

Social awareness and relationship management as correlates of academics' career performance in colleges of education in Benue State, Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

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Social awareness.

The study examined social awareness and relationship management as factors related to academics' career performance in colleges of education in Zone C, Benue State. The study adopted a correlational research design. Three instruments were used in this study. The instruments had reliability coefficients of 0.87, 0.84, and 0.86, respectively, and were used for data collection. 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. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics were applied to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. 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. 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 social awareness and relationship management skills into the teacher education curriculum to train future teachers on how to cope with relationships at the workplace with students and colleagues.

Contribution/ Originality: This study found a significant positive correlation between academics' social awareness ($r=.624$, $p<0.005$), relationship management ($r=.711$, $p<0.005$), and career performance in colleges of education in Benue State, Nigeria. It recommends that NCCE and NUC integrate these competencies into teacher education curricula to prepare teachers for future professional, effective workplace relationships.

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 organization (Ochiagha, 2019). Institutions of higher learning, such as Colleges of Education, rely heavily on the career performance of academics to achieve their aims and objectives. Nigeria, like other countries, recognizes the role of academics as a key element in training teachers who will instruct at the basic foundational level of education. There is, however, a seeming consensus about the falling standard of education as a significant problem hindering the nation's future in terms of human resources needed for the effective development of basic education in Nigeria. This issue is often attributed to academics in colleges of Education, as they are responsible for training individuals who will, in turn, train others at

the foundation of basic education. It appears many academic staff are experiencing challenges in their careers, leading to poor performance in their respective positions (Ajayi & Uyeh, 2022).

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 educational stakeholders, the government, and society in general. Many stakeholders in education, such as counselors, 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 tertiary institutions in Nigeria have failed to produce the desired results 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 realization of 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 careers, there will be no meaningful national development. An academic in a College of Education is a qualified professional responsible for teaching and instructing learners in a particular subject area related to education (Omeje, 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 their field of 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 (Ajayi & Uyeh, 2022; Jilomes, 2015). 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, delays 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, the existence of too many students, tight institutional policies, poor relationships with colleagues, and less career progression usually put pressure on academics and ultimately result in poor career performance. Jack and Punch (2001) also identified factors such as increased workload, a hostile environment, large classes, non-payment of salaries, poor working conditions, delay in promotions, inadequate instructional materials and infrastructural facilities, lack of staff development, misbehavior 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 organization. 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 uses 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 relationships cause crises in an organization and bring about low productivity. 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, lockouts, and propaganda against the institutions, among others. Rifts between the academics, students, the management, and government, which hamper academic programs 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 (2014), Uyeh et al. (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 to which they do not contribute academically, wanes of motivation, falsification of data, changing of grades for money, among others. These behaviors of academics evidently show that some academics are maladjusted and frustrated with their careers. This brings about notable learning gaps among students, such as unethical behaviors, 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 performance 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 in 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 at 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 organization. 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 uses 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 organization and results in low productivity. Blyton (2019) and Ajayi and Uyeh (2022) opined that employees do not perform their best at work when they are unhappy with management, government, or colleagues. By implication, academics may not perform their duties effectively if there is no proper relationship management. Actions taken by aggrieved academics may include strikes, lockouts, and propaganda against institutions and individuals, among others. The rifts between academics, students, management, and government, which hamper academic programs and activities in colleges of education in educational Zone C of Benue State, may result from 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) conducted a study on the effect of social awareness and work environment on training and its implementation on employee performance. The study was conducted at 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 as respondents. Data collection was done through interviews and questionnaires. Data were analyzed 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) conducted a study on the influence of employee-manager relationship management on employee performance and productivity in South Africa. The study was carried out in a financial organization based in Durban, South Africa. A quantitative approach was used 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 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) conducted a study on employee relationship management as a correlate of employee commitment in the primary health care sector in Oshodi/Isolo, Lagos. The objective was to establish the role of employee relationship management in enhancing employees' commitment. The study adopted a 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. The data collected were analyzed using Spearman's correlation. It was concluded that relationship management had a positive effect on 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 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 because it seeks to identify existing characteristics and their interrelations. The study area was educational Zone C, comprising nine local government areas in Benue State. There are five accredited Colleges of Education in the zone. The population consisted of all academic staff in these five colleges, totaling 1,146 staff (BSTSB, 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 at Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi (two experts in Counselling Psychology and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation), who scrutinized them to ensure that the items could measure the variables used to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of ASSAQ, ASRMQ, and ASCPQ, yielding reliability values of 0.87, 0.84, and 0.86, respectively. The instruments were administered to respondents through direct contact to minimize non-response. Research assistants helped in administering the instruments. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) method was used to analyze the data collected. These statistics were used to answer research questions and test 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	0.84557		
Correlation (R)				0.624*	Moderate correlation
Career performance	213	2.8545	0.84811		

Note: * = Significant at 0.05 level ($P < 0.05$).

Table 1 shows the correlation between social awareness and career performance of academics in Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The result indicates that there is a moderate positive correlation between social awareness and career performance ($r = 0.624$). This implies that as social awareness changes, career performance also changes moderately.

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	0.85248		
Correlation (R)				0.711*	Strong correlation
Career performance	213	2.8545	0.84811		

Note: * = Significant at 0.05 level ($P < 0.05$).

Table 2 shows the correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics in public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. The result indicates a strong positive correlation between relationship management and career performance ($r = 0.711$). This implies that as relationship management changes, career performance also changes significantly.

4.3. Hypothesis One

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

Table 3. Pearson correlation between social awareness and career performance.

Variables	N	r	$p - value$	Remark
Social awareness	213			
Correlation 'r'		0.624*	0.000	Significant
Career performance	213			

Note: * = Significant at 0.05 level ($P < 0.05$).

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 ($r = 0.624$, $P < 0.005$). 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 statistically significant.

4.4. Hypothesis Two

There is no significant correlation between relationship management and career performance of academics at 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	<i>r</i>	<i>p – value</i>	Remark
Relationship management	213			
Correlation 'r'		0.711*	0.000	Significant
Career performance	213			

Note: * = Significant at 0.05 level ($P < 0.05$).

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 ($r = 0.711$, $P < 0.005$). Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant correlation between relationship management and the career performance of academics was rejected. This implies that a significant correlation exists between relationship management and the career performance of academics in 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 the career performance of academics in public Colleges of Education in Zone C, Benue State. This finding agrees with Gunu and Oladepo (2014) and Firmansyah and Havidz (2019), who revealed that social awareness has a relationship with employees' performance, 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 endeavors. In their teaching practices, they foster inclusive environments, catering to diverse student needs and backgrounds, thus enhancing learning outcomes and student satisfaction. Their research endeavors 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 in public colleges of education in Benue and Cross River states is statistically significant. This finding aligns with Dlamini et al. (2022) and Ume and Agha (2020), who found that relationship management significantly influences employee productivity, job satisfaction, and employee commitment in the primary healthcare sector, respectively. The likely explanation for this outcome may be connected to the fact that academics cannot perform better or achieve their objectives if there are poor relationships among co-academics, students, and management; therefore, creating and maintaining good relationships is very important. Academics are the major assets of an

institution, without whom it would be difficult to realize the basic objectives of a higher institution. To maximize academic performance, creating a conducive working environment that satisfies individual needs is essential. Effective relationship management ensures academics work together as a collective unit and contribute equally toward achieving 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 endeavors, 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 endeavors. 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 academic 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 social awareness and relationship management skills into the teacher education curriculum, training future teachers on how to cope with relationships at work 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 recognized and rewarded.

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