



Modeling Institutional Variables on Academic Quality among Public University Academics in Southern States of Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to model institutional variables on academic quality among University academics in Southern States, Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, three research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated and tested. Literature review was carried out empirically and theoretically according to the sub-variables of the study. The study adopted an analytical survey research design and stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting a total of 717 academics from the Universities of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Uyo (UNIUYO). A questionnaire titled "University Academics Opinion Scale (UAOS) was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using the Cronbach alpha reliability technique. The coefficients of the sub-scales were high and adjudged reliable ranging from .69 to .81. Data collected by the researchers were analyzed using simple percentages, simple and multiple regression analyses and path analytical technique. The results showed that institutional variables when taken individually and collectively, have significant effects and can be used to predict academic quality of the universities and the academics. Out of 10 hypothesized pathways, only seven (7) met the criteria of significance and none for meaningfulness. The proportion of the total direct effects to the total indirect effect was approximately 66:23: 33:77 for institutional variables on academic quality. Based on the findings, it was recommended that work environment, academic workload, conditions of service and infrastructural facilities should be improved upon in order to enhance academic quality of Nigerian university academics.

Keywords: Modeling, Institutional Variables, Academic Quality, University Academics, Public Universities.

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INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries, including Nigeria, education is given national prominence as an instrument for national development. For an average Nigerian, after secondary education, there seems to be a general perception that nothing else except a higher or university degree can provide a good future. Thus, the demand for higher education has become imperative and it is sky-rocketing year after year.

Higher education is the key to national development in all countries of the world. University education is essentially important and fundamental to the construction of knowledge, economy, and the society. It is a veritable agent for developing, revamping and sustaining any nation's economy through harnessing human talents to achieve industrial objectives and development. Therefore, the acquisition of education, especially university education, is crucial and beneficial to society (Oladipo et al., 2010; FRN, 2014; Adenike, 2011). Expectedly, the importance attached to tertiary/higher education by the government of Nigeria is culminated with the setting of the following goals:

- To contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower;
- To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- To develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society and
- To produce and encourage scholarship and community services (FRN, 2014).

Generally, tertiary institutions, especially universities in Nigeria do pursue these goals through teaching, research and community service, robust staff development programmes, industrial work experience and dissemination of knowledge from research works via publications. The successful realization of these stated goals depends on the quality of academics to a large extent. An academic also known as a lecturer, is a person engaged in interactive behavior with one or more students for the purpose of effecting a change in the students' behavior. University academics often referred to as academic staff or lecturers are the major human resources necessary for the effective functioning of the university.

Academic quality, especially in higher educational institutions is a relatively new and interesting research concept in recent times, and is viewed from different perspectives by the various stakeholders in the education sector. To Shahzad et al. (2010), academic quality, in its broadest sense, encompasses activities and outcomes in all areas of academic work, such as, research work, teaching, assignments, administration and supportive service to the university and its community. According to Clarke (2002), the conceptualization of quality that underpins most ranking efforts are organized under three categories, namely; students' achievement, faculty accomplishment and institutional academic resources.

In this 21st century, stakeholders, parents, public and even the government are becoming more concerned about the performance and quality of university academics, as well as in the quality of graduates produced by these academics into the society. The notion holds true that, no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 2014). This implies that, the goals of universities cannot be achieved without the dedication and commitment of these academics. That is why, the proper management and harnessing of university academics is

necessary taking into consideration their importance in the system. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNICEF, 2003), explicitly stated, that the three fundamental tasks of the academic staff (academics) of tertiary/higher educational institutions include: teaching, research, and services to the community.

The Federal Government of Nigeria and the management of the universities have increasingly strived to ensure that quality is achieved in our university system. To actualize this, the Federal Government of Nigeria has set up the National University Commission (NUC) as a mechanism for improving and sustaining quality and high standard in the universities, and has also set up different agencies such as the Tertiary Education Fund (TETFUND) and Education Trust Fund (ETF), to ensure that the needs of the system in terms of provision of both human and material resources are met; the actual implementation to really ensure quality education rest squarely on the shoulders of the academics to improve the academic quality of our universities. Moreover, professional gatherings like conferences, seminars and workshops are periodically organized to improve the skills and competences of these academics, in addition, quality assurance units are established in the different universities. Yet the problem of declining academic quality still persists.

