

## **EXPLORING STAFF COMMITMENT IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: THE IMPACT OF SEX, AGE, CADRE, AND WORK EXPERIENCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigated the impact of demographic variables on the institutional commitment of staff in public universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Specifically, it examined the influence of sex, cadre, age, and work experience on institutional commitment. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and the target population comprised both academic and non-academic staff, totaling 30,721 (10,421 academic and 20,300 non-academic staff). A sample of 1,800 participants—1,200 non-academic and 600 academic staff—was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequencies, percentages, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and linear and multiple regression analyses. The findings revealed that 64.2% of the staff exhibited a moderate level of institutional commitment, while 67.5% of the Heads of Departments (HODs) also rated their staff's institutional commitment as moderate. Cadre had a significant moderating effect on institutional commitment ( $F(3,1451) = 3.533, p = .014$ ). However, sex ( $F(1,1451) = 2.797, p = .095$ ), age ( $F(4,1451) = 1.999, p = .092$ ), and work experience ( $F(3,1451) = 0.692, p = .557$ ) did not have statistically significant moderating effects. The study concluded that staff in public*

*universities in Southwestern Nigeria generally exhibit a moderate level of institutional commitment.*

**Keywords:** *Sex Age Work Experience Institutional Commitment*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Institutions of higher learning are recognized as agents for developing intellectual capacity, supplying labor, and driving social change. Consequently, it is essential to have committed and dedicated staff, who are often considered the “lifeblood” of a university, as they are pivotal to achieving institutional success. Moreover, without well-qualified and committed personnel, universities are unlikely to attain quality and sustainability in the long term. Therefore, the importance of staff commitment in the effective utilization of human resources is widely acknowledged as a key determinant of institutional success or failure (Umukoro, Egwakhe, & Akpa, 2020).

Several well-established institutions assess the level of commitment among their staff, as it is believed to reduce withdrawal behaviors such as lateness, absenteeism, and turnover (Irefin & Mohammed, 2014). Institutions have realized that achieving sustainable success requires not only hard-working employees but also genuinely committed ones (Eniola & Akhigbe, 2018). Hence, understanding the concept of institutional commitment and its components is vital.

Institutional commitment refers to an individual’s identification with and level of engagement in their institution. It encompasses employee loyalty, internalization of institutional goals and objectives, and a willingness to contribute meaningfully to achieving those goals (Ajie, Soyemi, & Omotunde, 2015). In essence, committed employees are more likely to embrace the institution’s values and work toward its success. Commitment can prompt individuals to act in ways that, from an outsider’s perspective, may appear contrary to their personal interest. Thus, committed staff form the backbone of every successful institution. The extent to which academic and non-academic staff are committed to their duties is crucial for universities aiming to achieve their goals.

Institutional commitment comprises three dimensions:

- (i) Affective commitment, which involves emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the institution;
- (ii) Continuance commitment, which is based on the perceived cost of leaving the organization; and
- (iii) Normative commitment, which relates to a sense of obligation to remain with the institution (Popoola & Adeyeye, 2021).

Depending on the context, gender may refer to biological sex, sex-based social structures (such as gender roles), or gender identity (Onubuleze, 2018). These socially constructed roles and expectations influence workplace dynamics, including those in universities (Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021). The roles expected of university staff may differ based on gender, potentially affecting levels of institutional commitment. For instance, male staff may be perceived as more committed than female staff—or vice versa.

Another relevant factor is years of experience, defined as the number of years a staff member has worked in a university (Dada, 2025). Experienced staff often have deeper insights and are better positioned to contribute meaningfully to their institutions, making them appear more committed (Dada, 2025). Similarly, age and cadre are important, as older and higher-ranking staff members often demonstrate greater institutional commitment.

Given these factors, this study seeks to investigate the level of institutional commitment among university staff in Southwestern Nigeria. It is posited that staff members with higher levels of goal setting, self-efficacy, interpersonal trust, and who work in supportive environments are more likely to demonstrate stronger institutional commitment.

### **Problem Statement**

Institutional commitment is an employee's emotional and attitudinal response to their institution. The performance of university staff is closely tied to their level of commitment. However, despite its importance, many universities still struggle with low staff commitment. Staff in this category often display withdrawal behaviors such as lateness, absenteeism, apathy, low job performance, indifference, turnover, and unsatisfactory service delivery (Irefin & Mohammed, 2014). These behaviors typically result from a lack of commitment.

