

Determinants of the Perceived Value of Doctoral Degrees among Academic Staff in Nigerian Federal Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the determinants of the perceived value of doctoral degrees among academic staff in Nigerian federal universities, with emphasis on financial valuation, professional benefits, and institutional influences. The study adopted a parallel mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how doctoral degrees are valued within the university system. The population comprised 8,784 academic staff and 6 principal officers in six federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria: University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Federal University of Technology Akure, and Federal University Oye-Ekiti. Using the Research Advisors sample size determination guideline, a sample of 370 academic staff was selected through a multistage sampling technique involving stratified, proportionate, and simple random sampling procedures. Additionally, three bursary officers were purposively selected for the qualitative component. Data were collected using the Doctoral Degree Value Questionnaire (DDVQ) and the Doctoral Degree Value Interview Guide (DDVIG). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores), while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC) and the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS) are the primary structural determinants of doctoral degree valuation in federal universities. Although bursary officials emphasized uniformity in remuneration due to centralized salary administration through the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), academic staff reported perceived disparities resulting from institutional practices such as allowance administration and delays in promotion implementation. The results also indicated that doctoral degrees provide significant professional benefits, including enhanced promotion opportunities, eligibility for postgraduate supervision, improved access to research funding, consultancy engagements, and increased professional recognition. Institutional factors such as research support, administrative transparency, and timely promotion processes were also found to influence the perceived value of doctoral qualifications. The study concludes that although doctoral degree valuation is formally standardized through national salary structures, institutional administrative practices and career development opportunities significantly shape how the value of doctoral qualifications is experienced by academic staff. The study therefore recommends improved research support, administrative transparency, and timely promotion processes to strengthen the value of doctoral education in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Doctoral Degree, Academic Staff, Salary Structure, CONUASS, IPPIS, Mixed-Method, Nigerian Federal Universities.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing global emphasis on research productivity, academic quality, and institutional competitiveness has placed significant importance on the doctoral degree in higher education. In most countries, particularly within developing regions, the doctoral qualification is considered the apex of academic training and a prerequisite for senior academic roles, research grants, and institutional leadership (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). The value of the doctoral degree is not only defined in terms of credential attainment but in its utility, relevance, and impact. Consequently, a doctoral degree holder's academic value is often determined not

solely by the degree itself but also by associated competencies, the institutional reputation, and professional outcomes linked to the doctoral experience (Maringe & Ojo, 2020).

In Nigeria, although policy frameworks prioritize doctoral qualifications for recruitment, promotion, and postgraduate supervision, concerns persist regarding the adequacy and consistency of the financial rewards associated with doctoral attainment. Inflation, irregular salary adjustments, limited research funding, and perceived institutional inequities have generated debates over whether doctoral degrees are sufficiently valued in practice. These concerns underscore the need to empirically examine the determinants and perceived disparities in doctoral degree valuation within Nigerian federal universities.

The doctoral degree value of academics refers to the importance and/or benefits that educational stakeholders like the institutions, governments, and society attach to it. This value varies, but generally it can be streamlined to intrinsic, institutional, and financial value. The institutional value ensures promotion and career progression. In Nigeria, academic staff progress through a hierarchical ladder that includes the ranks of Graduate Assistant, Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer, Reader (Associate Professor), and Professor. Promotion across these ranks is based on academic qualifications (notably the PhD), teaching experience, research output, community service, and administrative contributions (Okebukola, 2021). The intrinsic value ensures professional prestige, self-achievement, social recognition, professional expertise, and professional influence in terms of policy and decision making.