Considerably, the academic quality of Nigerian universities has raised a lot of concerns. While some stakeholders consider academic quality in terms of students' assignments and achievement, quality of instructions, quality and quantity of teachers (academics); others view it in terms of quality of graduates released from the universities into the society and employment market year after year. It is now very expedient to reconsider the quality of academics that are employed into the university system because, they determine the quality of teaching and learning that continuously take place, the quality of graduates produced and to a large extent the attainment of the university education goals.

Concept of institutional variables

Institutional variables are factors that relate to structures in the institution. These include rules, norms, and routines that guide behaviour in a work environment or institution. These processes can exist within an organization or the structure may be part of the culture in a particular area. According to Hilary (2012), institutional factors are those internal variables within the school such as rules, principles, policies and practices that regulates the activities of the school and its members. They are factors that determine to a greater extent, activities of members of the organizations. In the school system, institutional variables are decision- based activities of the management, the commitment of the teachers, the relationship that exist in the school, the motivation the teachers receive as well as the academic environment that is provided. Definitely, the term, institutional comes from the word institution and involves all that the institution does.

In fact, Granyanpfu (2013) discovered that, government cannot guarantee all public schools even distribution of the infrastructural facilities, adequate employment of teachers and renovation of schools. This according to him, affects schools negatively and leads to poor staff task performance. In the same vein, Hussain et al. (2012) opined that, most of our public schools suffer with unattractive and old school buildings, cracked classroom walls and floors, lack of toilets, transport facility, proper security, drinking water, power supply, playgrounds, teaching staff, sufficient classroom, educational technology, first aids facility and inadequate classrooms.

Academic workload implies the number of courses (subjects) assigned to the academic staff (lecturers) to teach a particular group of students in a semester, and in an academic session.

The assignment of academic/teaching loads is useful to teachers (and lecturers) in several ways. When properly done, assigned teaching load (academic workload) helps the teaching staff to precisely know their roles, thus, minimizing duplication of responsibilities. Provision of facilities and work condition or condition of services are also essential in determining the quality of academics that are found in the system.

Ogunwa (2008) conducted a study in which one of the hypotheses stated that, there is no significant influence of promotion on workers' productivity in secondary schools in Anambra State. The outcome of the result revealed that, there was a significant influence of promotion on teachers' productivity. An academic who is effective and efficient, when promoted as at when due, his/her academic morale will be heightened. From observation and interaction of these researchers with university academics in the course of this work, it was discovered that, prompt promotion gives the workers (academics in this case), recognition, put new life in the individuals, activates his/her knowledge and skills, makes the staff to put in more effort in his work and consequently works harder to be more effective in his new position or level or rank.

Meanwhile, path model is a multivariate statistical technique that is used in modeling the relationship between observed variables. It is a technique that is concerned with examining the direct and indirect effects of identified independent variables on the dependent variable. Unlike univariate statistics where a single variable is used to explain the variance in another variable, this is difficult to be accepted in the behavioral science. As a result of the nature of the variables we are dealing with, multivariate statistics which path model is a class type, helps us in combining a number of variables to model their relationships, thereby validating an existing theory or help in building theories that will facilitate decision making. Path analysis is not used in discovering causes. It relies heavily on multiple correlations and multiple regression statistics. Path analysis makes use of endogenous and exogenous variables to explain the kind of relationships existing in the model or system.

It is in the light of these observations that the need for this research work arose to model path-ways using institutional variables on academics quality among university academics. Thus, the researchers triggered the investigation to study the modeling of some institutional variables on the academic quality of public university academics in Southern States of Nigeria, in order to make appropriate suggestions and recommendations based on the findings of this study. Hopefully, the outcomes/findings could help improve the academic quality of university academics and our university system generally.

