

Social Awareness and Relationship Management as Correlates of Academics' Career Performance in Colleges of Education in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: The study examined social awareness and relationship management as factors related to academics' career performance in colleges of education in Zone C, Benue State. **Design:** The study adopted a correlational research design. **Instruments:** Three instruments were developed by the researcher and validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Reverend Father Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi: The Academic Staff Social Awareness Questionnaire (ASSAQ), the Academic Staff Relationship Management Questionnaire (ASRMQ), and the Academic Staff Career Performance Questionnaire (ASCPQ). The instruments had reliability coefficients of 0.87, 0.84, and 0.86, respectively, and were used for data collection. **Sampling:** A multistage sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 213 academics from a population of 1,146 staff in colleges of education across Zone C, Benue State. **Method:** Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics were applied to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. **Findings:** The findings indicated that social awareness and relationship management have significant positive correlations with the career performance of the academic staff. It was concluded that social awareness and relationship management significantly relate to the career performance of academics in colleges of education in Zone C, Benue State. **Conclusions:** Professional bodies responsible for teacher education in Nigeria should liaise with National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Universities Commission to integrate the social awareness and relationship management skills in teacher education curriculum so as to train future teachers on how to cope with the relationships at work place with students and colleagues.

Keywords: social awareness, relationship management and career performance

1. Introduction

Across the globe, career performance is considered an extremely important criterion that relates to organizational outcomes and successes. Career performance denotes a situation where an

employee discharges the duties of their engagement and contributes to the outcomes and success of an organisation (Ochiagha, 2019). Institutions of higher learning, such as Colleges of Education, rely extremely on the career

performance of academics to achieve their aims and objectives. Nigeria, like other countries of the world, recognises the role of academics as a key element in the training of teachers who would teach at the basic foundational level of education. There is, however, a seeming consensus about the falling standard of education as a big problem that is hindering the posterity of the nation in terms of human resources that are needed for effective development of basic education in Nigeria. This menace is often attributed to academics in colleges of Education since they are responsible for training the individuals who will, in turn, train individuals at the foundation of basic education. It seems many of the academic staff are experiencing challenges in their career, leading to poor performance in their various work positions (Ajayi & Uyeh, 2023).

The upsurge in poor career performance of academics in the public Colleges of Education in Nigeria seems to have become an issue of concern confronting the educational stakeholders, the government and the society in general. Many stakeholders in education, such as counsellors, educational managers, researchers and some government officials, seem to be worried about the future of basic education in Nigeria. For instance, Duze (2011), Owoeye and Yara (2019), Uyeh, Tor-Anyiin and Ajayi (2020), Afeez (2022) and Dotun (2025), apprehensively stated that academics in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria have failed to produce the desired result in terms of teaching and research, and consequently, they are producing 'half-baked' graduates who in most cases, do not have intellectual and moral justifications for the certificates they hold. The major work of academics is research and human resource development, and no nation can develop beyond its human resources. Thus, academics are very important in the actualisation of the educational goals and national development. Apparently, it is apt to say that without 'academics' there can be no meaningful development of a nation. It is equally true that if academics do not perform effectively in their career, there will be no meaningful national development. An academic in a College of Education is a qualified professional who is responsible for teaching and instructing learners in a particular subject area related to education (Omeje et al, 2020). Academics are also responsible for developing course syllabi, delivering lectures and seminars, assessing students and mentoring them. Oftentimes, they

are also involved in research activities and publishing in books and academic journals related to the field of their expertise. Undoubtedly, academics in a College of Education play critical roles in preparing future educators and contributing to the field of education.

In spite of the central role expected of academics in the realization of school objectives, which translate into national development, academics in Nigeria seem not to be performing optimally (Jilomes, 2015; Ajayi & Uyeh, 2023). Academics in Benue state are not exempt from this poor attitude to work. The researcher, as an academic in the College of Education, surmised that many academics seem to exhibit a poor attitude towards attending lectures, a delay in administering continuous assessment, poor supervision of students' teaching practice exercises, supervision of students' projects, grading and recording students' performances and lateness to work, among others. Factors that might be responsible for the seemingly poor career performance of academics have been viewed from different perspectives. Kazeem (2016) opined that factors such as fewer rewards, workload, existence of too many students, tight institutional policies, poor relationship with colleagues and less career progression usually put pressure on academics and ultimately result in poor career performance. Jack and Punch (2017), also identified factors such as increase in work load, a hostile environment, large classes, non-payment of salaries, poor working environment and conditions of service, delay in promotions, inadequate instructional materials and infrastructural facilities, lack of staff development, misbehaviour of students, lack of social recognition and time pressure as factors that might lead to poor career performance.

