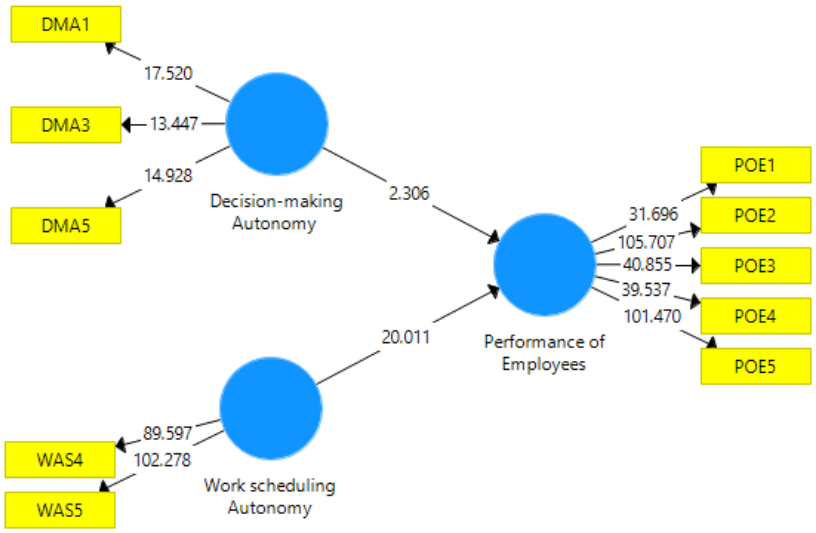
Source: Mined from Smart PLS Output.

The computed VIF values for Decision-Making Autonomy and Work Scheduling Autonomy were both 1.103, which is well below the recommended threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that there is no multicollinearity issue among the constructs in the model.

The estimated structural path model for the study is illustrated in Figure 2, which was generated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The results revealed that both Decision-Making Autonomy and Work Scheduling Autonomy were positive determinants of Employee Performance, confirming their relevance as key job resources influencing staff outcomes in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

Figure 2

Estimated Path Model of the Study



Source: Mined from Smart PLS Output.

Table 4

Estimated Path Coefficients with p and t values

Path Relationship	Std. Dev.	t-Statistics	p-Values	Decision
Decision-Making Autonomy → Performance of Employees	0.039	2.306	0.022	Rejected
Work Scheduling Autonomy → Performance of Employees	0.040	20.011	0.000	Rejected

Source: Mined from Smart PLS Output.

Table 4 presents the estimated path coefficients with their corresponding p-values and t-statistics for the hypothesized relationships. The results show that Decision-Making Autonomy has a positive and statistically significant effect on Employee Performance (t = 2.306, p = 0.022). Similarly, Work Scheduling Autonomy has a strong positive and statistically significant effect on Employee Performance (t = 20.011, p = 0.000).

Since all p-values are below the 0.05 significance threshold, both null hypotheses (H_{01} and H_{02}) were rejected. This implies that increasing employees' decision-making autonomy and granting them greater control over their work schedules significantly enhance their performance in private tertiary institutions in Nasarawa State.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings showed that both dimensions had a positively and significantly affect employee performance.

i. Based on the findings, **Decision-making Autonomy significantly enhances employee performance**, it is recommended that management should provide staff with greater participation in decisions related to their work. This can be achieved by delegating appropriate authority, encouraging input in departmental planning, and reducing excessive bureaucratic restrictions. Empowering employees in this way will improve their sense of responsibility and commitment, ultimately enhancing institutional performance.

ii. Considering the finding that **work scheduling autonomy strongly predicts employee performance**, institutions should introduce policies that allow flexible work scheduling where feasible. Staff should be able to plan and organize their teaching, research, and administrative tasks with minimal unnecessary supervision, provided that institutional goals are met. Flexibility in scheduling will help reduce stress, prevent burnout, and improve job satisfaction, leading to higher productivity and better service delivery.

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