Purpose of study

The study sought to examine institutional variables and academic quality among university academics in the Southern States. Specifically, the researchers seek to find out:

- The relative and collective effects of institutional variables on academic quality among academics in public universities
- The most significant, meaningful, and parsimonious model involving the effects of institutional variables on academic quality among university academics.
- The proportions of the model involving institutional variables on academic quality of university academics that are direct and indirect.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

- What are the relative and collective effects of institutional variables (infrastructural facilities, conditions of service, academic workload, and work environment) on academic quality among academics in public universities?
- What is the most significant, meaningful, and parsimonious model involving the effects of institutional variables on academic quality of university academics?
- What proportions of the model involving institutional variables on academic quality among university academics are direct and indirect?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses were stated in null form as follow:

- There are no significant relative and collective effects of institutional variables on academic quality among academics in public universities.
- There is no significant meaningful and parsimonious causal model involving the effects of institutional variables on academic quality among university academics.

METHODS

The study adopted the analytical survey research design with multistage sampling that involved stratified and purposive sampling techniques to select a total of 1591 academics consisting of 1071 academics from University of Calabar (UNICAL) and 520 academics from University of Uyo (UNIYO). The sample that was used for the study consisted of 717 academics which indicated 45% of academic staff from the two universities in the study area. The instrument used for this study was a 74-item structured questionnaire titled University Academics Opinion Scale (UAOS) designed by the researchers and used in collecting data for the study. The instrument was validated by three experts in measurement and evaluation, and the reliability established using Cronbach Alpha, the coefficients of the sub-scale ranged from 0.69 to 0.81, which is adjudged to be high. Data collection was done by the researchers and data collected was analysed using simple percentages, regression analysis and path analytical technique, the results are presented appropriately.

RESULTS

Research Question One and Hypothesis One: There is no significant relative and collective effect of institutional variables on academic quality among university academics in public universities.

Note that research question one was translated into hypothesis one. To test this hypothesis, the data collected were analyzed using bivariate correlation and multiple regression techniques.

The results presented in Table 1 are the inter-correlation matrix of the four institutional variables (infrastructural facilities, conditions of service, academic workload and work environment) and academic quality expressed by the respondents. The Table shows that, the least

correlation coefficient is .020, and that is the correlation between academic workload and infrastructural facilities. The highest correlation coefficient of .315 was obtained for the relationship between academic workload and academic quality. However, most of the correlations were found to be significant at .05 level except for the correlation between work environment and academic quality.

Using the regression analysis results, Table 2 revealed the collective contribution of the four institutional variables in predicting academic quality among university academics which yielded a coefficient of multiple correlation of $R^2 = .144$ and an adjusted $R^2 = .139$. From this result, it can be inferred that 13.9% of the total variance of academic quality among university academics is explained by the four institutional variables. Although, the percentage of the joint contribution of the institutional variables to the variance in academic quality is low, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) result for the prediction produced an F-value of 29.860 which is significant at .05 level. This significant value of F-ratio means that the four institutional variables used in the study when combined, have a significant effect and can be used to predict or explain academic quality among university academics.

Furthermore, the results reveal the strength of the individual institutional variables (infrastructure/facilities, conditions of service, academic workload and work environment) in predicting academic quality among university academics as still shown in Table 2. The results also show that, the standard beta weight (β) ranged from -.044 for work environment to .148 for infrastructural facilities, and the t-values ranged from -1.208 for work environment to 4.064 for infrastructural facilities. Beta weights generally indicate the strength of each prediction. The analysis of these beta weights has shown that, three institutional variables: infrastructural facilities ($\beta = .148$), conditions of service ($\beta = -0.174$), and work environment ($\beta = -.276$), were significant predictors of academic quality among university academics except for work load which had a beta value of -.044. A close inspection of these beta weight values showed that, work environment is the strongest predictor, followed closely by conditions of service and infrastructural facilities. The null hypothesis which stated that, institutional variables (infrastructural facilities, conditions of service, academic workload and work environment) individually and collectively combined, do not significantly affect academic quality among university academics is rejected.

