# EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG GRADUATE ASSISTANTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, NIGERIA

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#### Abstract

This study investigated the effect of employment status on organisational commitment among graduate assistants in the University of Lagos. Other specific objectives were to determine how workload and working hours affects organisational commitment respectively. The study is based on quantitative approach with cross-sectional design. Census survey was adopted to sample all the graduate assistants across the faculties in University of Lagos. Structure questionnaire designed in a closed ended format with Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.705 was used to obtain data from 71 graduate assistants to address the objectives of the study. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis through SPSS. Also, the hypotheses formulated were tested using multiple regression analysis at 0.05 significant level. The study found that whereas employment status significantly affects organisational commitment (p = .001, < .05), workload (p = .994, > .05) and working hours (p = .294, > .05) do not significantly influence organisational commitment. The study concludes that employment status would affect organisational commitment among graduate assistants in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Therefore; measures need to be put in place by management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to enhance movement of graduate assistants to higher cadre to increase organisational commitment.

**Keywords:** Employment status, organisational commitment, workload, working hours, graduate assistant.

#### 1. Introduction

Formal organisations and institutions have different job positions for different categories of employees, as the world is full of benchmarks, categorizations, rankings, and hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Many organisations including academic institutions believes that categorizing and ranking workers based on cadre and treating them according to their job status would make the workers increase their competitiveness and put in more effort to elevate themselves particularly those at the lower job status. On the other hand,

workers may become demoralized due to the kind of treatment and low benefits associated with their ranking, status and the hierarchical structure of the organisation or institution. Consequently, high ranking individuals and those given senior positions may tend to stop working harder since they already occupied the top position, while low ranking individuals may be depressed and tend to quit the work (Ogunleye & Osekita, 2016).

There is no doubt that highly committed workers tend to put in more effort and do better than their counterpart who are less committed, and are also less likely to quit (Dixit & Bhati, 2012). However, maintaining employees' commitment has become a contentious issue in the Nigerian academic institutions especially in respect of employment status. Experience has showed that employees at the lowest cadre of academic staff hierarchy tend to have some fear, distrust, and are less committed to their institution due to their being over burdened with tasks considered unproductive, time consuming and outside their job description. Consequently, declining commitment to the institution may result in channeling commitment to other endeavours perceived to be beneficial which may however result in detached behaviours including lateness and absenteeism which may pose serious threat to the overall performance of the institution (Irefin & Mechanic, 2014).

Studies have identified several factors predicting employee commitment including job status, job security, career prospects, job involvement, and job enrichment (Ogunleye & Osekita, 2016; Mosaybian & Jafari, 2017; Nzewi, Chiekezie, Ekene, Raphael & Ebuka, 2017; McElroy, Morrow, Liu, & Weng, 2010). However, studies have given less attention to employment status and the commitment of graduate assistants in tertiary institutions in developing countries like Nigeria. Hence, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. Investigate how employment status affects organisational commitment.
- ii. Examine how workload influences organisational commitment.
- iii. Determine how working hours influence organisational commitment.

### 2. Literature Review

Employment status also referred to as job status has been viewed and contextualized in different ways by different authors. For instance, Ogunleye and Osekita (2016) described employee job status as the actual ranking existing within the work environment which may sometimes be in grades or levels. Ayinde, Ajila and Akanni (2012) described employment status as one of the major socializing forces that influence the extent to which psychological attachments are formed with the organisation. Employment status could be referred to as an employees' level within an organisational hierarchy which may determine the extent of benefits and recognition obtainable within the organisation.

Organisational commitment is the strong feelings and desire of a member of an organisation to remain in the organisation, believe and accept the goals and values of the organisation, and express readiness to exert a considerable effort on behalf of the organisation (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982). Kanter (1968) also describes organisational commitment as the willingness by social actors to exact energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations seen as self-expressive.