Socially, a doctoral degree commands considerable respect and prestige within the academic community and broader Nigerian society. Doctoral holders are often addressed with honorifics such as “Dr.” and are regarded as thought leaders, intellectuals, and custodians of knowledge. In many traditional and professional circles, the attainment of a PhD confers social status, influence, and a platform for policy engagement and leadership (Nwagwu, 2021). In academic settings, doctoral holders enjoy greater involvement in decision-making processes, curriculum development, and institutional governance. Their opinions are often sought on critical issues of academic and administrative importance. Moreover, possessing a doctoral degree increases opportunities for participation in international collaborations, membership in scholarly bodies, and visibility in global research networks (Manathunga, 2020).

Financial value is the most tangible values, it includes the commensurate salaries, eligibility for research grants and funding, consultancy opportunities, allowances, visiting opportunities for sabbaticals. It is believed that all of these should outweigh the opportunity cost, the initial investment of getting a doctoral degree. The financial value of a doctoral degree for academic staff in Nigerian federal universities is largely tied to the federal salary structure known as the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS), which links academic rank and remuneration to qualifications. Holding a PhD is a prerequisite for career advancement beyond Lecturer II and directly influences eligibility for positions such as Senior Lecturer, Reader, and Professor. With these higher ranks come increased salaries, access to research grants, conference sponsorships, and eligibility for sabbatical leave and international fellowships (Okebukola, 2021). Additionally, academic staff with doctorates can earn additional income through consultancy, postgraduate supervision, and authorship of scholarly works, enhancing their financial stability (Adeleke, Adepoju & Salami, 2020).

However, despite the structures and policies in place that prioritise qualification for recruitment, promotion, postgraduate supervision, and good quality publications in both local and international journals, there is a complex gap in the inconsistent perception of the financial value attached to doctoral degree of academics. The actual financial reward is often undermined by systemic issues such as irregular salary payments, inflation, limited funding for research, and a lack of performance-based incentives. The financial value and returns remains inadequate when considering the opportunity cost, opportunity forgone, the time, effort, and finances that goes into academic engagement, professional advancement and promotion when compared with international standards (Ofoegbu & Alonge, 2020).

Moreover, substantial discrepancies exist in the perceptions of doctoral degree holders regarding the advantages of their qualification across various institutions federal, state, and private universities. These variations may be affected by institutional policies, availability of research grants, international collaborations, consultancy opportunities, and administrative frameworks. The outcome reveals a disparity between the expected financial

benefits of doctoral involvement and the actual experiences of numerous academic personnel. Beyond the financial dimension, there are fundamental issues regarding how institutional culture, policy execution, and systemic inefficiencies lead to the devaluation of doctoral degrees. The absence of effective reward systems, irregular support for research, and restricted institutional autonomy in resource management exacerbate the difficulty. Consequently, there is an imperative to examine the elements that affect the perceived financial worth of PhD degrees and how these perceptions are influenced by institutional contexts and individual academic experiences.

Comprehending these dynamics is crucial for enhancing the welfare and motivation of academic personnel, as well as for maintaining quality assurance, research excellence, and institutional competitiveness within the Nigerian higher education framework. In the absence of comprehensive insights into these drivers, the nation risks devaluing doctoral education and compromising the academic pipeline essential for national progress and global involvement. The study therefore seeks to investigate the determining factors of doctoral degree value of academics in Nigeria higher education institutions, with the aim to explore the factors influencing the financial valuation of doctoral degrees and examine how these valuations vary across different institutions.

Statement of the Problem

Doctoral degrees in universities should, ideally, attract commensurate recognition and rewards that reflect the level of intellectual investment, research competence, and professional expertise associated with the qualification. In well-structured higher education systems, doctoral degree holders are expected to receive adequate financial compensation, enhanced career advancement opportunities, and institutional support that reflect the strategic importance of advanced scholarship to national development. Standardized remuneration frameworks and transparent institutional policies are also expected to ensure equity and consistency in the valuation of doctoral qualifications across universities.

In Nigeria, the federal government has established policy mechanisms such as the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS) and the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIIS) to standardize remuneration and ensure uniformity in salary administration across federal universities. These frameworks are designed to guarantee fairness, transparency, and predictability in academic staff compensation, thereby reinforcing the institutional value attached to doctoral qualifications.

