Impact of Workplace Insecurity and Personnel Management Strategies on Employee Performance in Nigerian State-Owned Universities: A Study of Imo State University (Imsu), Owerri

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1310000091

Received: 18 October 2026; Accepted: 23 October 2026; Published: 02 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Workplace insecurity has become one of the most serious challenges facing Nigerian state-owned universities. At Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri, lecturers and non-academic staff face insecurity arising from irregular salary payment, delay in promotion, lack of pension, threat of retrenchment, political interference by government, and poor personnel management. This study examines the impact of workplace insecurity and personnel management strategies on employee performance in IMSU. Drawing on current literature (Ifeanyi & Eze 2023, Okonkwo 2024, ILO 2024, Nwokorie 2025, Akinola 2026), and using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study argues that workplace insecurity reduces motivation, commitment, and productivity, while effective personnel management strategies can reverse this effect. Data was collected from 300 staff of IMSU — 150 academic and 150 non-academic — using mixed methods. Findings show that 86% of staff feel insecure, 78% said insecurity reduces their performance, and 91% said good personnel management — prompt promotion, training, welfare, and fair appraisal — improves performance. Regression analysis shows workplace insecurity has a significant negative relationship with employee performance ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.05$), while personnel management strategies have a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.81$, $p < 0.05$). The paper concludes that IMSU's performance crisis is not a problem of staff laziness, but of insecurity and poor personnel management. It recommends institutionalized personnel management reforms, timely promotion, and job security policy for state-owned universities.

Keywords: Workplace Insecurity, Personnel Management, Employee Performance, State-Owned University, Industrial Sociology.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The performance of employees in Nigerian state-owned universities has become a subject of growing concern in contemporary industrial relations literature. While universities are expected to be centres of excellence in teaching, research, and community service, state-owned institutions in Nigeria are increasingly characterised by chronic underfunding, irregular payment of salaries, political interference in governance, and frequent industrial disputes. These conditions have engendered a pervasive climate of workplace insecurity that undermines staff commitment and productivity.

Workplace insecurity, as conceptualised in recent literature, is not merely the objective threat of job loss, but the subjective perception of powerlessness and inability to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation (Adekoya et al., 2025). In the Nigerian state university context, this insecurity manifests in three distinct forms: (i) job insecurity — fear of retrenchment due to state government fiscal crises; (ii) income insecurity — delayed and incomplete payment of salaries, allowances, and pensions; and (iii) career insecurity — stalled promotions, lack of training, and absence of clear career progression.

This reality resonates with the findings of Wood, Martindale and Lehdonvirta (2023) in their study of platform workers, where workers experienced what they termed *subordinated agency* — they enjoyed formal autonomy but remained dependent on the platform for income and feared the consequences of negative ratings. Similarly, academic and non-academic staff in state-owned universities enjoy academic freedom in principle, but are subordinated to state government funding decisions and university management control over promotion and welfare. Over 50% of workers in Wood et al.'s (2023) study reported they could not leave the platform without substantial income loss, a condition analogous to Nigerian lecturers who cannot exit the university system due to limited alternative employment opportunities.

The Fairwork (2024) India Ratings, conducted by Oxford University and IIIT Bangalore, further illuminates this problem. Evaluating 11 digital platforms against five principles of fair work — pay, conditions, contracts, management, and representation — the report found no platform scored above 6 out of 10, and none scored a point for representation. In Nigerian state universities, a similar pattern exists: while universities have formal policies on pay and conditions, implementation is poor, and staff representation through unions (ASUU, NASU, SSANU) is often not respected in decision-making, leading to strikes and low performance.

At the global level, the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2025) at its 113th International Labour Conference initiated the process for Convention No. 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy, which was formally adopted in 2026. The Convention requires member states to ensure correct classification, fair pay, social security, and protection from algorithmic management. Although directed at platform work, its principles are directly relevant to state-owned universities: decent work requires security, fair pay, and voice — the very elements missing in Nigerian state universities. The ILO (2025) argues that insecurity is not an inevitable feature of modern work but a policy choice that can be addressed through regulation and effective personnel management.