The researcher, however, observed through a review of literature that there appears to be a nexus between some psychological constructs and the career performance of academics. For instance, studies by Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo (2015) revealed that health care, reasoning ability, mental adjustment and occupational stress are some of the psychological factors that relate to career performance. The considerations of factors affecting the career performance of academics in tertiary institutions in Benue state have not been adequately explored. The influence of some crucial psychological variables which contribute to

personal and professional development and success of individuals, such as social awareness, relationship management, growth mindset and adaptability, is generally neglected.

Social awareness generally refers to the ability of an individual to read people's intentions accurately. Goleman (2015) defines social awareness as the ability to be sensitive to other people's feelings. It involves empathy, which means having astute awareness of others' emotions, concerns and needs. It also includes the ability to identify people's unstated needs and the ability to read situations objectively without biases and assumptions. Spencer and Spencer (2016) explained that social awareness helps in an organisation. Academics' ability to read situations objectively, without the distorting lens of their own biases and assumptions, allows them to respond effectively to issues and situations in their institutions.

Hence, for effective career performance to take place, academics must have the ability to network and build bonds with other members of the institution and beyond. By implication, nobody has all the knowledge and skills to do it all alone, and so needs the support of others, if high career performance is to be achieved. Relationship management refers to the interpersonal skills an individual use to relate effectively with others. It also means the ability to inspire, influence and develop others. The interpersonal skills include listening and taking criticism non-defensively. It also means individuals humbling themselves to learn from their subjects or colleagues. Poor relationship causes crises in an organisation and bring about low productivity output. Blyton (2019) opined that employees do not put in their best performances at work when they are unhappy with management, government or even their colleagues. By implication, academics may not perform their duties effectively if there is no proper relationship management. Actions taken by aggrieved academics may include strike actions, lock out and propaganda against the institutions, among others. Rifts between the academics, students, the management and government, which hamper academic programmes and activities, may be an indication that academics in colleges of education in educational zone C of Benue state may be having reduced relationship management skills.

In Nigeria today, it is not surprising to discover that many workers cannot perform in their chosen careers, and academics seem not to be an

exception. Studies by Gunu and Oladepo (2020), Uyeh, Tor-Anyiin and Ajayi (2020) and Anderson (2016) reveal that academics are not performing optimally in their various ranks and positions of work. The researcher, as an academic, observed that academics in the colleges of education in Zone C of Benue State are not exempt from the menace of poor career performance. This is evident in their persistent coming late to work, absenteeism, stagnation (in knowledge & promotion), change of authorship, inclusion of their names in publications they do not contribute academically to, wanes of motivation, falsification of data, changing of grades for money, among others. These behaviours of academics evidently show that some academics are maladjusted and frustrated with their career. This brings about notable learning gaps among students, such as unethical behaviours, lack of enthusiasm and teamwork, low academic achievement and school dropout, among others. Invariably, the students who are like raw materials in the hands of such academics suffer significant setbacks in their performances and subsequently in their goal achievement. It is certain that if this abysmal situation is allowed to thrive for a longer time, it will lead to a total collapse of teacher education in the zone. Consequently, there will be fewer opportunities for viable sustainability, growth and development.

1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What is the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State?
- 2) What is the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State?

1.2. Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- 1) The correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State is not statistically significant.
- 2) There is no significant correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public

Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Awareness

Social awareness generally refers to the ability of an individual to read people's intentions accurately. Goleman (2015) defined social awareness as the ability to be sensitive to other people's feelings. It involves empathy, which means having astute awareness of others' emotions, concerns and needs. It also includes the ability to identify people's unstated needs and the ability to read situations objectively without biases and assumptions. Spencer and Spencer (2016) explained that social awareness helps in an organisation. Academics' ability to read situations objectively, without the distorting lens of their own biases and assumptions, allows them to respond effectively to issues and situations in their institutions. Hence, for effective career performance to take place, academics must have the ability to network and build bonds with other members of the institution and beyond. By implication, nobody has all the knowledge and skills to do it all alone, and so needs the support of others, if high career performance is to be achieved.

2.2 Relationship Management

Relationship management refers to the interpersonal skills an individual use to relate effectively with others. It also means the ability to inspire, influence and develop others. The interpersonal skills include listening and taking criticism non-defensively. It also means individuals humbling themselves to learn from their subjects or colleagues. Poor relationship management causes crises in an organisation and brings about low productivity. Blyton (2019) and Ajayi and Uyeh (2023) opined that employees do not put in their best performances at work when they are unhappy with management, government or even their colleagues. By implication, academics may not perform their duties effectively if there is no proper relationship management. Actions taken by aggrieved academics may include strike actions, lock out and propaganda against the institutions and individuals, among others. The rifts between the academics, students, the management and government, which hamper academic programmes and activities in colleges of education in educational Zone C of Benue state, may be a result of reduced relationship

management skills by academics.

