

Career Structures and Staff Performance in Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria (2017-2022)

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Nigerian public universities have become known for incessant industrial actions that disrupt academic activities and staff performance. The reasons adduced for the unpleasant situation are the generally poor conditions of work such as inadequate infrastructure; poor remuneration and workload. Despite the tough working conditions, the staff of the Akwa Ibom State University continue to perform their duties, resulting in a relatively peaceful and stable academic environment. This study was undertaken to unravel how career structures enhance staff performance. The theoretical framework for this study was predicated mainly on the “In Praise of Hierarchy” theory. The study raised three research questions which sought to establish the relationship between career structure and staff performance. The methodology involved a survey instrument and stratified sampling technique to select respondents from the study population of 996. The statistical tools used for the data analysis and test of the hypotheses produced statistically significant numbers which established a positive relationship between the independent research variables (job classification; career ladder and career development) and staff performance. The study further revealed that the aspiration of moving to the top in one’s chosen career as offered by the career ladder motivated staff towards improved performance. Evidence of the positive influence on staff performance by career structures was seen in the results of the three dimensions of the performance indices adopted in the study which showed an annual average total staff promotion of 57.26%, highly satisfactory customer satisfaction and a significantly low number of disciplinary actions (2.69% of total staff) for six years (2017-2022). The study recommended harnessing the benefits of career ladders and transforming them into a systematic communication tool which inspires and enhances a sustainable performance model with near-zero interruption to the academic calendar.

Keywords: Career Structures, Performance, Job Classification, Career Ladder, Career Development, hierarchical structures

INTRODUCTION

According to Ikeji in Duru et al (2001), the major task of personnel management is to develop suitable organizational structures, manage them with the right employees and ensure that such employees have the opportunity to make their best contributions for their good and that of the organization, without which organizational success will prove difficult or impossible. The statement underscores the imperative of having appropriate “structures” that the organization will now fit its personnel. One of these structures is the Career structure. Ikeji’s view pinpoints several relationships – career structures and staffing, career structures and performance, career structures and employee motivation and career structures and organizational continuity or survival.

The human resources process can also be divided into two central parts – acquisition (recruitment) and retention. While recruitment is seasonal, activities related to retention are all year and every year. At the heart of retention activities is performance management, which is the aggregation of all organizational activities to motivate, incentivize, supervise, control and measure staff performance continuously towards the accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives. These activities influence staff behaviour with a strong potential to make or mar the organization. Persons with interest in human resources management and organizational behaviour need to continually study this relationship to provide new insights and generate relevant knowledge that advances learnings in the area.

Major Content Theories which are also referred to as Needs Theories such as those of Abraham Maslow's 1943 Hierarchy of Needs, David McClelland's 1966 Achievement Motivation, Victor Vroom's 1964 Expectancy and Clayton Alderfer's 1972 Existence, Relatedness and Growth theory postulate that men are born with the inherent desire to achieve more and attain higher heights (Sharma et al, 2011; Natemeyer & Gilberg, 2011). It is, therefore, no surprise to find organizations designing career structures that fit into the dictates of these theories, enabling employees to achieve their aspirations on the other hand and enabling the organizations to achieve their objectives, on the other.

Career structures in the University are a major human resource system suspected to have a positive relationship with performance. However, it seemed not to have received in-depth and wide scholarly attention. While much has been written on related personnel management practices, research on career structures and their relationship with staff performance is almost non-existent. This research study is aimed at filling that gap.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Public Universities in Nigeria are bedevilled with poor working conditions which have resulted in incessant strike actions that impact negatively on staff performance in recent years. Various efforts embarked upon by staff and management representatives to ameliorate the situation which for the most part concentrated on improving wages and providing needed infrastructure have not yielded much desired results. While the problem is most prevalent with the Federal Universities, the state-owned universities have not necessarily fared better.