When dissatisfied staff leave, universities lose valuable experience and institutional knowledge, leading to reduced loyalty and increased recruitment and training costs (Adu-Gyamfi, Adu-Oppong, & Boahen, 2017). In public universities in Southwestern Nigeria, declining staff commitment may negatively affect university operations, including management, academic activities, and student welfare. This issue can be further exacerbated when staff resort to industrial action.

A low level of commitment can disrupt institutional activities and hinder the timely achievement of university goals. It is costly and detrimental to service delivery, planning, and coordination (Adewoyin, Opeke, Ikonne, & Madokoma, 2020). It may also lead to inefficiencies in addressing student needs, planning systems, financial oversight, and workforce management. Ultimately, this can result in student dissatisfaction, academic failure, and setbacks at both local and international levels.

These challenges underscore the need to understand institutional commitment across its affective, normative, and continuance dimensions. Despite the central role of public universities in Nigeria's development, staff commitment remains a significant concern. Low commitment contributes to declining productivity, increased turnover intentions, and reduced education quality. Dissatisfied staff are less efficient, seek opportunities elsewhere, and leave institutions with high recruitment costs. Teaching quality, research output, and the student experience all suffer as a result.

Furthermore, the cultural, social, and economic contexts of the Southwestern region of Nigeria warrant a focused investigation. Existing studies have largely concentrated on private institutions, case studies, or limited geographical areas. A comprehensive examination of the factors influencing institutional commitment among staff in public universities in Southwestern Nigeria is therefore long overdue. This study aims to address that gap by exploring the roles of personal values and cultural context in shaping institutional commitment.

### **Objective of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to explore the impact of sex, age, cadre, and work experience on the institutional commitment of staff in public universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The specific objective is to examine the significant influence of demographic variables (sex, cadre, age, and work experience) on the institutional commitment of staff in public universities.

## **Study Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that there is no significant influence of demographic variables—sex, cadre, age, and work experience—on the institutional commitment of staff in public universities.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study will provide critical insights into the psychosocial factors—such as goal setting, self-efficacy, interpersonal trust, and the work environment—that predict institutional commitment in universities. These findings will be valuable to stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, school management, health educators, university counselors, policymakers, school administrators, teaching staff, and parents.

Understanding the factors that influence institutional commitment will support the government and Ministry of Education in making informed decisions to improve the work environment for staff. It will also contribute to addressing the issue of brain drain in Nigeria's public university system by improving staff retention and institutional loyalty.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Institutional Commitment**

According to Ajie, Soyemi, and Omotunde (2015), institutional commitment refers to an individual's identification with, and level of engagement in, an organization. It reflects an individual's attitude toward the organization's goals, objectives, and values, as well as their intention to remain with the institution. It is also described as an attitude involving employees' loyalty, internalization of the institution's goals and objectives, and willingness to contribute to achieving them (Ajie, Soyemi, & Omotunde, 2015; Atak, 2011; Altindis, 2011).

Institutional commitment is the level of allegiance an employee feels toward their employer. Donald, Lucia, and Victor (2016) describe it as the extent to which an individual commits to an organization's practices, influencing both their behavior and attitudes. Employees with higher levels of institutional commitment tend to be more productive, loyal, responsible, and satisfied (Ajie, Soyemi, & Omotunde, 2015).

Institutionally committed staff typically have strong attendance records, adhere to organizational policies, and exhibit lower turnover rates. Their commitment often surpasses expectations, self-discipline, or workplace conditions. In the absence of commitment, productivity diminishes, obstacles become insurmountable, and opportunities are lost (Winnie, Judy, & Jophelyn, 2018).

Akanbi and Itiola (2013) define institutional commitment as the degree to which employees identify with their organization and are dedicated to contributing to the achievement of its goals. Similarly, Nweke, Okoye, and Dike-Aghanya (2021) highlight employees' willingness to continue their association with the organization and invest considerable effort toward institutional success. Institutional commitment encompasses workers' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors toward their institutions (Gorgulu & Akilli, 2017). It is reflected in employee loyalty, dedication to organizational principles, and motivation to contribute to productivity and success (Adewoyin, Opeke, Ikonne, & Madokoma, 2020). It represents the emotional bond linking employees to their organization and is a key driver of institutional effectiveness (Fako, Nkhukhu-Orlando, Wilson, Forcheh, & Linn, 2018).