Adekola (2012) views organisational commitment in terms of the strength of the feeling of responsibility that an employee has towards the mission of the organisation. It is the degree to which employees identify themselves with their organisations, their attachment and belief in values of an organisation, and the desire to stay (Khalid, Khalid, Waseem, Farooqi & Nazish, 2014). Thus, employees who are committed to an organisation tends to spend larger part of their working lives working in the same organisation, putting in more effort towards the achievement of the organisational goals and in some cases retire in the organisation.

# 2.1 Employment Status and Organisational Commitment

In organisation with a ranking structure, the jobs may be arranged based on how the organisation values the jobs. Thus, organisations may derive more value from jobs which are placed at the top in relation to those jobs at the lowest list. Lincoln and Kallerberg (1990) pointed out that the most favoured within an organisation in terms of material rewards, authority and autonomy are those in higher positions in an organisation. Hence, they may be more committed to the organisation in relations to others in lower position which could be less favoured.

The study by Ayinde et al. (2012) examined how downsizing perception relationship with organisational commitment is mediated by locus of control and job status among civil servants in federal ministries in Lagos and Abuja. The findings revealed that employee downsizing perception relationship with their work commitment is not significantly mediated by their job status.

Ntisa Dhurup and Joubert (2016) explored how employment status contract relates with job satisfaction with a focus on academic staff in South African University of Technology. The study was based on a cross-sectional design with survey as the strategy found that employment status contract is negatively related with job satisfaction.

Previous studies have established how employment status of permanent and temporary employment affects organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Lee & Johnson, 1991), how employees downsizing perception relationship with work commitment is mediated by job status (Aynde et al, 2012), and how contract of employment status predicts job satisfaction (Ntisa et al., 2016). However, attempt to establish the effect of employment status on

organisational commitment specifically in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have received less attention in the literature. Hence, this study hypothesizes that:

H<sub>01</sub>: Employment status has no significant influence on organisational commitment.

# 2.2 Workload and Organisational Commitment.

Workload is the intensity of job assigned to an employee, and maybe a source of mental stress for such employees (Ngantung, Saerang & Pandowo, 2015). Dasupta (2013) views workload as the amount of work assigned to a worker or that which is expected to be completed by a worker in a specified period of time.

There is no doubt that most managers of organisations desires increase in workers output, however, increasing workers task and assigning excessive workload to workers may result in more time spent by the workers in performing such task and with little or no time off the task for leisure and rest in the quest to meet specified deadlines for the task completion. This may however have a negative consequence for the workers and may also affects the workers commitment, as maintained by Akintayo (2010), that workload induce stress may result in both decreasing performance and organisational commitment.

Similarly, Meyer and Allen (1997) also assert that emotional commitment of employees is negatively influenced by workload. Maxwell and Steele (2003) also found that workload is negatively related with organisational commitment and further stated that a stable workload and responsibility would positively affect administrators' commitment to organisation. However, Shah Jaffari, Aziz, Ejaz, Ul-Haq and Raza (2011) proposed a different view stating that workload provides employees with the opportunity to learn and prosper more quickly, and that employees who have enough work to do are more active and energetic compared to work-less employees who are leftover inactive and lazy.

Previous studies have demonstrated workload effect on employees' commitment (Schagen, 2014; Asamani, Amertil & Chebere, 2015; Erat, Kitapçi & Çömez 2017). However, gaps in the literature necessitate a further investigation on how workload at the levels of lowest cadre in organisational hierarchy affects the employees' commitment especially in tertiary institutions. Thus, this study hypothesizes that:

H<sub>02</sub>: Workload has no significant effect on organisational commitment.

# 2.3 Working Hours and Organisational Commitment

Many employees in different industry at some point work more than the working hours stated by in their employment contract. Van-Emmerik and

Sanders (2005) assert that an employees' situation at home, forces within the environment, agreed hours as contained in the contract of employment and the employee preferred working hours determines the employee actual work hour behaviour.