Table 1: Inter-correlation matrix of institutional variables and academic quality

Variables	FAC	CONSERV	WRKLD	WRKENV	ACAQ
FAC	1	.120**	.020	.292**	.120**
CONSERV		1	.196**	.138**	-.216**
WRKLD			1	.028	-.315**
WRKENV				1	-.032
ACAQ					1
**	=	Correlation is significant at .01			
*	=	Correlation is significant at .05			
FAC	=	Infrastructural facilities			
CONSERV	=	Conditions of service			
WRKLD	=	Academic Workload			
WRKENV	=	Work environment			
ACAQ	=	Academic quality			

Table 2: Summary of multiple regression analysis of the relative and collective effects of the institutional variables on academic quality

Model	R	R ²	Adj.R ²	Std error	
	.379	.144	.139	23.34	
Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F-ratio	sig-value
Regression	65103.954	4	16275.98	29.86*	.000
Residual	388090.969	712	545.072		
Total	453194.92	716			
Variables	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t-values	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	66.640	5.702		11.687	.000
Facilities	1.051	.259	.148	4.064	.000
Condition of service	-.1.256	.259	-.174	-4.849	.000
Workload	-1.399	.179	-.044	-7.801	.227
Work environment	-.325	.269	-.276	-1.208	.000

Research Question Two and Hypothesis Two: There is no significant, meaningful and parsimonious model involving the effects of institutional variables on academic quality among university academics.

Recalling that the research question two was: what is the most significant, meaningful and parsimonious model involving the effects of the institutional variables (infrastructural facilities, conditions of service, work environment and academic workload) on academic quality among university academics? To answer this research question, it was converted to hypothesis two, then the data collected from the respondents were analyzed using path analytic technique to obtain the original correlation coefficients of the variables in the study. In addition, path coefficient for each of the hypothesized pathways in the recursive model was determined. Out of the 10 pathways, only seven met the criteria for significance and none for meaningfulness. Figure 1 shows a more parsimonious causal model with seven surviving paths for institutional variables and academic quality among academics in the universities under study.

Figure 1 has shown that, after trimming using significance and meaningfulness as criteria, seven (7) out of ten (10) hypothesized paths were retained. The values in the paths indicate the original correlation coefficients and beta weights (β) in the brackets. The direction of the causal paths of the variables in the model is the paths ways which are significant and meaningful as well as possess a link with the criterion/dependent variable (academic quality). Further analysis of Figure 1 reveals that, out of the 7 significant path ways, 3 pathways are direct, while others are indirect. From the new model, a new set of structural equations are obtained and are presented below:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Z_1 &= e_1 \\
 Z_2 &= P_{21} + e_2 \\
 Z_3 &= P_{31} Z_1 + P_{32} Z_2 + e_3 \\
 Z_4 &= P_{42} Z_2 + P_{43} Z_3 + e_4 \\
 Z_5 &= P_{51} Z_1 + P_{52} Z_2 + P_{54} Z_4 + e_5
 \end{aligned}$$

Keys:

Z₁ = Infrastructural facilities

Z₂ = Conditions of service

Z₃ = Work environment

Z₄ = Academic workload

Z₅ = Academic quality

Table 3: The original and reproduced correlation matrix of institutional variables and academic quality

Variables	FAC	CONSERV	WRKLD	WORKENV	ACAQ
FAC	1	.120**	.020	.292**	.120**
CONSERV	.127**	1	.196**	.138**	-.216**
WRKLD	.029	.201	1	0.28	-.315
WRKENV	.321**	1.43	0.34	1	-.032
ACAQ	.131	-.220	.354	-.045	1

Table 4: Discrepancies between the original and reproduced correlation coefficients of institutional variables and academic quality

Variables	FAC	CONSERV	WRKLD	WRKENV	ACAQ
FAC	.000				
CONSERV	.007	.000			
WRKLD	.009	.005	.000		
WRKENV	.029	.005	.006	.000	
ACAQ	.009	-.004	0.39	-.013	.000

Table 5: Significant paths through which the institutional variables determine academic quality

Paths	Path coefficients	p-values
P ₂₁	.120**	.001
P ₃₁	.280**	.000
P ₃₂	-.104**	.000
P ₄₁	-.048	.210
P ₄₂	.200**	.000
P ₄₃	.015	.703
P ₅₁	.148**	.000
P ₅₂	-.174**	.000
P ₅₃	-.044	.227
P ₅₄	-.276**	.000

