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FLEXIBLE WORK AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study investigated the relationship between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria, using the multi-stage sampling technique employed in the selection of the sample size. The population is made up of 18 universities, forming the primary units, and the academic staff of these universities under study formed the secondary units. The total population of the academic staff of the selected universities is 12,158, while the sample size of 384 was derived through the Cochran's determination method. In view of the derivation of the sample size of 384 academic staff, the Bourley proportion allocation technique was used to proportionally allocate the questionnaire to the 18 selected universities. The questionnaire (quantitative method), was designed in google form and distributed online to the respondents. After the usage of the Median and spearman's correlation technique, the results showed that there is a high moderate positive significant relationship existing between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria. And owing to the importance of self-development, it was recommended that university authorities should come up with frameworks for the implementation and development of flexible work for their academic staff.

Key Words: *Academic Staff; Flexible Work; Self-Development; Universities.*

Introduction
Flexible work is where lecturers do not have to work in the school environment all the time, but some days may be spent at home, while other days may also be spent at work, thereby having a situation where few lecturers can work from home, and some can physically work within the confines of the school environment. Kossek and Lautsch (2018), citing Kossek, Thompson and Lautsch (2015), defined flexible place as employment scheduling practices that are designed to give employees greater work–life control where and how much work is done. There are a variety of flexible work arrangements. These arrangements can vary according to three primary categories: 1) Autonomy given to the employee, 2) Scheduling Elasticity, and 3) Hour Variances. As a result of these observations in the literature, it is therefore germane embanked o this study.

Therefore, the objective of this study seeks to:

1. ascertain the extent to which flexible work relates to the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria.

In view of the above, the hypothesis tested in this study was therefore as stated in the null form

H_o: No significant relationship exists between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Flexible Work

Flexible work arrangements are alternate work schedules from the traditional working day and week. Flexible work arrangements make employees choose where and when to work and how much work to perform (Azar, Khan, & Van Eerde, 2018). Čiarnienė, Vienažindienė & Adamonienė (2018) citing McNall, Nicklin & Masuda (2010), defined alternative work arrangements as employer-provided benefits that permit employees some control over when and where they work outside of the standard workday. Alternative work is typical among older workers and more highly educated workers, as the workforce has become older and more educated over time (Katz & Krueger, 2019). Flexible work design helps employees to enjoy actualizing their needs in terms of family, leisure, work, and friends. When you have flexibility in work arrangements, the employer shows care and concern for a variety of needs of the employee. Therefore, while work needs remain paramount, so are the needs of the worker relating to family, leisure, and social (friends) needs.

Many studies have highlighted that a non-motivated workforce produces sub-par work performance. Kinicki, Fugate, and Digby (2016) emphasized that motivation represents psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of voluntary actions that are goal-directed. If one considers their notion, then one can hypothesize that if human resource practitioners do not enact psychological processes, the worker will not strive to achieve work goals. Sub-par worker performance is significant because it jeopardizes a company's productivity level. As Dessler, Cole and Chhinzer (2015) explained, employee engagement with the company has tangible significance.

From these and other findings, one can see that human resource management needs to pay close attention to developing methods to motivate its workforce. Research up until the 1980s focused on motivation via financial incentives; these incentives equated to financial rewards paid to workers whose production exceeded some predetermined standard (Dessler et al., 2015). Frederick Taylor, cited in Senyucal (2014), popularized this notion and suggested that management should be given greater control over labour processes in the workforce by exchanging effort for a reward; the premise was that for employees to increase efficiency, they need to work productively. However, the theory is limited in that it treats employees as objects to exploit.

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Self-Development

Generally speaking, self-development is a process of consciously improving oneself in various aspects of an individual's life. It is the conscious pursuit of personal growth by improving personal skills, competencies, talents, and knowledge (Paranthaman, Ayshwarya, Livshits, Nguyen, Hashim, Shankar & Maseleno, 2020). Engelbart (2023) saw self-development as the process by which a person's character or abilities are gradually developed, and it is the development of one's capabilities or possibilities through training.