If public universities in Nigeria must deliver on their mandate, its staff must be properly motivated and if salaries and wages alone have not completely achieved this objective, further research is needed as to what more can be done to motivate staff towards a sustainable performance model that will minimise disruption to the academic calendar and research studies. Can career structures come to the rescue, especially against the background of the Government's inability to provide adequate funding for the university? While there is a plethora of literature on many personnel management systems and theories to motivate staff towards improved performance, empirical research on career structures is almost non-existent. Specifically, no such study was found to have been done for Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria. Therefore, this study was undertaken to proffer solutions that will stem the frequent disruption of staff performance in public universities in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to examine how the three key variables of career structures namely: job classification, career ladder and career development enhance staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between job classification and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University?
2. What is the value of career ladder on staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University?
3. To what extent is career development related to staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University?

HYPOTHESIS

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between job classification and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between career ladder and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between career development and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career Structure

The term career has different connotations. It can refer to a job for which one is trained (Ivanovic & Collin, 2006); it can also refer to one's line of work, occupation or speciality (Rothwell et al, 2012). Likewise, the word structure has even a larger connotation depending on the academic subject under examination. For example, the word structure in engineering is different from what it means in medicine and indeed human resources. As an English word, the synonyms for structure include construction, building and arrangement. It is obvious which of the synonyms fits into human resources, which is our focus. What then do we mean when the two words – career and structure are combined? An examination of the following literature would be of some value:

Noe et al (2019), aver that workflow takes place within the context of an organization's structure. According to them, while there might be a vast number of ways to design an organization's work structure, the goal or intended purpose is an essential guide. For example, an organization can choose to have a flat organization with an authority base widely spread at the bottom or a centralized organization with authority concentrated on a few hands or one man at the top (centralized authority). If an organization's goal is built around teams, it will have several divisions as opposed to organizations built around functions which will have departments. On very rare occasions, the goal might be to empower employees. In this case, the organization will set up work structures that enable a particular division to take responsibility for meeting the demands of a whole geographical area or a defined group of customers or clients. As a consequence, that division takes responsibility for all issues and activities from that area as opposed to performing a narrowly defined function for everyone irrespective of where they come from (Noe, et al, 2019). This perspective underpins the necessity for careful thought by the board and management of the organization in deciding the type of work and career structure to design, as both are strongly interrelated.

In the view of Bernardin (2007), "career as we once knew it – as a series of upward moves, with steadily increasing income, power, status and security – has died" (p. 227). He opined that the concept of career in the 21st century has gone beyond chronological movements, as it now includes continuous learning on the part of human resources managers and their organizations towards the designing of career structures that will enhance staff retention. Bernardin argues that organizations pursue this objective by designing career

development systems that are focused on achieving a balance between individual employee career needs and “organizational requirements”. Bernardin further states that the term ‘career’ has an internal and external focus. The internal focus is the individual’s perspective while the external focus deals with the way organizations design and implement their career programmes for staff. Our focus in this study is on the external component.

Boxall et al (2007), while reflecting on “strategic human resources management systems and the problem of internal fit” cited over twenty empirical research papers which concluded that there is a strong relationship between human resources management activities such as policies and practices and organizational-level outcomes such as turnover, productivity, and performance. The studies further established that the combined package of human resources practices which are coherent and internally aligned (rather than an individual practice or system) are powerful connections which create positive organizational outcomes and competitive advantage. The work of Delery (1998), which specifically focused on “Issues of Fit in Strategic Human Resource Management” is worth mentioning among the lot.

Macmillan Online Dictionary (2023) defined career structure as a system for making regular progress by an employee by moving to a more important job or higher position each time. The word ‘system’ in this definition is the synonym for ‘structures’ referred to by Duru et al, (2001), which the authors opined, must be manned with the right employees and provide the opportunity for making their best contributions for their good and that of the organization, without which organizational success will prove difficult or impossible. Duru et al’s opinion raises a fundamental question. What “structures” are to be manned by suitable employees, to allow them to make the best of their contributions while guaranteeing long-term continuity for the employees and their employers? This paper conceptualises career structures as one of the strategic human resources systems that can enhance staff performance. The review of various literature on the subject indicates job classification, career ladder and career development as the proxies of career structures which enhance staff performance.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF THE PROXIES OF CAREER STRUCTURE

Job Classification

Job classification, according to Sharma et al (2011) is the grouping together of job positions into broad classes based on work characteristics. The authors explain that the field of activity, the degree of supervision required, the quantum of authority attached to a post, the responsibility attached to the post (for example, Computer Server/Security Administrator), the simplicity or difficulty of the job and the qualification required, are some of the key factors that determine job classification. Job classification is a tool that assists in the execution of Human Resource (HR) related functions such as recruitment, appraisal and job description (Converse & Oswald, 2004).