However, despite these policy arrangements and the institutional prioritization of doctoral qualifications for recruitment, promotion, and postgraduate supervision, concerns persist regarding the actual financial value attached to doctoral degrees in Nigerian federal universities. Many academic staff argue that their earnings and professional rewards do not adequately reflect the qualifications they possess, the research productivity expected of them, or the international benchmarks associated with doctoral training. Furthermore, experiences shared by academics during sabbaticals, research collaborations, and inter-institutional engagements suggest that variations may exist in the practical implementation of remuneration policies across institutions.

These divergent perceptions raise critical questions regarding the determinants of doctoral degree valuation and the extent to which institutional policies and administrative practices influence how doctoral qualifications are valued within Nigeria's federal university system. Without empirical examination of these factors, the gap between the expected value of doctoral education and the lived experiences of academic staff may continue to undermine motivation, research productivity, and the attractiveness of academic careers. Consequently, there is a need to investigate the determinants of doctoral degree value among academic staff and examine the factors that account for perceived disparities in the valuation of doctoral degrees across Nigerian federal universities.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to:

- i. investigate the determinants of doctoral degree value among academics in Nigerian federal universities.

- ii. examine the factors accounting for perceived disparities in the valuation of doctoral degrees across federal universities.
- iii. determine the perceived professional and career benefits associated with the possession of doctoral degrees among academic staff in federal universities.
- iv. assess the effect of institutional policies and administrative practices on the perceived value of doctoral degrees in Nigerian federal universities.

Research Questions

- a. What are the determinants of doctoral degree value among academics in Nigerian federal universities?
- b. What accounts for the disparities in the valuation of doctoral degrees among academics in Nigerian federal universities?
- c. What professional and career benefits do academic staff associate with possessing a doctoral degree in federal universities?
- d. How do institutional policies and administrative practices affect the perceived value of doctoral degrees in Nigerian federal universities?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a parallel mixed-method research design in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the determinants and perceived value of doctoral degrees among academic staff in Nigerian federal universities. The parallel mixed-method approach allows the researcher to collect qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, analyze them separately, and integrate the findings during interpretation to provide deeper insights into the research problem.

The population of the study comprised all academic staff of federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria, including the University of Lagos (UNILAG), University of Ibadan (UI), Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife (OAU), Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA), and Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), with a total of 8,784 academic staff and 6 principal officers. Using the Research Advisors (2006) sample size determination table, a minimum sample size of 370 respondents was considered adequate for a population above 5,000 at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. To select the respondents, a multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, stratified sampling was used to categorize the universities into their respective institutions to ensure adequate representation. In the second stage, proportionate sampling was applied to allocate the sample size of 370 across the six universities based on their academic staff population. In the final stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select the academic staff within each institution, thereby giving every member of the population an equal chance of being included in the study. The Bursars of the selected universities were included using total enumeration sampling technique due to their strategic role in salary administration and financial policy implementation. This procedure ensured representativeness and minimized sampling bias in the selection of respondents.

Two research instruments were used for data collection. The first was a Doctoral Degree Value Questionnaire (DDVQ) administered to academic staff to generate quantitative data on perceptions of doctoral degree value. The second instrument was a Doctoral Degree Value Interview Guide (DDVIG) administered to selected academic staff and bursary officers to obtain qualitative insights into salary structures, institutional practices, and perceived disparities in doctoral degree valuation.

The instruments were validated by experts in Educational Management, and their reliability was ensured through pilot testing. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, while qualitative interview responses were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results

from both strands were integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive explanation of the determinants and perceived value of doctoral degrees in Nigerian federal universities.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the determinants of doctoral degree value of academic staff in Nigerian federal universities?

To answer this question, staff in bursary unit (representing the bursar in proxy) across all the selected institutions were interviewed. Their responses are as presented.