Kaplan and Kaplan (2018) emphasized institutional commitment as a core concept in industrial and organizational psychology, particularly due to its association with variables such as

goal setting, self-efficacy, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee turnover (Adewoyin et al., 2020).

Three major forms of institutional commitment have been identified: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. According to Popoola and Adeyeye (2021), affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to and identification with the organization. It is a psychological bond where employees willingly dedicate themselves to and feel responsible for their organization (Friday & Ugu, 2019; Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012).

Continuance commitment reflects employees' perception of the costs associated with leaving the organization (Popoola & Adeyeye, 2021). It relates to the material or emotional investments made, and the potential disadvantages of leaving, such as loss of income, effort, or time already committed (Uchenna & Ayeerun, 2013; Nwibere, 2014). Varsha and Monika (2012) add that continuance commitment develops when employees feel they would lose significant investments or lack viable alternatives.

Normative commitment, as described by Agada and Zep-Obipi (2017) and Allen and Meyer (1996), is a sense of moral obligation to remain with the organization, often due to the benefits the employee has received. It reflects a feeling of indebtedness and a belief that staying is the right course of action.

## **Theoretical Review**

### Meyer and Allen's Theory of Institutional Commitment

According to Tutei (2017), the institutional commitment theory developed by Canadian scholars Meyer and Allen in 1996 (Shurbagi & Zahari, 2013) is the leading framework in commitment research. The theory builds on earlier work by Howard Becker. Unlike Becker's side-bet theory, Meyer and Allen proposed that commitment should be assessed through employees' perceived investments (side bets) rather than solely through attitudinal measures (Irefin & Mohammed, 2014).

Meyer and Allen's model suggests that employees remain committed because of emotional attachment, perceived costs of leaving, or moral obligations. The "side-bets" refer to accumulated resources or benefits an employee would forfeit if they left the institution (Tutei, 2017; Shurbagi & Zahari, 2013).

### Goal Setting Theory

Locke and Latham (1990), pioneers of goal-setting theory, integrated findings from over 400 studies into a comprehensive framework on goals and task performance. The theory posits that human behavior is purposeful and guided by goals. Goal-setting applies not only to conscious action but also characterizes behavior across living organisms (Latham & Locke, 2007).

According to Locke and Latham (2002), effective goal-setting requires goals to be specific and challenging, and influenced by moderating factors within an organizational context. They emphasized that as long as a person is committed to the goal, has the ability to achieve it, and does not face conflicting objectives, there is a positive, linear relationship between goal difficulty and task performance.

The theory identifies two cognitive determinants of behavior: values and goals (intentions). Goals influence behavior through mechanisms such as attention, effort, persistence, and strategy. Values, often experienced emotionally, create desires aligned with goal-directed behavior.

## Empirical Evidence

Udofia (2017) examined career advancement as a correlate of institutional commitment among library personnel in universities in South-South Nigeria and reported a high level of affective commitment. In contrast, Oyovwevotu (2017), in a study on institutional support and employee commitment in public university libraries in Nigeria, found a low level of affective commitment. Nazneen and Mohammad (2017) studied the impact of affective, continuance, and normative commitment on career advancement among faculty members of technical universities and reported a moderate level of affective commitment.

Tutei (2017) found a high level of affective commitment among both teaching and non-teaching staff. However, continuance commitment was not strongly endorsed, with many staff disagreeing that it influenced institutional performance. Normative commitment was also found to be low.

Mayowa-Adebara (2018) explored the impact of leadership style, institutional justice, and human capital development on employee commitment in Nigerian university libraries and also found a moderate level of affective commitment. Similarly, Mayowa-Adebara and Aina (2016) reported that library staff in Nigerian universities exhibited a high level of organizational commitment.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of both academic and non-academic staff of public universities in Southwestern Nigeria, totaling 49,804 staff members—14,756 academic staff and 35,048 non-academic staff.

A total sample of 1,800 participants (1,200 non-teaching staff and 600 academic staff) was selected from public universities in the region using a multistage sampling procedure. Three states were selected from the study area through stratified sampling. From each of the selected states, two public universities (one federal and one state-owned) were purposively selected based on their ownership status.