Most studies on working hours centres on flexibility in the hours of work, (Shagvaliyeva, & Yazdanifard, 2014; Prowse & Prowse, 2015; Mungania, Waiganjo & Kihoro, 2016), as it enables employees to determine their working hours as long as the task is carried out and performance is not compromised. Flexibility in hours of work would enable employees determine how to manage their work in terms of when to begin and complete the work, or the location to work from without jeopardizing performance (Ongaki, 2019).

Flexible work hours have further been reported to have some positive effect on organisational outcomes including employees' commitment. For instance, Abid and Barech (2017) opine that flexible work hours have benefits of improving work quality, reducing the absenteeism rate, increasing morale and productivity enhancement. Choo, Desa and Asaari (2016) also found that a significant positive relationship exists between flexible work arrangement and organisational commitment.

Essien and Edwinah (2017) studied how flexibility in work time schedules relates with organisational commitment among employees of banks in Nigeria, sampled 320 employees of two banks in Akwa Ibom Nigeria using survey questionnaire and interview. The collected data was analysed using Pearson correlation and they found that the employees commitment including affective, continuance and normative positively impacted by the banks flexible work schedule implementation. Similarly, Okemwa (2016) examined how work arrangement flexibility relates with commitment among public hospitals nurses in Kenya and found that a significant positive relationship exists between the public hospitals' nurses' commitment and work arrangement flexibility in Kenya.

Previous studies have showed how flexible working hours relates or influences commitment in different organisations in different sectors including the banking and health sector among others. However, most of these studies focus on different hierarchical levels within the organisations of study and not on the general population of a specific organisational hierarchy. Hence, this study hypothesizes that:

H<sub>03</sub>: Working hours does not significantly influence organisational commitment.

#### 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This section provides the theoretical explanations of the subject matter under investigation. Many theories can be used to explain the subject matter, however, Role theory, and Equity theory were adopted to explain the effect of employment status on employees' commitment to their organisation.

# 2.4.1 Role Theory

Role theory stems from the works of Talcott Parsons and his associates between 1902 and 1979 in their development of society theory which was later described as the structural functionalism theory. Role theory have been viewed from different terms and perspective. Nye (1976) identified two general perspectives as the interactionist, and the structural perspective.

Role theory within the interactionist perspective views individuals' daily activities as acting a role based on categories that are socially defined. That is, each role comprises a collection of duties, expectations, rights, norms and behaviours an individual must contend with and also performs. The theory posits that how an individual would behave is based on the individual's expectation as well as the expectations held by other people. This expectation relates to the different roles such as mother, worker, manager, friend or employer which is carried out by an individual or enacted by an individual in their everyday lives. Role theory is also predictive in that the information on the expectation regarding the role for a particular position such as a worker, manager, supervisor etc. can be predicted.

Role theory is relevant to this study because it helps to identify the duties and responsibilities expected of any employees in an organisation regarding their job or employment status, and how the employees' behaviour or attitudes can be predicted in relation with their role expectation. This implies that the attitudes of the graduate assistants towards the institution can be predicted to determine their level of commitment to the institution.

## 2.4.2 Equity Theory

Equity theory propounded by in 1960s by Stacy Adams maintains that individuals tends to compare their output-input ratio with those of their colleagues in similar cadre and where the output-input ratio of their comparing individuals is perceived to be same with theirs then a state of equity exist and such individual may be more motivated and committed to work having perceived equity among employees of similar cadre. However, where the output-input ratio of the comparing individuals is not same with the individual an inequity state therefore exist and such individual may become less motivated to work. The more inequity perceived by the individual in terms of either lower rewards or the higher rewards, the more discomfort felt by the individual, and the more the discomfort, the more the need by the individual to reduce such discomfort by taking actions to achieve equity.

From the perspective of equity theory, the graduate assistants being retained in the University system on the basis of their academic performance may tend to compare their working conditions and pay with those of their counterparts or contemporaries' in other industries. If the workload and remuneration associated with their job are perceived to be at variances with those of similar job cadre in other industries, they may perceive inequity and their commitment to the academic institution may begin to decline.