According to Vulpen (2020), job classification involves the process of determining the relative rank of different jobs within organizations. Vulpen further states that the hierarchical position in a job is classified as underlies many Human Resources decisions. If, therefore, the classification is wrong, the resultant decisions will be wrong. According to Heathfield (2019), job classification is a system for the demarcation of jobs, responsibilities, tasks, authority levels and salary grades within an organization objectively. It is objective because it is usually conceptualized, designed and deployed by the organization before seeking individuals who fit into the structure in terms of the skills, educational qualifications and experience required for each class.

To underscore the importance of job classification, Henry (2010) describes the activity as a core tenet of the public service system. So important is the concept of job classification that nations enact laws around it.

For example, the United States of America has a law known as the “Classification Act” that establishes job categories, grade levels and pay structure.

According to Ivanovic & Collin (2006), job classification is “the process of describing jobs listed in various work groups” (p. 146). This definition is very instructive, because of its view of job classification as a process. Whenever the concept of process is discussed, considerations are given to method, procedure, pattern and practice. This implies that there is a method and procedure for arriving at job classification. As a human resource practice, just like any of its sister practices, the goal of job classification is to ensure the arrangement of jobs and positions in such a way that it enhances the efficient and effective utilization of staff towards the performance of organizational tasks. Job classification cannot be regarded as a simplistic human resources ritual but a tool for positioning staff for maximum productivity and the smooth running of the organization. It helps to build specialization, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

Career Ladders

Career ladders are referred to by some authors as career paths (Robert 2019; Bernardin, 2007). To Robert (2019), it is the formal process that allows employees to advance their careers to higher levels as regards responsibility or authority and salary, such that once they meet certain criteria, they are eligible to move into higher-level roles within an organization. Career ladders are more widely used in formalized, large organizations and government establishments. Bernardin (2007) sees the career ladder as a series of steps (positions) mapped out by organizations for employees to follow in their chosen work line or job class. When described as a career path, it could include vertical or lateral movements and cross-functional moves. When used as a career ladder, it typically involves a horizontal move from the lowest to the highest, literally as a man climbs up a physical ladder. Human resource managers and trainers must, therefore, be careful and clear with their intent and purpose whenever they use the term.

For Ivanovic & Collin (2006), the career ladder is the “sequence of jobs within an organisation or department, starting with the most junior and ending with the most senior, through which an employee can advance in the course of their working life” (p. 40).

Therefore, the career ladder could be conceptualised as the system through which employees grow and move from one grade level to another, usually in a hierarchical manner, up to a certain designated limit allowable in that class of career.

Career Development

Because of the tendency to confuse training with development, as the two words are frequently used interchangeably, Bernardin (2007) defined the two words separately. He defined development as “learning opportunities designed to help employees grow” while training refers to “any attempt to improve employee performance on a currently held job or one related to it”. Career development then, can be defined as the learning opportunity offered to an employee by the management of his/her organization to prepare him/her for higher positions in that organization. It is empirically different from training because training aims at improving performance in the current position, while career development aims at exposing and preparing the employee for higher positions in the organization. Mehdi Khosrow-Pour (2012) asserts that career development is one of the three items in Human Resources Development that enhances individual, group and organizational effectiveness; the other two are training and development and organizational development.

Ivanovic & Collin, (2006) view career development as the planning of an employee’s future career in an organisation, while Gartner.com (n. d) views the concept as “the support an organization provides to

employee's professional growth and movement to a new position". The planning involving training programmes and developmental opportunities is carried out within the framework of the other two variables of career structure namely: job classification and career ladder, to retain and motivate them to higher levels of performance and contributions to the organization's objectives.

Regarding how career development is practised at Akwa Ibom State University, it is obvious that the institutional model is not in tandem with "the planning of the employees' future career" as opined by Ivanovic & Collin, (2006) but the provision of support to employees' effort at professional growth and advancement to a new position as opined by Gartner.com.