From the interview with the participants in the bursary unit across all the institutions examined, it was established that the major determinants of value of academic staff doctoral degree is the Federal government through the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC). The Federal government being the sole owner of federal universities in Nigeria makes essential plans and decisions that affects staffing, remuneration, financing, material resources, and other core decisions as pertain to all federal universities in the country. As such, they are the core determinants of academic staff doctoral degree value in Southwestern federal Nigerian universities. Participants said:

The major determinant of doctoral value of academic staff is salary structure which is influenced by academic qualification, years of experience, cadre attained, numbers of publications, and other administrative duties. The salary scale for academic staff in Federal universities is called CONUASS (Consolidated university Academic Salary Structure) and CONMESS (Consolidated Medical Salary Structure). CONUASS is the stipulated salary scale approved for all academic staff members in all Federal universities and remuneration is paid based on individuals' grade levels. Meanwhile, the lowest position is Graduates Assistant while the highest position is Professor. The items consolidated within the basic salary are transport allowance, journal allowance, leave allowance, research allowance, utility allowance, meal subsidy, examination supervision allowance, post graduate studies allowance and many more.

All of these were put together in the salary structure and every academic staff is paid based on their position or promotion level which is largely determined by promotion done every three years to raise academic staff salary as they climb the professional ladder. Also, it is important to note that not all academic staff have their Ph.D. however, the ones with Ph.D. without teaching experience, and required publications in the university system starts from Lecturer II, while the ones with Ph.D., publications and teaching experience are easily promoted to the level of Lecturer I, then a senior lecturer, a reader or associate professor and lastly, a professor. CONMESS on the other hand, is basically for medical personnel in the Federal public service, however some medical personnel who are combining the assignment of attending calls and lecturing, as such their salary is more than other academic staff based on the nature of their job. The NSIWC carry out proper job assessment before coming out with a befitting pay policy for any agency. They take into consideration the tenacity of the work done.

It was established that the major determinant of academic staff doctoral degree value is salary structure which is affected by academic qualification, level of cadre, number of publications, administrative duties, and years of experience.

Research Question Two: What accounts for disparities in doctoral degree value of academics in federal universities in Nigeria?

The participants (Bursars) established that there is a unified salary structure across all Federal universities in Nigeria and as a result, there is no disparity in the salary structure. From the words of the participants:

I don't know why some academic staff believe there is disparity in the salary being paid across all Federal universities in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, it is the stipulated salary scale that is being paid over time and there is no form of disparity in payment what so ever. The introduction of the IPPIS (Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System) has curbed every form of discriminatory payment and put an end to ghost workers in the

system. However, there are disparities in the salary scale of the states and private universities compared to Federal universities.

Contrary to this opinions, academic staffs from these institutions stated over and over again that there are disparities in the salary structure among federal universities in Nigeria. Words from the academic staff:

There is nothing general about the salary structure across all universities in the country. We go for sabbatical leave and we can tell the differences in the salary we see out there and it is quite disheartening. It is painful that even within the same Federal universities, there are differences in the salary structure let alone compared to state universities. There is a junior colleague who is earning 150,000 as lecturer II here in UI but when he was at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye he was earning N250,000 for the same position, a whole difference of N100,000. Even in River state university, a professor earns about N1.4million, while in a Federal university, a professor earns N416,000 after statutory deductions. Not a newly pronounced professor, but a professor at bar. There are disparities in the salary structures and it is highly pathetic. Even with the introduction of IPPIS there is still disparity, though it might not be much as before. Despite the fact that we are serving the same government, we are not earning the same salary.

Research Question Three: What professional and career benefits do academic staff associate with possessing a doctoral degree in federal universities?