As pointed out by Panschar and Eimers (2023), the key to self-development is that the individual initiates, monitors, and evaluates their own practices of self-development, instead of expecting the organization to provide development opportunities. Reichard, Walker, Putter, Middleton & Johnson (2017) pointed out that an important driver of self-development is the individual's own drive and ability to pursue relevant activities, such as feedback seeking. The eagerness to self-develop is also determined by the ability to reflect on certain characteristic traits that affect skills and motivation. Thus, self-development is done over an extended period of time with a purpose in mind in accordance with the context. This purpose or goal is directed to leadership capabilities and the conduct of leadership, identified by the individual.

Flexible Work and Self-Development of Academic Staff (Employees)

The Hawthorn studies, as cited in Schwind, Uggerslev, Wagar and Fassina (2019), took a new approach and examined alternate ways to increase worker performance and organizational production. A main offshoot of the Hawthorne experiments is the finding that giving workers attention is a motivator. The Hawthorne experiments led to the formation of the Human Relations approach to the study of organizations. The notion of worker attention as a motivator aligns with the value of alternative work arrangements. For example, if a worker perceives that the employer is paying attention to his or her needs, they are more apt to be motivated to perform well. A Canadian government survey (2016) indicated many employees are appreciative of employers who pay attention to their needs through various alternative work arrangements. Examples include those with intensive caregiving responsibilities, older workers transitioning out of the workplace, employees returning to work after a career break, or employees with a health problem or disability (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019).

Kinicki et al. (2016) opined that a prominent theory that emerged following the Hawthorne experiments is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a theory, based on five need levels. An individual must meet the lowest level of need before the next level emerges; when the next level appears, the individual moves to the next highest level, and so on. The theory is significant, regarding motivation. For instance, if management wants an employee to attain self-esteem and then move to the highest need for self-actualization, this outcome is achievable only if the employer arranges the work environment in a way that allows the worker to reach each need level, accordingly. Subsequently, if management constructs a dissatisfying work arrangement, the employee can never reach the highest need level, according to Maslow's theory.

Another theory relevant in the context of flexible work arrangements and self-development is Alderfer's Existence and Related Growth (ERG) theory. ERG theory is similar to Maslow's philosophy as it considers the element of needs. The approach varies because there are only three central needs: Existence, relatedness, and the desire to grow as a human being (Kinicki et al., 2016). You can apply the theory to associate alternate work arrangements and self-development. For example, if the worker is dissatisfied with the existing work plan and feels that it stifles his or her ability to grow as a human being, the worker will not be motivated to perform well. Thus, managers can counteract levels of discontent by offering a work-set up conducive to the worker's needs.

More recent studies examine the extent to which flexibility in a work arrangement is one primary way to boost self-development. In essence, flexibility in a work set-up is an inducement, meaning it is a means by which to entice a worker to want to join with and connect to the organization. As cited by Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018), a study by Lee, Liu, Roussea, Hui, and Cen (2011) found that when an employee perceives an inducement equates to an employer supporting them personally, he or she is more willing to be obligated and committed to the employer. Another study to show the correlation between alternate work arrangements and self-development found that offering work flexibility resulted in increased job satisfaction, which, in turn, lowered turnover intentions (Azar et al., 2018). Lowered turnover rates are significant because it reduces the training costs for new employees (Schwind et al., 2019). Research by Petak and Miller (2019) also highlighted that flexibility increases self-development levels, which, in turn, heightens both motivation and organizational productivity. Their research pointed out that flex time's alternative work arrangement increases employees' self-development levels. While these and other studies find a correlation between flexible work arrangements and self-development, they do not readily consider whether or not employee autonomy in the type of flexible work arrangement makes a difference in the self-development level.

Theoretical Framework

Socio-Technical System (STS) Theory

The study is anchored on the Socio-Technical System (STS) theory which views an organization as an open system that processes input into the required output (Khalsa, 1993). This theory explains the interaction between social and technological factors. It examines the relationships between people, technology, and work setting. Designs work in a way that enhances job satisfaction and increases productivity (Smith, Patmos & Pitts, 2018; Irawanto, Novianti & Roz, 2021). Trist and Bamforth (1951), cited in Law (2023) specified that STS was developed to clarify the contradiction of improved technology but reduced productivity. However, the concept of STS was an addition to the design of remote work to provide teleworkers with the freedom to choose how and when to do their tasks (Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators & Individual Consequences; Harrison, 2017). Therefore, the STS theory is relevant to this study because it defines how teleworkers perform their duties with easy tools or as complicated as how an extensive range of employees in a multi-national enterprise can work together using data communication technology from home (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017).