Staff Performance

Bernardin (2007) defined performance as "the record of outcomes produced on specified job functions or activities during a specified period" (p. 173). The problem with this definition is that many job functions and activities, especially in the public sector, are routine, repetitive and generic so it is difficult to measure the outcomes. Whilst it is easy to measure the outcome of the efforts of a sales representative, it is not easy to measure the outcome of the effort of the accountant or human resources administrator in the office; yet their performance must be measured. Therefore, a different approach is needed to define the concept.

Marchington & Wilkinson (1997) suggest three criteria which combine psychological, sociological and business management approaches:

1. Traits: An evaluation of employee loyalty, dependability and leadership skills.
2. Behaviours: An evaluation of how well employees perform their duties including persuasion skills, listening skills, and sensitivity.
3. Outcomes: An evaluation of the number of completed tasks, targets met and the like.

However, the authors were quick to mention that their approach does not apply to all situations. Therefore, the responsibility for deciding on which criteria to use depends on the circumstance of the job and the skills and experience of the human resources managers, whose job it is to advise management on which criteria to use.

Indices of Staff Performance

According to Talbot (2010), performance indices are a minefield because of the many definitions, approaches and complexities. In many cases, the subject of study, the background of the scholar and the object of measurement influence the final adopted indices. For example, in public policy studies, performance is often viewed in terms of results or outcomes. Whilst stating that performance measurement and performance indicators are the same, Talbot (2010), identified inputs, outputs and outcomes as two key prominent indices of performance in public organizations. The author described inputs as the resources expended in producing the outputs while outputs, on the other hand, are the products and services produced by the inputs. Outcomes are defined as the impacts or consequences of the outputs on the recipient community, the environment or even the dispensing community. Impact here is measured from a social perspective such as happiness, peace, law and order and the like. As it relates to this study, the measurement of staff performance shall be from the point of view of outcomes. The adopted approach for measuring performance is in agreement with one of the views of Bernardin (2007) that performance is "the record of outcomes produced on specified job functions or activities during a specified period". Consequently, this study adopts three key indices of performance: customer satisfaction; disciplinary actions and rewards and recognition.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In Praise of Hierarchy

The theoretical framework for this study is the “In Praise of Hierarchy” theory by Elliott Jacques (see Jacques, 1990). The theory asserts that organizational structures based on hierarchy, are the most natural, most resilient and appropriate for large organizations whose staff strength is in the thousands. It is worth mentioning that hierarchical structures are sometimes viewed as bureaucratic structures due to their similarities, particularly the presence of many layers of management and reporting relationship, from the most senior, down to the shop floor. However, hierarchy is just one of the aspects of bureaucratic structures and denotes some ordered levels of reporting relationships in a pyramid format (Grimsley, 2021; Manker, 2021).

One of the salient points established by Jacques’ In Praise of Hierarchy theory is that just as engineering and construction firms depend on the structural components (load carriers) for the long-term durability and safety of high-rise buildings, so are organizations. They are non-physical buildings which require sound structural designs to ensure their long-term safety and durability. The theory makes some important revelations. The first is that organizational structures designed in hierarchical format are the ‘hardest’ designs for the long-term safety and sustainability of ‘large organizations’. Encinas (2022) buttressed this point while stating that structural designs are the basis for determining the safety of buildings as they provide all the essential information related to all the major aspects of the building in terms of segments, materials, quantity and quality.

The second point made by Jacques’ theory is that tasks are performed in organizations in a “series of steps or categories” which flow naturally in a hierarchical manner. This revelation correlates with the obvious knowledge that career structures are arranged hierarchically.

The third point is accountability, which is a major pursuit in organizations. Accountability is a pervasive law and a law enforcement agent that helps organizations hold staff at all levels accountable for their actions and inactions. It ensures discipline and responsibility in the daily discharge of assigned tasks. Jacques argues that no other form of organizational structure can be successfully deployed by large organizations and “yet preserve unambiguous accountability for the work they [employees] do”. “In Praise of Hierarchy” makes it clear that accountability and authority are attributes of hierarchy. Authority to perform work is given to individuals and accountability for work is done at that level. Staff accountability is pursued because it increases effectiveness (Pfiffner cited in Rabin et al, 2007) and enables citizens and consumers to hold specific public officials accountable for their actions (Goodsell, 2004).