Within each university, five faculties were randomly selected using a simple random sampling technique, resulting in a total of 30 faculties. From these faculties and administrative units, 40 non-teaching staff and 20 academic staff were selected using a convenience sampling technique. The non-teaching staff included personnel from the Vice-Chancellor's office, Registrar's office, Bursar's office, as well as departments of Works, Health, Transportation, Security, Library, and Exams and Records. In total, 1,200 non-teaching staff and 600 academic staff participated in the study.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to the respondents. Two adapted instruments were used:

- *Questionnaire on Psychosocial Predictors of Institutional Commitment for Non-Teaching Staff (PSPIC-NT)*, and
- *Questionnaire on Psychosocial Predictors of Institutional Commitment for Academic Staff (PSPIC-AS)*.

The Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical technique was employed to test the study's hypothesis.

## RESULT AND FINDINGS

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant influence of demographic variables (sex, cadre, age and work experience) on institutional commitment of the staff.

**Table 1: Factorial Analysis of Variance Test of Significant Influence of Sex, Cadre, Age and Work Experience) on Institutional Commitment of the Staff**

<i>Source of Variance</i>	<i>Type III SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Corrected Model	6827.968	48	142.249	1.768	.001
Intercept	278027.552	1	278027.552	3455.036	.000
Sex	225.096	1	225.096	2.797	.095
Category	348.651	1	348.651	4.333	.038
Age	643.446	4	160.861	1.999	.092
Experience	167.060	3	55.687	.692	.557
Sex * Cadre	90.198	1	90.198	1.121	.290
Sex * Age	218.144	4	54.536	.678	.607
Sex * Experience	517.452	3	172.484	2.143	.093
Cadre * Age	891.875	4	222.969	2.771	.026
Cadre * Experience	852.961	3	284.320	3.533	.014
Age * Experience	338.949	6	56.492	.702	.648
Sex * Cadre * Age	225.454	4	56.364	.700	.592
Sex * Cadre * Experience	25.206	2	12.603	.157	.855
Sex * Age * Experience	395.107	4	98.777	1.227	.297
Cadre * Age * Experience	435.841	4	108.960	1.354	.248
Sex * Cadre * Age * Experience	521.395	4	130.349	1.620	.167
Error	116762.301	1451	80.470		
Total	3609800.000	1500			
Corrected Total	123590.269	1499			

*SS*= Sum of Squares, *MS* = Mean Square, *M* =Mean, *SE* = Standard Error

Table 1 presents a factorial analysis of variance conducted to examine the influence of sex, cadre, age, and work experience on the institutional commitment of university staff. The analysis revealed no statistically significant main effect of sex,  $F(1, 1451) = 2.797, p = .095$ ; age,  $F(4, 1451) = 1.999, p = .092$ ; or work experience,  $F(3, 1451) = 0.692, p = .557$  on institutional commitment. However, a statistically significant main effect of cadre was found,  $F(1, 1451) = 4.333, p = .038$ , indicating that institutional commitment varied by staff cadre.

The mean institutional commitment scores for teaching staff ( $M = 47.59, SE = 0.82$ ) and non-teaching staff ( $M = 48.07, SE = 0.65$ ) suggest that non-teaching staff exhibited a significantly higher level of institutional commitment than their teaching counterparts.

Furthermore, significant interaction effects were found between cadre and age,  $F(4, 1451) = 2.771, p = .026$ , and between cadre and work experience,  $F(3, 1451) = 3.533, p = .014$ . These findings suggest that the influence of cadre on institutional commitment varies across different age groups and levels of work experience.

Nevertheless, since the stated hypothesis focused on the main effects of the four demographic variables, and only one (cadre) was found to have a significant main effect, it can be concluded that while sex, age, and work experience did not significantly influence institutional commitment, cadre had a significant moderating effect on the institutional commitment of university staff.

### Analysis of Interaction Effects on Institutional Commitment

Table 1 also examines the interaction effects of sex, age, cadre, and work experience on institutional commitment among staff in Nigerian public universities. While some main effects were non-significant, several key interaction terms revealed important insights. Notably, the interaction between cadre and age was statistically significant,  $F(4, 1451) = 2.771, p = .026$ , as was the interaction between cadre and work experience,  $F(3, 1451) = 3.533, p = .014$ . These results indicate that the effects of age and work experience on institutional commitment vary significantly by staff cadre (academic vs. non-academic). Academic staff with increased age or longer work experience tend to exhibit higher levels of commitment, likely due to greater autonomy, academic recognition, and clearer career trajectories. In contrast, non-academic staff may not experience similar benefits from tenure or aging, resulting in comparatively lower levels of institutional commitment.