** = Significant at .05

* = Significant at meaningfulness

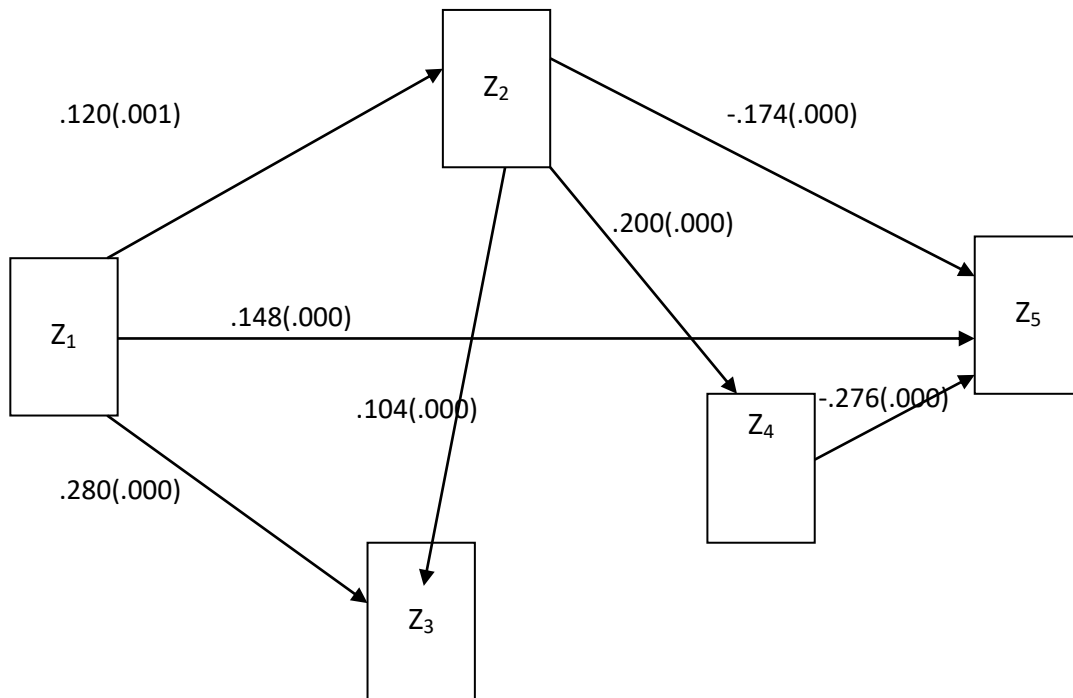


Figure 1: Parsimonious causal model of institutional variables on academic quality

Keys:

Z₁ = Infrastructural facilities

Z₂ = Conditions of service

Z₃ = Work environment

Z₄ = Academic workload

Z₅ = Academic quality

P₂₁-P₅₄ = are obtained by regressing variables 2, 3, 4, 5, taken as the dependent/criterion variables on their predictor variables using the structural equation models earlier (S.E.M.) developed.

Validation of the parsimonious model

To validate the parsimonious model drawn from Fig. 1, the original correlation matrix of the four institutional variables was reproduced. Table 3 shows the original correlation coefficients presented in the upper half of the matrix, and the reproduced ones at the lower half of the matrix. The discrepancies between the original and reproduced correlations as shown in Table 4, are negligible except for academic workload and academic quality, and work environment and infrastructural facilities. These discrepancies could be due to error arising from the sampling techniques and error from the instrument because of its inability to accommodate all the items that were supposed to be covered. Notwithstanding, the values are small enough to justify the acceptance of the model as good, consistent, and reliable for explaining the causal influence of the four institutional variables on the academic quality of the university academics.

Hence, it could be concluded here that, Fig. 1 can be used to explain the causal linkages among the criterion variable and the predictor variables. The null hypothesis was therefore

rejected with the conclusion that, there is a significant, meaningful and parsimonious causal model involving institutional variables and academic quality of the university academics.