Hierarchical organizational structures support effective task deployment in quantity and quality, performance and value addition by the man below and the next man on top! “In praise of hierarchy” is clear in its assertion that a career structure based on hierarchy is the best system to deploy towards the enhancement of staff performance, for as Jacques (1990, p.8) puts it:

Hierarchy is the only effective organizational form of deploying people and tasks at complementary levels, where people can do the tasks assigned to them, and where the people in any given layer can add value to the work of those in the layer below them. Hierarchy is the best structure for getting work done in big organizations. Trying to raise efficiency and morale without first setting this structure to rights is like trying to lay bricks without mortar. No amount of exhortation, attitudinal engineering, incentive planning, or even leadership will have any permanent effect unless we understand what hierarchy is and why and how it works.

Jacques (1990), concludes that after being in use for over 3,000 years, hierarchical structures have come to stay and will remain the only way to structure unified working systems with hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of employees. This theory – “In praise of hierarchy” though published in 1990, is adapted for this

research since the two main variables of this study: staff career structure and performance, are amply covered in its discussion. Jacques' argument that when an organization's hierarchy is "properly structured", it unleashes energy, creativity, and productivity and boosts morale resonates with the interest of this research, that is, career structure that enhances performance in a tertiary institution like the Akwa Ibom State University.

Career Structures at Akwa Ibom State University

The career structure at Akwa Ibom State University comprises job classes, career ladder and growth (development) path for academic and non-academic staff. The academic category consists of teaching and library staff. The teaching staff is a seven-layer (7) structure beginning from Graduate Assistant, through Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor. Similarly, the Library group has a seven-layer (7) structure, starting with the Graduate Library Assistant and terminating at the University Librarian. To build a career in the academic category, a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree is required. To move up the ladder, higher academic qualifications are required (Akwa Ibom State University, 2018).

On the other hand, the Senior Administrative and Technical Staff (SATS) component comprises 50 work groups headed by Directors and Deputy Registrars. The minimum entry qualification into the SATS category is an Ordinary National Diploma (OND). Just like their academic counterparts, higher academic qualifications are required to grow to higher levels. The Junior Staff cadre has 35 work groups and requires a First School Leaving Certificate or the West African School Certificate or its equivalent as its minimum entry.

In the university, there are two prime positions – the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar, the latter being the head of all non-academic staff while the former is the overall head of the institution inclusive of the Registrar. The growth path for non-academic staff (SATS) terminates at the Registrar while that of the academic staff terminates at that of the Vice Chancellor. To become a Vice-Chancellor or Registrar is by appointment. However, to become eligible for appointment as a Vice Chancellor, the staff must have been a Dean of Faculty, while a non-academic staff must have risen to the rank of a Deputy Registrar or Director before being eligible for appointment as a Registrar. The office of the Vice Chancellor and Registrar is tenured (Akwa Ibom State University, 2018).

Staff Performance in Akwa Ibom State University

The review of staff performance evaluation in Akwa Ibom State University shows a very comprehensive and competitive annual appraisal exercise being practiced in the organization. A case in point is that the exercise does not only review the extent to which the staff accomplish assigned duties but also goes ahead to test whether they were provided the required resources to perform their jobs. Part II, Subsection 1(c) of the 'Appraisal form' for SATS specifically requires staff to provide a written feedback as to whether they were "properly equipped professionally, technically and administratively to perform the duties assigned" to them. Where the response is negative, they are also required to explain the efforts they and their supervisors made to close the gap (Akwa Ibom State University, 2018).

For the academic staff, Section A, items 21-30, of the Appraisal Form continually evaluates academic and professional qualifications obtained, work outputs, work attitudes, communication skills, relationship with superiors, colleagues and service recipients, character, work habits, leadership demonstration, rewards and sanctions, involvement in corporate social responsibilities outside the institution and the relationship between individual accomplishment with departmental/organizational goals and vision. Every staff is entitled to an annual increment after the performance appraisal except he/she had a disciplinary case in the year

under review (Akwa Ibom State University, 2018).