In Nigeria, Adekoya et al. (2025) provide the most relevant developing-country evidence. Focusing on the Nigerian gig economy, they found that algorithmic management shapes career trajectories and undermines employment security, as workers' reputations are locked within platforms and cannot be transferred. This insight is crucial for state universities where contract staff, adjunct lecturers, and junior staff face similar precarity — their employment is insecure, their career progression is uncertain, and their accumulated experience is not recognised across institutions.

Similarly, Nwosu & Eze (2026), in their recent study of Nigerian public institutions, argue that workplace insecurity in state-owned universities is a product of political interference and poor personnel management. They contend that when personnel management strategies — recruitment, training, appraisal, promotion, and welfare — are weak or politicised, insecurity intensifies and performance declines. Their work provides the Nigerian empirical foundation for this study.

In a university, the lecturer is the factory worker. His product is knowledge. His machine is his brain. If his brain is worried about salary, promotion, and job security, he cannot produce knowledge. At IMSU, staff are worried. Salary is delayed. Promotion is delayed for 5-7 years. Pension is not sure. Government changes and new VC comes with new policy. Some staff are owed arrears. Some are threatened with sack during staff verification exercises. This is workplace insecurity.

Statement of the Problem

Despite several reforms, including the introduction of IPPIS, TETFund interventions, and NEEDS Assessment, employee performance in Nigerian state-owned universities remains low. Research output is declining, teaching quality is compromised by moonlighting, and administrative efficiency is poor.

The problem is not lack of talent, but insecurity. Staff who are unsure of their next salary, promotion, or job security cannot be expected to perform optimally. This study therefore investigates whether effective personnel management strategies can moderate this negative relationship

Objectives

- To examine the types of workplace insecurity in IMSU.
- To analyze the personnel management strategies used in IMSU.
- To determine the impact of insecurity on employee performance.
- To determine the impact of personnel management strategies on employee performance.
- To recommend solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Insecurity

Recent literature distinguishes between quantitative insecurity (fear of losing the job itself) and qualitative insecurity (fear of losing valued job features). Adekoya et al. (2025) argue that in Nigeria, qualitative insecurity is more damaging — staff may keep their job but lose allowances, research grants, or promotion opportunities. Wood et al. (2023) found that 62% of workers feared the impact of unfair feedback on future earnings, a parallel to Nigerian lecturers who fear victimisation by management through delayed promotion.

Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984) defined job insecurity as perceived threat to job continuity. In Nigeria, it has expanded to include salary insecurity, promotion insecurity, and pension insecurity. conceptualised job insecurity as perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation. This remains the foundation of contemporary insecurity research (Adekoya et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2023). In state-owned universities, this powerlessness is evident as staff cannot influence funding decisions yet bear the consequences of salary delays

Ifeanyi & Eze (2023) investigated job insecurity and employee performance in Nigerian organisations and found that perceived job insecurity significantly predicts low performance and deviant behaviour. They concluded that perceived organisational support — through fair appraisal, welfare, and communication — moderates this relationship. This finding provides empirical support for the present study which examines personnel management strategies as a moderator between workplace insecurity and employee performance in Nigerian state-owned universities.

Okonkwo (2024) in a study of Nigerian universities in the era of global village found that effective personnel management — particularly recruitment, appraisal, and training — directly enhances job performance, with 80% of non-academic staff affirming this relationship. However, Okonkwo noted that poor training and inadequate ICT infrastructure limit this effect. This supports the present study's hypothesis that personnel management strategies have a significant positive effect on employee performance, and that when these strategies are weak, workplace insecurity is amplified.

ILO (2024) in its World Employment and Social Outlook warned that global workplace insecurity is rising, with 83% of African workers in informal and insecure employment. The ILO further argued in its 2024 Platform Economy Report that insecurity is a policy failure, not a market necessity, and called for a new social contract based on fair personnel management, social protection, and representation. This global concern is mirrored in Nigerian state-owned universities where irregular funding has made insecurity endemic Report on Decent Work in Universities* rated Nigerian state universities low on job security due to political interference.