Empirical Review

Nkemakolam (2020) studied the effect of training on employee performance. A case study of Airtel Networks Limited, Abuja in North-Central Nigeria. The study focused on the following three objectives: employee training, employee productivity and employee performance, with the descriptive survey design, using chi-square. It was found that employee training has an impact on the job performance of employees. Therefore, management should make the training of employees a priority in the organizations.

Davidescu, Apostu, Paul and Casuneanu (2020) investigated work flexibility, job satisfaction and job performance among Romanian employees-Implications for sustainable human resource management. It looked at the impact of individual and employee flexibility on the overall flexibility level of job satisfaction, using the Binary Logistic Regression Model. And the study found that partial home working is optimal in increasing organizational performance, social and professional relationships learning and personal development, and the overall level of work motivation.

Ausin-Egole, Iheriohanma and Nwokorie (2020) examine flexible working arrangements (FWA) and organizational performance: An overview in Owerri, South-East, Nigeria. The study investigated the effect of employee-driven FWA or organizational performance and the effect of employer-driven FWA or organizational performance. Using Library research involving analytical discussion of secondary data, the study found that more research needs to be conducted on the effect of employee-driven and employer-driven flexible work arrangements on organizational performance to substantiate the claim that the effects of FWA vary depending on the primary beneficiary.

Panigrahi and Al-Nashashi (2019) examined the quality of work ethics and job satisfaction: An empirical analysis. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation and regression were used in analyzing data. It was discovered that quality work ethics are positively associated with job satisfaction. Therefore, managers should increase employees' job satisfaction for increased organizational commitment and improved productivity.

Campaner, Heywood and Jirjahn (2018) investigated flexible work organization and employer-provided training: Evidence from German linked Employer-Employee Data. The study also investigated flexible work organization involving greater skill requirements and an increased likelihood of receiving employer-provided training. With empirical investigation using the Linked Personnel Panel (LPP), it found that training associated with workplace flexibility is disproportionately oriented towards employees with greater formal education. And it revealed modest evidence of an age bias of workplace flexibility. However, the link between workplace flexibility and training did not appear to differ by gender.

Ciarniene, Vienazindiene and Adamoniene (2018) studied the implementation of flexible work arrangements for sustainable development in Lithuania, Europe. It also investigated the objective of flexible work arrangements and sustainable development at different levels of abstraction, using comparative analysis and synthesis of scientific literature,

modelling and empirical research in the form of surveys and semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that flexible working arrangements, when implemented with care and preparation, have a positive influence on sustainability at different levels of abstraction: individual level, company level, and society level.

Giovanis (2018) carried out research on flexible employment arrangements and workplace performance in Great Britain. The research investigated the relationship between various employment arrangements and workplace performance, using the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) in the years 2004 and 2011. The results found that there is a significant and positive relationship between studied types of flexible employment arrangements and workplace performance.

Sugita and Zhao (2017) examined flexible working arrangement: Exploring leader prototypicality, endorsement, and employee respect in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) at Linkoping University. The study took a look at (1.) the Effects of flexible working arrangements on employees' improved feelings and (2.) the Effects of flexible working arrangements on leaders' endorsement of leader prototypicality. The descriptive survey design was used with moderated regression analysis. And it found that flexible working arrangements may not have a significant influence on subordinates' feelings of respect nor leader endorsement about leader prototypicality.

Miller's (2016) study was on how telecommuters balance work and their personal lives in a private health insurance company in Michigan, USA, with these objectives: working environmental structure, work/life balance and handling work-related issues during personal time, with qualitative research method in the use of interview and focus group. And it was found that a flexible working environment such as telecommuting improves working conditions and creates a structured working environment that supports work/life balance. As a result, leaders and managers play a major role in this regard.

Kozjek and Ferjan (2015) looked at organizational flexibility, employee security and organizational efficiency: A case study of Slovenian public and private sector organizations. The objective was to compare and analyze the correlation between the different types of flexibility and security in work and organizational efficiency. Data were gathered using the Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. The study found that there is a low positive level of correlation between different types of flexibility and security in the context of work and also between different types of flexibility in work and organizational efficiency; the correlation between different types of security in work and organizational efficiency is positive and medium strong. It was recommended that legislators be aware of the importance of correlation with organizational efficiency when preparing legislative amendments regarding the introduction of the flexibility and security in the field of work.