#### 3. Methods

The study is based on a quantitative approach with a survey design. The study population comprised all the 75 graduate assistants across the faculties in University of Lagos as of January 2020. Census survey technique was adopted to sample all the graduate assistants in University of Lagos. The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire which comprised 28 items with a response format of modified 3-point Likert scales with lindicating "Agree", 2 indicting "Disagree" and 3 indicating "Undecided". The questionnaire was used to obtain information from the respondents regarding their employment status and commitment to the institution.

The instrument test of validity was ensured through validation by experts in the field of employment relations whereas the reliability of the instrument was ensured through a pilot study involving 20 respondents in two faculties of the institution. Cronbach Alpha reliability test with the aid of SPSS was carried out on the responses received from the pilot study to determine the instrument reliability. The result showed a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.705. Also, no adjustment was made on the research instrument after the pilot study.

In carrying out the study, the respondents' consents were obtained and were also adequately briefed on the purpose the study before administering the questionnaire on them. Also, the respondents were duly assured of none disclosure of their identity by not including personal questions such as name or contact address in the questionnaire as well as confidentiality of findings. The questionnaire was administered physically to the respondents solely by the researchers. This was made possible by getting the respondents' contact numbers from their WhatsApp group chart from a personal contact who is also a graduate assistant and them taking the questionnaire directly to them after scheduling an appointment with them through phone calls. However, out of the 75 respondents surveyed, only 71 copies of the questionnaire were adequately filled and found usable.

The data obtained were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics through SPSS version 20.0. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses to determine the influences of the employment status {independent variables (iv)} on the organisational commitment {dependent variables (dv)}.

#### 4. **Results**

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents** 

Socio-Demographic Attributes	Frequency	Percent	
Gender:			
Male	43	60.6	
Female	28	39.4	
Total	71	100	
Age (Years):			
20-25 years	20	28.2	
26-30 years	37	52.1	
31 years and above	14	19.7	
Total	71	100	
Marital Status:			
Single	60	84.5	
Married	24	36.4	
Total	71	100	
<b>Highest Educational Qualification:</b>			
Bachelor's Degree	18	25.4	
Master's Degree	53	74.6	
Total	71	100	
Length of Service:			
1-5 years	71	100	
Total	71	100	
Income Per Month:			
N100,001- N150,000	71	100	
Total	71	100	
Source: Survey, 2020.			

As showed in Table 1 is the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. Table 1 showed the dominance of male graduate assistants (60.6 percent) over the females (39.4 percent) in various departments of University of Lagos covered in this study. Most of the graduate assistants in the institution were within the legal working age in Nigeria, and are in the early stage of their career as majority (52.1 percent) of the respondents were within the ages of 26-30 years as showed by their age distribution.

The marital status of the respondents also justifies earlier assertion revealed by the age distribution of the respondents as (84.5 percent) of the respondents were single while (31.2 percent) were married. Also, concerning the highest educational qualification, majority (74.6 percent) of the respondents had a Master degree as their highest educational qualification. This is expected given that a postgraduate degree is a requirement for all academic staff to remain and advance in their career.

Table 1 further revealed that none of the respondents have been engaged in the service of the institution as a graduate assistant for more than five years as all (100 percent) of the respondents have 1-5 years' work experience within the institution. Finally, the income estimates of the respondents showed that all the respondents (100 percent) earn a monthly income between ₹100,001 to

№150,000. This means that all the graduate assistants in University of Lagos earn above the current national minimum wage of №30, 000 as obtainable in Nigeria.

**Table 2: Result of the multiple regression analysis** 

Variables	В	Beta	T	Sig	R	$\mathbb{R}^2$	F	P	VIF
Constant	3.395		1.340	.185					
ES	.684	.375	3.321	.001					1.018
WL	.001	.001	.008	.994	.401	.161	4.276	<.05	1.014
WH	.220	.119	1.058	.294					1.005

Dependent Variable: Organisational Commitment

**Key:** OC: Organisational commitment; ES: Employment Status; WL: Work-load, WH: Working Hours

The result in Table 2revealed that (F = 4.276, p < .05) which indicates that the model is significant.R is .401 and R square is .161 which shows that the ES, WL, and WH causes a variation of 16.1 percent in the graduate assistants' organisational commitment. The variance inflation factor indicates that the regression model is reliable as it ranges between 1.005 to 1.018.