Akintola (2026), in a systematic review of 22 studies on the Nigerian banking industry, confirmed that all four dimensions of job insecurity — qualitative, quantitative, contractual, and outsourcing-related — significantly and negatively affect satisfaction and commitment. He argued through Psychological Contract Theory that insecurity is a breach of the employer's promise to the employee. This same breach occurs in Nigerian state-owned universities where staff are promised security and promotion but experience salary delays and politicised promotion.

Nwokorie (2025) investigated organisational culture and employee job satisfaction at the Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri. Using a sample of 311 academic and non-academic staff and MANCOVA analysis, he found that leadership style, communication patterns, and employee involvement in decision-making each had a significant impact on job satisfaction. He recommended transformational leadership, stronger communication systems, and institutionalised staff involvement. The present study builds on Nwokorie's findings by arguing that these same cultural and personnel management factors can buffer the effects of workplace insecurity on performance in Nigerian state-owned universities

Personnel Management Strategies — Current Perspectives

Personnel management strategies are the deliberate practices used to manage human capital. Recent studies (Fairwork, 2024; ILO, 2025) emphasise that fair management — transparent appraisal, clear contracts, and human review of disciplinary decisions — is essential for performance. In Nigerian universities, personnel strategies include: (a) Manpower planning, (b) Training and development, (c) Performance appraisal, (d) Promotion and career development, (e) Welfare and compensation, (f) Communication and participation.

Personnel management is the management of people in the organization. Strategies include:

- **Recruitment and selection**- which is a process of attracting qualified candidates to come and apply and a company advertises a vacancy as well as screening, interviewing, and testing those applicants to pick the most suitable candidate for the job.
- **Training and development**- the practical, and skill-focused, aimed at improving performance on a job, which in turn prepares the worker for future bigger jobs, roles and responsibilities.
- **Promotion and appraisal**- a formal assessment to know who is performing well and who needs improvement. Promotion usually happens as a result of good appraisal.
- **Welfare and compensation**- all the money and benefits a worker receives for doing his job which could be direct or indirect. The welfare is everything the organization does to make workers comfortable, happy and healthy beyond salary.
- **Communication and participation** – this is the exchange of information, ideas, and feelings between people in an organization, which could be upward(workers to boss), downward (boss to workers) and Horizontal (colleagues). The participation allows works to take part in making decisions that affect their work and welfare.

Olusegun & Chinedu (2023) investigated workplace insecurity and employee performance in Nigerian public institutions and found a significant negative relationship between the two. They identified political, financial, and job-structure insecurity as key drivers, and argued that insecurity leads to psychological withdrawal, reduced citizenship behaviour, and increased turnover intention. Their findings support the present study which examines the same variables in Nigerian state-owned universities, where political and financial insecurity are endemic.

Eze (2024) investigated personnel management and employee performance in Nigerian public sector organisations and found that fair recruitment, regular training, and transparent appraisal were significant predictors of performance. He concluded that personnel management strategies, when participatory and developmental, reduce the psychological impact of workplace insecurity and enhance employee performance. This study provides strong empirical support for the moderating role of personnel management strategies in the present study

Fairwork Nigeria (2024) in its annual ratings of Nigerian platform companies found that most platforms scored 0-3 out of 10 on labour standards, with workers reporting insecurity from sudden deactivation and lack of representation. This pattern of arbitrary management and powerlessness is mirrored in Nigerian state-owned universities, where irregular funding and politicised personnel management create a culture of insecurity *Fairwork Nigeria (2024)* found that welfare is the most ignored strategy in Nigerian universities.

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

Employee Performance

Employee performance in universities is multidimensional: teaching effectiveness, research output (publications, grants), community service, punctuality, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Nwosu & Eze (2026) found that insecurity reduces all three dimensions — lecturers engage less in research, skip classes, and focus on survival activities (consultancy, private teaching).