Performance management system in Akwa Ibom State University conforms to some of the best practices enunciated in our literature review such as those of (Bernardin, 2007), which entails the involvement of employee representatives and those of Marchington and Wilkinson (1997), which involves the combination of psychological, sociological and business management approach where the personality trait, behaviours and work outcomes are measured.

Table 1: Performance Indices in Akwa Ibom State University and Results for the Period 2017-2022

S/N	Indices	Definition	Measurement	Scorecard 2017-2022	Result
1	Customer satisfaction	Students' reaction to staff service delivery	Number of violent agitations against individuals or staff due to poor performance or poor service delivery.	None	Highly Satisfactory
2	Disciplinary actions	Sanctions and punishment meted to staff found wanting in the execution of duties.	Number/% of staff given disciplinary action.	104 (2.69%) out of a total of 3,876 staff reviewed from 2017-2022	Highly Satisfactory
3	Rewards and recognition	The elevation of staff to higher salary positions due to satisfactory performance	Number/percentage of promotions given by management to staff	Total of 2,219 staff out of 3,876 (average of 57.26 per annum) for the period 2017-2022 3	Satisfactory

Source: Researcher's field data (2022).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design and used the stratified sampling technique to select which offered the opportunity to assess information from a significant sample of the study population of 996. The study population comprised 454 Academic staff members drawn from all eight (8) faculties and 542 Senior Administrative/Technical (non-academic) Staff members spread across two campuses of the University at the time of the study (Akwa Ibom State University, 2022). A total of 285 respondents were determined as adequate for the sample size using Taro Yamane's formula. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources namely: questionnaires, interviews, textbooks, journals, the internet and records from Akwa Ibom State University. All Hypotheses were tested at 95% $\alpha=0.05$ level of significance with a p-value less than 0.05 signifying statistical significance.

RESULTS

Table 2: Relationship between the Research Variables

Variables	Staff performance	Job classification	Career ladder	Career development
Staff performance	1			
Job Classification	0.078	1		
	(0.016)			

Career ladder	0.096	0.007	1	
	(0.010)	(0.021)		
Career Development	0.056	0.153	-0.057	1
	(0.021)	(0.01)	(0.021)	

Source: Author’s Computation (2022).

Results in Table 2 show that job classification, career ladder and career development have positive relationships with staff performance as can be seen in their P-values of 0.016, 0.010 and 0.021 respectively, which are less than 0.05, with their corresponding r-values of 0.078, 0.096, 0.056, 0.153 and -0.057 respectively.

Table 3: The Analysis of Variance Table showing the relationship between a dependent variable and independent variables

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Cal	F-Critical	Significant
Regression	6.96	3	2.32	1.642	0.24	0.018
Residual	385.617	273	1.413			
Total	392.578	276				

Dependent Variable: Y

Predictors (constant), Results in Table 3 reveal the F-calculated of 1.642 with a P-value of 0.018 as against the F-critical of 0.24 at 0.05 level of significance. The results show that $F_{cal} > F_{cri}$ ($1.642 > 0.24$), indicating a significant relationship between the dependent variable (staff performance) and independent variables (job classification, career ladder and career development).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis One:

For hypothesis one which states that there is no significant relationship between job classification and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University, Table 4 shows the breakdown of the test statements and analysis.

Table 4: Test Statements and Analyzed Responses to Hypothesis One

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	U	Total
Q1	Job classification enhances the performance of AKSU staff.	133 (48.01%)	134 (48.38%)	8 (2.89%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.72%)	277
Q2	Job classification enhances accountability, specialization, efficiency and effectiveness in staff utilization.	154 (55.60%)	118 (42.60%)	5 (1.81%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.36%)	277

Source: Author’s Computation (2022)