Table 1: Professional and Career Benefits of Doctoral Degrees (N = 370)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Rank
1	Possession of a doctoral degree enhances promotion opportunities in universities.	181 (48.9%)	148 (40.0%)	25 (6.7%)	16 (4.4%)	3.33	2nd
2	Doctoral degree holders are more likely to supervise postgraduate students.	206 (55.6%)	123 (33.3%)	25 (6.7%)	16 (4.4%)	3.40	1st
3	Possession of a PhD increases opportunities for research grants and funding.	164 (44.4%)	140 (37.8%)	49 (13.3%)	17 (4.5%)	3.22	4th
4	Doctoral degree holders enjoy higher professional recognition in academia.	189 (51.1%)	132 (35.6%)	33 (8.9%)	16 (4.4%)	3.33	2nd
5	Possession of a doctoral degree increases opportunities for consultancy and professional engagements.	148 (40.0%)	156 (42.2%)	49 (13.3%)	17 (4.5%)	3.18	5th

Grand Mean = 3.29

Decision Rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Accepted.

The results in Table 1 reveal that academic staff strongly associate doctoral qualifications with several professional and career benefits within Nigerian federal universities. All the items recorded mean scores above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating general agreement among respondents. The highest ranked item (Mean = 3.40) shows that doctoral degree holders are more likely to supervise postgraduate students. This is closely followed by the perception that doctoral degrees enhance promotion opportunities and increase professional recognition in academia (Mean = 3.33). Opportunities for research grants and consultancy services also recorded relatively high agreement among respondents.

The grand mean score of 3.29 further confirms that academic staff generally perceive doctoral degrees as significantly beneficial for career progression, research engagement, and professional status within the university system.

Research Question Four: How do institutional policies and administrative practices affect the perceived value of doctoral degrees in Nigerian federal universities?

Table 2: Institutional Policies Affecting Doctoral Degree Value (N = 370)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Rank
1	Timely implementation of promotion enhances the perceived value of doctoral degrees.	197 (53.3%)	123 (33.3%)	33 (8.9%)	17 (4.5%)	3.36	1st
2	Institutional research funding increases the value attached to doctoral degrees.	173 (46.7%)	140 (37.8%)	41 (11.1%)	16 (4.4%)	3.29	3rd
3	Administrative transparency in salary and allowances improves confidence in doctoral valuation.	156 (42.2%)	148 (40.0%)	49 (13.3%)	17 (4.5%)	3.22	5th
4	Delays in promotion reduce the perceived financial value of doctoral qualifications.	181 (48.9%)	132 (35.6%)	41 (11.1%)	16 (4.4%)	3.29	3rd
5	Institutional support for research and conference participation increases the perceived value of doctoral degrees.	189 (51.1%)	140 (37.8%)	25 (6.7%)	16 (4.4%)	3.33	2nd

Grand Mean = 3.30

Decision Rule: Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Accepted.

The results in Table 2 indicate that institutional policies and administrative practices play a significant role in shaping how doctoral degrees are valued among academic staff in Nigerian federal universities. All the items recorded mean scores above the acceptance benchmark of 2.50, indicating general agreement among respondents.

The highest ranked factor (Mean = 3.36) shows that timely implementation of promotion significantly enhances the perceived value of doctoral degrees. Institutional support for research activities and conference participation (Mean = 3.33) was also identified as a major factor influencing doctoral degree valuation. Additionally, adequate research funding and transparent administrative practices contribute to academics' confidence in the value attached to doctoral qualifications.

The grand mean score of 3.30 suggests that institutional governance practices, administrative efficiency, and research support mechanisms are critical in shaping the perceived value of doctoral qualifications beyond the formal salary structure.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the determinants and perceived value of doctoral degrees among academic staff in Nigerian federal universities by integrating both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

The results revealed that the major determinant of the value of doctoral degrees among academic staff is the Federal Government through the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC). The NSIWC, as a government agency, is responsible for regulating wages and salaries across the public service and therefore determines the remuneration framework applicable to academic staff in federal universities. Interview responses from bursary officials confirmed that the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS) serves as the official salary framework guiding academic staff remuneration. The structure outlines a hierarchy of academic positions ranging from Graduate Assistant to Professor, with remuneration determined by factors such as academic qualifications, number of scholarly publications, years of experience, and administrative responsibilities.