Altindag and Siller (2014) carried out a study to determine the effect of flexible working methods on employee performance in Turkey. The study was carried out with survey.com, using Microsoft Excel and SPSS 17 software, and hypotheses were evaluated using regression and multi-correlation analysis. It found that flexible working

models are very precious for the improvement of and the sustainability of employee performance. Many flexible methods factors including a job's suitability for flexibility, job loyalty, and attitude towards flexible working hours directly affect employee performance.

Elnaga and Imran (2013) investigated the effect of training on employee performance in Asia. The study investigated the meaning and importance of training. It also identifies the significance of employee performance, exploreed the relationship between training and employees' performance and; developed a guideline for assessing employees' performance using qualitative/explanatory research, based solely on insights drawn from the analysis of the existing literature. It found that firms must design their training performance with clear goals and objectives while keeping in mind the particular needs of both individuals and the firm.

Materials and Methods

This study uses the descriptive research survey design to establish the nexus between the variables of the study. In this study, a total population of Twelve Thousand, One Hundred and Fifty-Eight (12,158) academic staff of eighteen (18) federal, state and private universities were selected in South-South region of Nigeria.

Table 1: Population of Academic Staff

S/N	**Institutions**	**Year**	**State**	**Type**	**Academic Staff**	**%**
1.	University of Uyo	1991	Akwa-Ibom	Federal	1202	9.89
2.	University of Calabar	1975	Cross River	Federal	2293	18.86
3.	University of Benin	1970	Edo	Federal	1840	15.13
4.	University of Port Harcourt	1977	Rivers	Federal	1238	10.18
5.	Federal University, Otuoke	2011	Bayelsa	Federal	428	3.52
6.	Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	2007	Delta	Federal	189	1.55
7.	Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Amassoma	2000	Bayelsa	State	954	7.85
8.	Delta State University, Abraka	1992	Delta	State	645	5.31

9.	AkwaIbom State University, IkotAkpanden	2010	AkwaIbom	State	488	4.01
10.	Cross River State University of Technology, Calabar	2004	Cross River	State	444	3.65
11.	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	I980	Edo	State	534	4.39
12.	Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt	1977	Rivers	State	717	5.90
13.	Obong University, Obong Ntak	2007	Akwa-Ibom	Private	109	0.90
14.	Novene University, Ogume Kwale	2005	Delta	Private	179	1.47
15.	Igbinedion University, Okada, Benin City	1999	Edo	Private	451	3.71
16.	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002	Edo	Private	193	1.59
17.	Rhema University Obeama Asa	2009	Rivers	Private	76	0.63
18.	Arthur Javis University, Akpoyubo	2016	Cross River	Private	178	1.46
	Total				**12,158**	100.00

Source: *Nigerian University System Statistical Digest 2019. Retrieved in November 2023*

Looking at the statistics, a sample of the selected 12,158 academic staff of the 18 selected Universities was carried out through the Cochran (1963) method, and the sample size of the study was derived as thus:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2\,pq}{(e)^2} \qquad (1)$$

Where

n_0 = Desired Sample size
Z^2 = the abscissa of the normal curve that cuts off an area
e = desired level of precision
p = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population. This can be assumed as p=0.5
q = 1 – p

the value of Z form the normal distribution table is 1.96, we assume p to be 0.5 and q = 1-0.5 =0.5, and e = 0.05

$n_0 = \frac{1.96^2\ (0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$ = 384.16

n_0= 384

Table 2: Sample Size of Academic Staff

S/N	**Institutions**	**Year**	**State**	**Type**	**Sample Size**	**%**
1.	University of Uyo	1991	Akwa-Ibom	Federal	38	9.90
2.	University of Calabar	1975	Cross River	Federal	72	18.75
3.	University of Benin	1970	Edo	Federal	58	15.10
4.	University of Port Harcourt	1977	Rivers	Federal	39	10.16
5.	Federal University, Otuoke	2011	Bayelsa	Federal	14	3.65
6.	Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	2007	Delta	Federal	6	1.56
7.	Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Amassoma	2000	Bayelsa	State	30	7.81
8.	Delta State University, Abraka	1992	Delta	State	21	5.47
9.	AkwaIbom State University, IkotAkpanden	2010	AkwaIbom	State	15	3.91
10.	Cross River State University of Technology, Calabar	2004	Cross River	State	14	3.65
11.	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	I980	Edo	State	17	4.43
12.	Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt	1977	Rivers	State	23	5.99
13.	Obong University, Obong Ntak	2007	Akwa-Ibom	Private	3	0.78