Regarding how each of the independent variables affects organisational commitment, the model revealed that employment status significantly affects organisational commitment as P-value (0.001 <  $\alpha$  (0.05),  $\beta$  = (.375). This implies that a higher job status would significantly influence more commitment to the institution. However, workload (P-value (0.994 >  $\alpha$  (0.05),  $\beta$  = (.001) and working hours (P-value (0.294 >  $\alpha$  (0.05),  $\beta$  = (.119) do not significantly influence organisational commitment.

# 5. Findings and Discussions

This study investigates how employment status affects graduate assistant organisational commitment in University of Lagos with other specific objectives of determining the effect of workload and working hours on organisational commitment respectively. In attempt to address these objectives, three hypotheses were formulated and tested with the results presented in Table 2. As presented in the analysis in Table 2, the result of the first hypothesis showed that employment status ( $\beta = .375$ ) significantly influences organisational commitment.

This finding however contradicts the findings of Ayinde et al. (2012) which revealed that perception of downsizing relationship with commitment of employees to work is not significantly mediated by job status. This contradiction may be attributed to the study units and variables, as the study by Ayinde et al. (2012), investigated the mediating role of job status in the relationship between employees commitment to work and perception of downsizing among civil servants in Federal Ministries, whereas current study

investigated employment status in terms job position effect on employees commitment to organisation with a focus on lowest cadre of academic staff in tertiary institution.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that workload has ( $\beta$  = .001). This implies that an increase in the workload would result in 0.1 percent increase in organisational commitment. Also, the p-value of .994 is higher than the significant value of .05. This showed that workload has no significant effect on organisational commitment among graduate assistants in University of Lagos.

This finding negates the findings of the study conducted by Erat et al., (2017) which revealed that work load and responsibility load have effect on emotional commitment among academic staffs in Turkey's State universities. The study also negates the findings of the study conducted by Schagen (2014) that revealed the existence of significant positive relationship between workload and affective organisational commitment.

This negation of the findings of previous study can be attributed to variations in the nature of the workload in the study units. While this study focused on the lowest cadre of academic staff in academic institution in Nigeria, the previous studies focused on all academic staff across different cadre in Turkey's State Universities (Erat et al 2017), and employees in Pension and ICT department of an insurance company in Netherlands (Schagen, 2014) respectively.

Finally, the result of the third hypothesis showed that working hours has ( $\beta$  = .119). This implies that a more flexible working hours would result in 11.9 percent increase in organisational commitment. However, the p-value of 0.294 is higher than the significant value of .05 which indicates that working hours does not significantly influence organisational commitment among graduate assistants in University of Lagos. This finding negates the findings of Essien and Edwinah (2017) which revealed that flexibility in working hours has a positive effect on employees' commitment. This negation can be attributed to variations in the study units. Whereas present study investigated the lowest cadre of academic staff with no specific working hours due to the nature of their work, the previous study focused on bank workers who may seems to value flexible work hours.

#### 6. Conclusion

Academic institutions in Nigeria have different levels of hierarchy among the academic staff cadres and employment benefits are based on level of seniority. Hence, low employment benefits with different task assignment from superiors or senior colleagues which is associated with the lowest cadre of the

academic staff specifically the graduate assistants in relations to other cadre may affect their commitment to the institution which necessitated the conduct of this study.

The findings of this study have showed that whereas employment status has a significant influence on organisational commitment, work load and working hours do not significantly influence organisational commitment among graduate assistants in University of Lagos. Hence, organizations' particularly tertiary institutions need to put in place adequate policies and structures that would enhance movement of staff to higher cadre to increase commitment to the job and to the institution.

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