This finding corroborates the position of Fapohunda (2019) who noted that the salary structure of academics in Nigeria is largely determined through the legislative and policy processes of government agencies responsible

for wage regulation. Similarly, the findings support Okebukola (2021) who emphasized that the Federal Government exercises significant authority over policy decisions relating to funding, remuneration, staffing, and governance in Nigerian federal universities.

However, Tabola (2019) argues that salary structures should reflect the actual work performed by academic staff rather than merely the academic qualifications possessed. According to this perspective, remuneration systems aim to ensure that staff on the same grade level receive equal pay for work of equal value. Consequently, while academic qualifications such as the PhD influence career progression, the salary structure attempts to maintain equity across positions within the university system. Differences in take-home pay may therefore arise mainly from allowances, administrative responsibilities, and other job-related benefits rather than qualifications alone.

The issue of salary disparities across federal universities generated contrasting responses between administrative officers and academic staff. Bursary officials interviewed during the study insisted that no disparity exists because the introduction of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) has standardized salary payments and eliminated irregularities such as ghost workers. This position aligns with Adegbite and Oluwalana (2022) who reported that IPPIS has enhanced the uniform administration of academic staff remuneration across federal universities. Likewise, Ogunmodede and Adebayo (2020) observed that the combined implementation of IPPIS and CONUASS has strengthened transparency and accountability in salary administration.

Nevertheless, many academic staff interviewed in the study strongly contested the claim of uniformity. They reported that noticeable disparities exist in take-home pay across institutions, particularly during sabbatical engagements, collaborative research activities, and inter-institutional academic interactions. These experiences suggest the existence of hidden inequities that may arise from institutional practices such as differences in statutory deductions, supplementary allowances, and delays in promotion implementation. This observation supports the findings of Ofoegbu and Alonge (2020) who argued that although CONUASS establishes a baseline salary framework, institutional practices such as allowance administration and promotion implementation timelines can create variations in actual earnings.

The quantitative findings revealed that academic staff in federal universities strongly associate doctoral qualifications with several professional and career benefits. The descriptive analysis showed that the highest ranked benefit of possessing a doctoral degree was the opportunity to supervise postgraduate students. This finding reflects the traditional academic structure of universities where doctoral qualification serves as a prerequisite for supervising master's and doctoral students. In most universities, institutional regulations require that only staff with PhD qualifications can supervise postgraduate research, thereby reinforcing the professional significance of the degree. The study also found that doctoral qualifications significantly enhance promotion opportunities and increase professional recognition in academia. This result is consistent with the academic career progression model in universities where possession of a doctoral degree is often a minimum requirement for advancement beyond certain academic ranks. Scholars have emphasized that doctoral qualifications represent a key credential in the academic labor market because they signify expertise in research, teaching, and knowledge production (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2019). Similarly, studies on academic career progression indicate that the PhD remains a critical determinant of promotion and professional legitimacy within the global higher education system (Teichler, 2020).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that doctoral degree holders have greater opportunities for research grants and consultancy engagements. This outcome reflects the fact that research funding bodies often prioritize scholars with doctoral qualifications when awarding competitive grants. According to Marginson (2021), the possession of a doctoral degree enhances a scholar's research credibility and increases their likelihood of participating in funded research projects and international collaborations. The grand mean score obtained in the analysis confirms that academic staff generally perceive doctoral degrees as highly valuable for career development and professional advancement. This perception aligns with the knowledge economy framework, which views advanced academic qualifications as essential assets in knowledge production and innovation within universities.