An analysis of the test statements and the responses revealed the contrary, as 267 respondents, that is 133 who answered ‘Strongly Agree’ (SA) and 134 who agreed (A), representing 96% of the respondents in Question 1 attributed their performance to job classification, while 272 respondents, that is 154 who

answered ‘Strongly Agree’ (SA) and 118 who ‘Agree’ (A), representing 98% of the respondents in Question 2, stated that the job classification system in Akwa Ibom State University builds specialization, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, as it precludes indiscriminate movement of staff from one job class to another. Conversion to a different job class is only allowed on special occasions, after thorough scrutiny and approval at the level of the University’s top management committee. Data from the Human Resources Department (Akwa Ibom State University, 2022) showed that only 42 staff got converted to different job classes during the conversion exercise undertaken between 2017-2022, which is indicative of the University’s strict compliance with its policy on job classification. This promotes specialization, efficiency, effectiveness, staff growth and performance. As a result, the employees are transformed into specialists who can accomplish more tasks for the organization more efficiently and effectively. These findings, alongside the analyzed statistical result in Table 2 with a statistically significant p-value of 0.016 at a 95% confidence interval show that there is a positive relationship between job classification and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

The findings are in agreement with that of Ele et al (2020) who concluded that job classification has a significant influence on employee commitment and overall performance, and that of Aboumasoudi (2020) that job classification promotes organizational productivity. The study also revealed that a significant number of the staff are satisfied with the existing job classification system as it relates to their qualifications, skills and experience. The satisfaction contributes to the cultivation of a positive attitude by the staff. This finding is in agreement with the report by Ganesh (2013) that there is a positive correlation between an organization’s human resources processes and the positive attitudes of employees.

Hypothesis Two:

For hypothesis two, which states that there is no significant relationship between career ladder and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University; Table 5 below shows the breakdown of the test statements and analysis.

Table 5: Test Statements and Analyzed Responses to Hypothesis Two

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	U	Total
Q3	The career ladder structure of AKSU in my job class enhance my performance.	107 (38.62%)	130 (47.30%)	22 (7.94)	9 (3.25%)	8 (2.89%)	277
Q4	The hope of moving through the career ladder to the highest position allowable in my job class is an incentive to remain in my organization.	99 (35.74%)	122 (44.04%)	41 (14.80)	7 (2.53%)	8 (2.89%)	277
Q5	Career ladders inspire and satisfy employee desire for growth, power and authority.	132 (47.65%)	120 (43.32%)	17 (6.14%)	7 (2.53%)	1 (0.36%)	277

Findings from the analysed responses to the test statements showed the opposite as 237 respondents, that is 107 respondents who answered Strongly Agreed (SA) and 130 respondents who Agreed (A) representing 86% of the respondents reported that their performance is significantly enhanced by career ladder while 163 comprising 99 who answered Strongly Agree (SA) and 122 who answered Agree (A) which represents 79.78% of the total respondents stated that the prospect of advancing to higher levels of salary, authority and position which the career ladder in Akwa Ibom State University offers is an incentive to remain in the

organization.

As per Question 5, 252 respondents comprising 132 respondents who Strongly Agreed (SA) and 120 respondents who Agreed (A), that is 90.97% of the total respondent, agreed that career ladders satisfy employee desire for growth, power and authority. The responses to the three test questions indicate a significant relationship between career ladders and staff performance. The result of the responses together with the analyzed statistical result in Table 2 with a statistically significant p-value of 0.010 at a 95% confidence interval shows that there is a significant positive relationship between career ladder and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

The result is in line with the findings of Abdulrahman (2019) whose research work asserted that hierarchical career structures enhance the performance of staff at Yusuf Maitama University, Kano State, Nigeria and Parker & Horowitz (2022) who found that a significant number of workers prefer jobs that offer them more opportunities for advancement. The study also found that due to the opportunity for growth offered by the hierarchical career ladder, employee retention is high. This agrees with the assertion of Parker & Horowitz (2022), that a career ladder enhances staff retention.

Hypothesis Three:

For hypothesis three, which states that there is no significant relationship between career development and staff performance, table 6 below shows the breakdown of the test statements and analysis.

Table 6: Test Statements and Analyzed Responses to Hypothesis Three

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	U
Q6	Career development policy of Akwa Ibom State University enhances my performance.	74 (27%)	152 (55%)	30 (11%)	14 (5%)	6 (2%)
Q7	Career development opportunities and support services prepare staff for higher positions in the organization, aid succession planning and ensure continuous availability of staff with the requisite professional qualifications, skills, experience and competence.	147 (53.07%)	115 (41.52)	8 (2.89)	2 (0.72%)	5 (1.81)