Furthermore, a marginally significant interaction between sex and work experience was observed,  $F(3, 1451) = 2.143, p = .093$ , suggesting a potential differential effect of work experience on institutional commitment across genders. Although not statistically significant at the conventional  $p < .05$  threshold, this result highlights possible gender-based disparities in how tenure influences commitment. Male staff may benefit more consistently from increased work experience, while female staff might encounter institutional or social constraints that limit the positive effects of tenure on their commitment levels.

Overall, the model's significance,  $F(48, 1451) = 1.768, p = .001$ , confirms that these interaction terms collectively explain a meaningful proportion of the variance in staff commitment. The findings underscore the importance of policies that consider these complex interdependencies—particularly the role of cadre in shaping how age and work experience influence institutional commitment.

### FINDINGS

The findings showed that:

1. Most of the universities' staff in Southwestern Nigeria exhibited a moderate level of institutional commitment while majority of the HODs also rated the institutional commitment level of their staff as moderate.
2. While there was no significant influence of demographic variables of sex, age and work experience on institutional commitment of the staff, cadre exerted a significant influence on institutional commitment of the staff.
3. The effect of age and work experience on institutional commitment depends significantly on staff cadre (academic vs. non-academic).

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the hypothesis testing revealed a significant influence of the demographic variable of cadre on staff institutional commitment. In contrast, there was no significant influence of the demographic variables of sex, age, and work experience on institutional commitment. These findings suggest that institutional commitment is not a one-size-fits-all concept; rather, it is shaped by a combination of personal and professional characteristics. Understanding the effects of these demographic factors is crucial for university management in developing targeted strategies to enhance staff commitment.

The influence of cadre indicates that the relationship between institutional commitment and various organizational factors (such as work environment, leadership, and interpersonal trust)



is significantly moderated by staff cadre but not by sex, age, or work experience. Each demographic variable introduces unique dynamics in how staff members experience and demonstrate commitment. For example, it could be assumed that male and female staff may experience institutional commitment differently due to gender-based expectations and societal roles. Female staff may face unique challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, potentially influencing their commitment levels. Conversely, male staff may be more focused on career progression or job security, which could also shape their commitment to the institution. Understanding these gender-specific nuances can help universities develop strategies that meet the distinct needs of both male and female staff. However, the present study found that sex did not significantly predict staff institutional commitment.

The findings from the interaction analysis align with Meyer and Allen's theory of institutional commitment, particularly the continuance commitment component, which is derived from Becker's side-bet theory. According to this theory, employees remain committed to an institution partly because of the investments they have made over time—such as tenure, experience, and age—which they risk losing if they leave. This perspective helps explain the significant cadre  $\times$  age and cadre  $\times$  experience interaction effects observed in the analysis. For academic staff, increasing age and experience likely represent greater accumulated investments (e.g., academic recognition, professional status, institutional roles), thereby strengthening their commitment. In contrast, non-academic staff may perceive fewer returns on their investments, resulting in comparatively weaker commitment despite similar levels of tenure. Thus, the analysis provides empirical support for Meyer and Allen's view that institutional commitment is influenced not only by attitudinal factors but also by rational calculations regarding what might be lost upon exiting the organization.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that university staff demonstrated a moderate level of institutional commitment. Since institutional commitment is one of the competitive advantages for corporate success and productivity, this finding is valuable for managers of organizations and institutions.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance staff institutional commitment:

1. **Provision of Professional Development Opportunities:**

University authorities should provide more training, mentorship, and promotion opportunities for staff. Establishing clear career advancement pathways will increase staff engagement and strengthen their commitment to the institution.

2. **Promotion of Gender Equity:**

University administrators, in particular, and management teams in general, should make deliberate efforts to prevent gender discrimination in policies such as recruitment, promotion, and staff appointments.

3. **Adoption of Fair Employment Practices:**

Equal opportunity, fairness, and merit-based engagement of the workforce should be prioritized. These practices are likely to enhance institutional commitment and, consequently, improve employee performance.

4. **Support for Staff Development:**

University administrators and government agencies should make adequate provisions for staff development programs. Staff should also be encouraged to participate actively in

such programs to update and improve their knowledge and skills. Regular training and mentoring opportunities can significantly enhance institutional commitment.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

Future research could investigate how specific aspects of the work environment—such as leadership style, communication patterns, and staff autonomy—contribute to the different dimensions of institutional commitment (affective, continuance, and normative). Additionally, comparative studies could examine the level of institutional commitment among staff in private institutions and public institutions across other geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

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