Nwokorie (2025) in his study of Federal Polytechnic Nekede found that organisational culture — leadership style, communication, and participation — significantly determines job satisfaction. This supports the present study's argument that personnel management strategies (which include leadership, communication, and participation) are the buffer against workplace insecurity. Where culture is supportive, performance holds even under insecurity; where culture is autocratic, insecurity destroys performance.Performance in university is measured by: teaching effectiveness, research output, student supervision, attendance, and commitment.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

Workers need security before they can perform. IMSU staff are stuck at security level — they cannot reach esteem or self-actualization because salary is not secure.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959)

Salary, job security, and welfare are hygiene factors. Their absence causes dissatisfaction and low performance. Promotion and recognition are motivators. IMSU lacks both.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)

When management treats workers well, workers reciprocate with good performance. When management fails workers, workers withdraw.

METHODOLOGY

- **Design**: Survey + In-depth interview.
- **Area**: Imo State University (IMSU), Owerri.
- **Population**: 1,200 academic and non-academic staff.
- **Sample**: 300 respondents — 150 academic, 150 non-academic. Random sampling.
- **Instrument**: Questionnaire (40 items, Likert scale) + 30 interviews.
- **Analysis**: Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, Regression.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Demographics

Variables	Frenqueny	%
Academic Staff	150	50%
Non-Academic Staff	150	50%
Male	178	59.3%
Female	122	40%

ISSN No. 2321-2705 | DOI: 10.51244/IJRSI |Volume XIII Issue X October 2026

Served > 5 years	210	70%
PhD holders	82	27.3%

Table 2: Workplace Insecurity in IMSU

Types of Insecurity	**Agree**
Salary delay/insecurity	86%
Promotion delay	89%
Fear of retrenchment/verification	74%
Pension not sure	81%
Political interference	77%
Overall feed insecure	86%

Table 3: Personnel Management Strategies in IMSU

Stragegy	**Rating/Agree**
Promotion is timely	21%
Training is provided	28%
Welfare is good	18%
Appraisal is fair	32%
Management listens to staff	24%
Personal management is effective	26%

Table 4: Impact on Employee Performance

Statement	**Agree**
Insecurity reduces my teaching performance	78%
Insecurity makes me do moonlighting	71%
Insecurity makes me think of leaving IMSU	69%

Good personnel management would improve my performance	91%
I would publish more if I feel secure	84%

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

Variable Correlation with Performance	**Sig**
Workplace Insecurity	$r = -0.72$ $p < 0.05$
Personnel Management Strategies	$r = 0.81$ $p < 0.05$

Qualitative Findings

Senior Lecturer, IMSU, 12 years: "I was due for promotion to Senior Lecturer in 2019. It is 2026, still not promoted. How can I be motivated to teach? I now teach in 3 private universities to survive."

Non-academic Staff: "Salary is not regular. Some months we get half salary. How can we perform?"

Professor, IMSU: "The problem is not staff. The problem is personnel management. If they promote us on time, we will perform."

DISCUSSION

Findings confirm current literature — Ifeanyi & Eze (2023), Okonkwo (2024), Akinola (2026). Workplace insecurity in IMSU is structural, not personal. It is caused by state government funding, political interference, and poor personnel management.

The study shows that insecurity has created a culture of moonlighting and survival. Staff are not lazy; they are insecure. They are performing in other places to survive, not in IMSU.

Personnel management is the solution. When promotion is timely, training is provided, welfare is good, and appraisal is fair, performance increases by 81%.

This paper contributes to Industrial Sociology by showing that the labour process in the university is similar to the factory — workers need security to produce.

CONCLUSION

Employee performance in IMSU will not improve by blaming staff. It will improve by removing insecurity and improving personnel management. Security is the foundation of performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- IMSU management should implement promotion as at when due — no delay beyond 3 years.
- State government should pay salary regularly and provide pension guarantee.
- Create a Personnel Management Policy for IMSU — with training, welfare, and appraisal.
- Stop political interference in staff verification and appointment.
- Create a Staff Welfare Fund and Health Insurance for all staff.

- Introduce participatory management — staff in decision making.
- Establish a Job Security Charter for IMSU staff.

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