2.3 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Numerous studies have investigated the relationships between social awareness, relationship management and career performance of employees. For instance, Firmansyah and Havidz (2019), carried out a study on the effect of social awareness and work environment on training and its implementation on the performance of employees. The study was conducted in Cahaya Lantern Esa Abdi Nusantara, Indonesia.

The study aimed to determine and clarify the effect of social awareness and work environment on training and its implementation on employee performance. Ninety-five employees were used for the study as respondents. Data collection was done through interviews and questionnaires. Data were analysed using path analysis and a correlation matrix between dimensions. The results of the study showed that social awareness and work environment both partially and simultaneously affect training. It was also found that social awareness, work environment and training both partially and simultaneously affect employee performance.

Dlamini, Suknunan and Bhana (2022), carried out a study on the influence of employee-manager relationship management on employee performance and productivity in South Africa. The study was conducted in a financial organisation based in Durban, South Africa. A quantitative approach was utilised with a census method targeting a total population of 40 administrative employees. Three research questions guided the study.

The questionnaire was constructed based on the research aims and was administered to all 40 respondents. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was used for data analysis. As a result, the response rate was 65%. The findings indicated that the relationship management between managers and employees affects employee performance and productivity. A positive relationship with a manager is closely linked to increased motivation and performance, while a negative relationship is linked with poor performance.

In addition, Ume and Agha (2020) carried out a study on employee relationship management as a correlate of employee commitment in the primary health care sector in Oshodi/Isolo, Lagos. The objective of the study was to establish

the role of employee relationship management in enhancing employees' commitment. The study adopted the survey design. A sample size of 211 respondents was obtained from a population of 350 health workers using a convenience sampling technique. A descriptive research design was used in the study. The data collected were analysed using Spearman's correlation. It was concluded that relationship management had a positive effect on the employees' commitment to Oshodi /Isolo Primary Health Centres.

While existing research provides strong evidence for the positive relationship between social awareness and relationship management and career performance of employees, there is limited research specifically focusing on their application in colleges of education in Education Zone C of Benue State. The unique cultural, educational, and socio-economic context of this region may influence the effectiveness of these variables, making it necessary to investigate how they impact the career performance of academics in this particular setting. Additionally, much of the existing research has focused on performance in other aspects of life, with less attention given to the teaching profession in general. This study is focused on academics whose role is critical for sustaining teacher education.

The current study aims to address these gaps by correlating the social awareness and relationship management skills with the career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Education Zone C of Benue State. By building on the findings of previous studies and applying them in a new context, this research will provide valuable insights into the potential of these crucial psychological constructs to enhance the career performance of academics in colleges of education in this region. The outcomes of this study could inform academic practices and policy decisions, ultimately contributing to the achievement of the educational goals outlined in the National Policy on Education.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational survey design. This is because the research seeks to find out the existing characteristics and their

interrelations. The study area was the educational zone C, comprising nine local government areas in Benue state. There are 5 accredited Colleges of Education in the zone. The population of the study consisted of all the academic staff in the 5 colleges of education in the educational zone C, totalling 1146 academic staff (BSTSB Statistics Units, 2023). A sample size of 213 Academic Staff was drawn from the population using a multistage sampling procedure.

Three instruments were used in the study. These included the: Academic Staff Social Awareness Questionnaire (ASSAQ), Academic Staff Relationship Management Questionnaire (ASRMQ) and Academic Staff Career Performance Questionnaire (ASCPQ). The researchers presented the instruments to three experts in the Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi (2 experts in Counselling Psychology & 1 expert in Measurement and Evaluation), who scrutinised them to ensure that the items were capable of measuring the variables that were to be used to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses. The Cronbach's Alpha was used to ascertain the reliability index of ASSEQ, ASEIQ and ASCPQ. This gave reliability values of 0.87, 0.84 and 0.86, respectively, to determine the reliability of the instruments. The instruments were administered to the respondents using the direct contact approach in order to minimize non-response from respondents. Research assistants assisted the researchers in administering the instruments. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical method was used to analyze the data collected. The statistics (PPMC) were used to answer research questions and also to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

Presentations in this section are based on research questions and null hypotheses.

4.1 Research Question 1

What is the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State? The answer to research question one is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation analysis between social awareness and career performance

Variables	N	Mean \bar{x}	Std.dev δ	R	Remark
Social awareness	213	3.1268	.84557	.624**	Moderate correlation

Career Performance	213	2.8545	.84811
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Table 1 shows the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The result indicated that there is a moderate positive correlation between social awareness and career performance ($r = .624$). This implies that as social awareness changes, career performance also changes in a moderate.

4.2 Research Question 2

What is the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State? Research question two is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation analysis between relationship management and career performance

Variables	N	Mean \bar{x}	Std.dev δ	R	Remark
Relationship management	213	3.1174	.85248	.711**	Strong correlation
Career performance	213	2.8545	.84811		

Table 2 shows the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The result indicated that there is a strong positive correlation between relationship management and career performance ($r = .711$). This implies that as relationship management changes, career

performance also changes in a strong magnitude.