It was also found out that institutional policies and administrative practices significantly influence how doctoral degrees are valued within Nigerian federal universities. The most prominent factor identified by respondents was the timely implementation of promotion processes. Academic staff indicated that when promotion procedures are delayed, the perceived financial and professional value of doctoral qualifications diminishes. This finding supports previous studies which argue that bureaucratic delays in promotion processes often undermine staff motivation and reduce the perceived benefits of academic qualifications (Aina & Omojola, 2022).

The study also found that institutional support for research activities and conference participation contributes significantly to the perceived value of doctoral degrees. Universities that provide adequate funding for research and academic conferences create an enabling environment where doctoral qualifications can be effectively utilized for knowledge production and scholarly engagement. This finding aligns with the work of Kehm and Teichler (2021), who observed that institutional support mechanisms such as research grants, conference sponsorships, and academic collaborations are crucial factors that enhance the professional utility of doctoral degrees.

Another important finding was that transparency in salary administration and allowances strengthens confidence in the valuation of doctoral qualifications. Where institutional remuneration policies are clear and consistently implemented, academic staff are more likely to perceive their doctoral qualifications as appropriately rewarded. Conversely, inconsistencies in administrative practices can generate dissatisfaction and reduce the perceived value of advanced academic credentials.

The grand mean obtained for the items measuring institutional policy factors suggests that the valuation of doctoral degrees is not determined solely by national salary structures but also by institutional governance practices. This finding highlights the critical role of university management in shaping the professional and economic value attached to doctoral qualifications within the Nigerian higher education system.

CONCLUSION

Although doctoral degree valuation in Nigerian federal universities is formally standardized through the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS) and the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), the findings of this study reveal that such standardization largely exists at the policy level. In practice, the perceived value of doctoral qualifications is influenced by institutional policies, administrative practices, and professional opportunities available within universities.

The study demonstrates that doctoral degrees provide substantial **professional and career advantages**, including enhanced promotion prospects, eligibility for postgraduate supervision, greater research opportunities, and increased professional recognition. However, disparities in the implementation of institutional policies, delays in promotion processes, and variations in allowance administration can weaken the perceived financial value of doctoral qualifications among academic staff.

The divergence between administrative claims of salary uniformity and the lived experiences of academic staff therefore highlights the need for stronger alignment between centralized remuneration policies and institutional practices. Without such alignment, dissatisfaction among academic staff may undermine motivation, research productivity, and the attractiveness of academic careers in Nigeria.

Ensuring that doctoral qualifications receive commensurate financial, professional, and institutional recognition is therefore essential for strengthening academic motivation, sustaining research excellence, and enhancing the global competitiveness of Nigeria's higher education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, there is a need for a comprehensive review of the Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS) to ensure that it reflects current economic realities. Inflation and rising living costs have

significantly reduced the real value of academic remuneration in Nigeria. Adjusting the salary structure to reflect contemporary economic conditions would help restore the financial attractiveness of doctoral qualifications and improve academic staff motivation.

Second, the administration of allowances across federal universities should be harmonized. Although salary structures are centrally regulated, variations in the interpretation and implementation of allowances contribute to perceived disparities in doctoral degree valuation. Establishing clear and enforceable national guidelines for allowance administration would enhance fairness and consistency across institutions.

Third, universities should improve transparency in promotion processes and salary adjustments. Delays in promotion implementation and lack of clarity in salary computation contribute to dissatisfaction among academic staff. Ensuring timely promotion implementation and providing clear information on salary components would strengthen trust in institutional management.

Fourth, universities should strengthen institutional support systems that enhance the professional value of doctoral degrees. This includes increased research funding, conference sponsorship, postgraduate supervision incentives, and international collaboration opportunities. Such initiatives would reinforce the professional and intellectual contributions of doctoral degree holders.

Finally, the introduction of performance-based incentives linked to research productivity and academic leadership is recommended. Incentives tied to research output, postgraduate supervision, innovation, and scholarly publications would better reflect the substantive contributions of doctoral degree holders and enhance the perceived value of doctoral education within the Nigerian university system.

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