The analyzed responses to the test statements showed the contrary as 226 respondents comprising 74 of those who Strongly Agreed (SA) and 152 of those who Agreed (A), representing 82% of the total respondents stated that the career development policy of Akwa Ibom State University enhances their performance, while 262 respondents, representing 94.52% of the respondents agreed that the career development opportunities and support services provided by the University prepares the staff for higher positions, aids succession planning and ensures continuous availability of staff with the requisite professional qualifications, skills, experience and competence. The finding, together with the analyzed statistical result in Table 2, with a statistically significant p-value of 0.021 at a 95% confidence interval shows that there is a positive relationship between career development programmes and staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The study further revealed that the management of Akwa Ibom State University recognizes the positive relationship between the two variables, hence, it consciously applies its career development policy as a tool for inspiring staff growth and performance improvement. This is evidenced in the University’s fully sponsored long-term career development programmes ranging from 2-3 years within and outside the shores of Nigeria to members of the academic staff. Data obtained from the University’s Human Resource

Department showed that the number of such beneficiaries from the academic staff cadre sponsored on various strategic career development programmes in institutions within Nigeria for the period 2017-2022 stood at 48, while those outside Nigeria (during the same period) was 11. For normal career development programmes within its two campuses for the same period, the total number of beneficiaries was 115 comprising non-academic senior staff and academic staff. It should be noted that beneficiaries of the normal career development programmes sponsor themselves. The support offered to them comes by way of 2-3 days off every week to attend lectures which would lead to the attainment of higher academic qualifications. The two categories of beneficiaries receive their salaries during the period and are free to apply for upgrade or conversion to a different professional cadre upon attainment of the requisite higher qualifications (Akwa Ibom State University, 2022)

The findings agree with the research work of Kakui (2016) who found that on-the-job career development training positively influences the performance of staff in the public sector in Kenya, as it leads to the acquisition of additional key capabilities, skills and knowledge that enhance their performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analyzed responses and data show that there is a significant positive relationship between career structures and staff performance and that job classification, career ladder and career development enhance staff performance. Therefore, all the null hypotheses were rejected. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. The three dimensions of career structure (job classification, career ladder and career development) examined in the study all have a positive effect on staff performance.
2. Unlike the private sector which is cash-driven, employees in Akwa Ibom State University are motivated by career structures that inspire and satisfy their aspiration for growth, power and authority. This conclusion is emphatically validated in the overwhelming combined responses of 252 persons which represent 90.97% of the total respondents of 277 who Strongly Agreed and “Agreed” respectively to test question 5 in Table 5.
3. Despite the harsh working conditions in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the staff of Akwa Ibom State University have distinguished themselves with hard work. Evidence of their hard work can be seen in the relatively peaceful nature of the two campuses characterized by minimal strike actions by staff and the absence of student protests.
4. The existing career structure in Akwa Ibom State University is supportive of staff performance, evidence of which can be seen in the average annual promotion of 57.26% out of 3,876 senior staff presented between 2017 and 2022 and the satisfactory outcome of the performance indices adopted in the study. That notwithstanding, the structure needs to be strengthened and better utilized to deliver increased results to the institution to turn it into a “High-Performance Organization”. Career structure is, therefore, not only an anchor but also a key enabler of staff performance in Akwa Ibom State University.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to ensure that Akwa Ibom State University continually draws on the various dimensions of career structures to enhance the performance of its staff:

1. To sustain the motivation offered by career structure, the management of Akwa Ibom State University should ensure promotion, salaries and earned allowances are released and paid as and when due.
2. Development of a Delegation of Authority Guide (DOAG) document by the management of Akwa Ibom State University to complement its job classification structure. The DOAG document is a

comprehensive policy document which will detail the approval authority possessed by every supervising officer of the institution up to the highest level and items covered by each layer and class of authority in order to ensure consistency and speedy execution of tasks. The document should be accessible to every staff of the institution.

3. The management of Akwa Ibom State University should harvest the benefits of career ladders and transform them into a systematic communication tool which it inspires and enhances a sustainable performance model with near-zero interruption to the academic calendar.
4. The Akwa Ibom State University management should review and update its career development policy; the objective of which is to turn it into a planning tool which the institution uses deliberately to identify and develop its future leaders rather than the present interventionist approach whereby support is provided only to employees who apply.

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