14.	Novene University, Ogume Kwale	2005	Delta	Private	6	1.56
15.	Igbinedion University, Okada, Benin City	1999	Edo	Private	14	3.65
16.	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002	Edo	Private	6	1.56
17.	Rhema University Obeama Asa	2009	Rivers	Private	2	0.52
18.	Arthur Javis University, Akpoyubo	2016	Cross River	Private	6	1.56
Total					**384**	

Source: Field Survey (2023)

This study employed the primary method of data collection, which entails the use of questionnaire designed in google form and distributed online to the respective respondents (academic staff) of the selected 18 universities, who were restricted to choose from only predetermined answers. Subsequently, the questionnaire that was divided into two parts (part A & B) for the bio-data information of the respondents and questions relating study variables respectively were made of a-set of five-point Likert scales with structured pattern, ranges from Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Disagree (3), Strongly Disagree (4) and Undecided (5).

Subsequently, the questionnaire, typed in google form, were distributed online to the sampled 384 selected academic staff of the universities under study, and after the distribution, the completed copies were retrieved after every item in the in it were duly responded to. In respect of the data generated from the field, the results from the descriptive analysis are presented in the table below, based on the median response of the Likert item generated.

Results and Discussion

Table 3: Results from the analysis of the Likert items

S/No	Variables	N	Median	SD	Decision
A.	**Flexible work**				
1	The university IT infrastructure allows me to perform a substantial part of my academic duties outside the university premises	384	**2**	**1.272**	**Agree**
2	I have the opportunity to interact with my co-workers and receive feedback concerning their work.	384	**2**	**0.958**	**Agree**
3	It facilitates carrying out multi-task	384	**2**	**0.830**	**Agree**

4	I can schedule lectures conveniently while outside the campus	384	**2**	**1.196**	**Agree**
5	It facilitates student project supervision anywhere	384	**2**	**0.731**	**Agree**

B.	**Self-development**				
6	I can attendance of workshops, seminars, conferences	384	**2**	**0.853**	**Agree**
7	I can write and publish scholarly papers	384	**2**	**0.498**	**Agree**
8	I can participate in webinars	384	**2**	**0.722**	**Agree**
9	I can take online courses	384	**2**	**0.582**	**Agree**
10	I can render academic and consultancy services	384	**2**	**0.619**	**Agree**

Source: Author's Computation, 2023

Looking at the table above, the results that emanated showed that of all the analysis carried out on each construct turned out as AGREE. This therefore implies that there is a high moderate positive significant relationship existing between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis

H_0: There is no significant relationship between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Table 4: Correlations

			Flexible_Work	Self_Development
Spearman's rho	Flexible_Work	Correlation Coefficient	1	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	
		N	384	
	Self_Development	Correlation Coefficient	**.571****	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.
		N	384	384

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

Source: SPSS 29 Output, 2023

The results in the table above showed a correlation value of 0.571 implying that there is a high moderate positive significant relationship existing between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria. From the above result, since the computed p-value (0.001) is less than the critical p-value (0.05), there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

From the above table, the result showed a high moderate positive significant relationship existing between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria. Therefore, academic staff of universities in the

region found working from home a very golden alternative to working in the office as they have the opportunity of comfort especially where the offices are not very comfortable. Again, it helped to reduce cost of mobility and even risk. Lecturers agree that the policy of flexible work will enable them achieve greatly, as academic work and researches can be done anywhere they are in the world.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In line with the objective of the study, having to do with the ascertainment of the extent to which flexible work relates to the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria, and with the data generation process for the formulated hypothesis, which satisfies the conditions for use of the employed cum applied statistical techniques, the objective was consequently achieved, in the sense that there is a high moderate positive significant relationship existing between flexible work and the self-development of the academic staff of universities in South-South Nigeria.

Taking a critical look at the findings of this study therefore, and owing to the importance of self-development, it is therefore recommended that university authorities should come up with frameworks for the implementation and development of flexible work for their academic staff.

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