4.3 Hypothesis One

The correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State, is not statistically significant. The answer to hypothesis one is presented on Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between social awareness and career performance

Variables	N	r	$p - value$	Remark
Social Awareness	213			
Correlation 'r'		.624**	0.000	Significant
Career Performance	213			

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation test result for the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The data in Table 3 reveal that the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation of social awareness and career performance was found statistically significant ($r = .624$, $P < 0.005$). Hence, the null hypothesis, which states that the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue state, is not

statistically significant, was rejected. This implies that the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue state, is not statistically significant.

4.4 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The answer to hypothesis two is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Pearson correlation between relationship management and career performance

Variables	N	r	$p - value$	Remark
Relationship management	213			

Correlation 'r'	711**	0.000	Significant
Career performance	213		

Table 4 presents the Pearson correlation test result for the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The data in Table 4 reveal that the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation of relationship management and career performance was found statistically significant ($r = .711$, $P < 0.005$). Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant correlation between relationship management and the career performance of academics was rejected. This implies that there is a significant correlation between relationship management and the career performance of academics of Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State.

5. Discussion

This research investigated the correlation between social awareness and relationship management and the career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The first hypothesis found that there was a significant correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics of public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue state. This finding agrees with Gunu and Oladebo (2020), Firmansyah and Havidz (2019), who revealed that social awareness has a relationship with employees' performance and organizational commitment, teamwork, and career performance of physicians in California, respectively. Thus, the likely explanation for this outcome may be connected to the fact that academics with strong social awareness should be able to develop and sustain positive relationships with co-academics and students. Academic staff members infused with social awareness exhibit a transformative impact on their roles within academia, permeating their teaching, research, advocacy, and community engagement endeavours. In their teaching practices, they foster inclusive environments, catering to diverse student needs and backgrounds, thus enhancing learning outcomes and student satisfaction. Their research endeavours are imbued with a commitment to addressing pressing societal challenges, forging connections with communities, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Advocating for diversity and inclusion, they influence

institutional policies and practices, leading to more equitable environments for all.

Through community engagement, they bridge academia with society, facilitating knowledge exchange and addressing community needs. This comprehensive integration of social awareness not only enhances their effectiveness as educators and researchers but also contributes to the creation of more inclusive, equitable, and socially responsible academic institutions, thus shaping the future of academia and fostering positive change within and beyond their academic communities.

The second finding of the study is that the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics of public colleges of education in Benue and Cross River states is statistically significant. This finding agrees with Dlamini, Suknunan and Bhana (2022), Ume and Agha (2020), who found that relationship management has a significant influence on employee productivity and job satisfaction, and employee commitment in the primary health care sector, respectively. Thus, the likely explanation for this outcome may be connected to the fact that academics cannot perform better and achieve their objectives if there is a bad relationship between co-academics, students and management; therefore, it is very important to create and maintain good relationships. Academics are the major valuable assets of an institution which without whom it will be hard to realize the basic objectives of such a higher institution. To harvest more from academics, it requires creating a conducive working environment which satisfies the needs of individual academics. Effective relationship management is essential in ensuring academics perform together as a collective unit and contribute equally towards the realization of a common goal. Effective academic staff members seamlessly integrate relationship management skills into their multifaceted roles, enriching every aspect of their work within the academic community. As educators, they foster an inclusive and engaging learning environment by actively listening to students, empathizing with their needs, and communicating clearly to facilitate understanding. In research endeavours, they leverage these skills to collaborate

effectively with colleagues, students, and external partners, fostering meaningful partnerships and driving collaborative initiatives forward. Additionally, in administrative capacities, they build and maintain professional networks, advocating for their institution's interests and forging strategic partnerships to support academic endeavours. Their ability to navigate conflicts constructively, adapt communication styles, and demonstrate trustworthiness underpins their success in fostering positive relationships and advancing the institution's mission. Ultimately, these academic staff members exemplify how relationship management skills are integral to promoting a culture of collaboration, innovation, and excellence within the academic community.

6. Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of this study that social awareness and relationship management have a strong positive relationship with academics' career performance. This means that there will be an improvement in an academic's career performance if there is an increase in social awareness and relationship management skills, and the reverse will be the case if there is a decrease in social awareness and relationship management skills. Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Professional bodies responsible for teacher education in Nigeria should liaise with the National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Universities Commission to integrate the social awareness and relationship management skills in the teacher education curriculum to train future teachers on how to cope with the relationships at work workplace with students and colleagues.
- 2) A policy should be enacted for Colleges of Education that Relationship management be incorporated as one of the soft-skill indicators in performance appraisal and promotion criteria, ensuring that academics who demonstrate strong relational and teamwork abilities are recognised and rewarded.

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