Research question three

What proportions of the effects of the institutional variables on academic quality among university academics are direct and indirect? To answer this research question, simple percentages were used. The data in Table 6 was used to verify the research questions. The results of multiple correlation and series of multiple regressions were used to obtain information on the total effect, the direct and indirect effects of the predictor (institutional) variables on the criterion variable (academic quality), while the direct effect is the value of the standardized regression weights between the predictor variables and the criterion variable (X_5). The differences between total effect and direct effect gave the indirect effect (a-b). From the output that brought the data, and the direct and indirect effects of the various predictor variables on the criterion variable, the percentage of the direct and indirect effects relative to the total direct and indirect effects were determined respectively, and shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Decomposition of the total effects of institutional variables on academic quality into proportions of direct and indirect effects

Predictor variables	A total effect	% of T.E rel of Overall T. E.	B Direct effect	% of D.E to Overall T. E.	(a-b) I.E	% of I. E. rel. to Overall T. E.
Facilities	.120	64.17	.148	79.14	-.028	-14.97
Conditions of service	-.216	-115.50	.174	92.06	.042	22.45
Workload	.315	168.44	-.044	-147.59	.039	20.85
Work environment	-.032	-17.11	-.276	-23.52	-.076	-40.64
Total	0.187	100.00		66.23		33.77

- Proportion of total direct effect = 66.23

- Proportion of indirect effect = 33.77

Table 6 shows the total effects (direct and indirect) of the four institutional variables as well as the proportion of their direct and indirect effects relative to the overall relative effect on academic quality. The proportion of the total direct effect to total indirect effect is approximately 66.23:33.77. The result shows that two out of the four institutional variables (infrastructural facilities and conditions of service) exert direct effect. In all, the four predictor variables showed that, the proportion of direct effect in relation to the overall total effect was found to be higher than the indirect effect as they influence academic quality.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results from hypothesis one revealed that, the four institutional variables (infrastructural facilities, conditions of service, academic workload and work environment) when taken together are effective predictors of academic quality among university academics. The observed F-ratio of 29.83 was significant at .05 level which indicates the effectiveness of the whole variables' joint contribution in predicting the academic quality among the academics. A further study of the table revealed that, provision of infrastructural facilities are the highest predictor, followed by

conditions of service and academic workload. This could be due to the fact that, the institutions where the academics serve are supposed to develop policies and programmes that would facilitate the quality of academics that they have. For example, where there are no infrastructures in place, the working conditions of the staff are not favorable and there is no commensurate pay for job performed, and little or no money is spent on conference attendance among others, it may reduce their quality. The findings were in line with that of Yelovi (2014), who carried out a study on institutional variables as predictors of academic quality among staff of tertiary institutions in Kenya. The findings of the study showed that job motivation, work environment and conditions of service were the best predictors of academic quality among academic staff of tertiary institutions in Kenya.

The parsimonious causal model showed that infrastructural facilities influenced academic quality directly and indirectly with a beta coefficient ($\beta = .148$) for direct effect and ($\beta = -14.97$) for indirect effect. The direct effect could be as a result of the fact that, where there are infrastructures in place in the schools such as; conducive office facilities, laboratories/studios, teaching facilities among others, for the staff to utilize; these in turn would influence their academic quality positively. They become comfortable in their offices to read and carry out other academic responsibilities that could contribute to their academic quality. But where there are no facilities for the staff, it may be difficult for the staff to stay in office and may not have the appropriate disposition to carry out the required research and other academic activities that would enhance their quality. The findings were in line with the findings of Olopoenia (2001) who researched on the underdevelopment of university education in Nigeria. The findings showed that the declining glory of the university system is caused by lack of school facilities, conditions of service of lecturers, stressful workload, their relationships with school administration, colleagues and students, lack of participation in decision making and institutional communication patterns. All these affect academics' work performance, effectiveness and quality, in one way or the other.

The result also showed that work environment was a strong predictor of academic quality among academics in the universities. This could be due to the fact that work environment determines to a greater extent the activities of the staff in the school. Where the social climate is always tense, characterizing with suspicion, distrust and poor interpersonal relationships among staff and staff, staff and management and staff and students, there is every likelihood that most staff may prefer to come to work from home and this has the tendency of cutting the benefits that one would have derived if he/she was in the school. This is why the work environment must be made conducive, friendly and favorably for staff activities to trail smoothly. The findings collaborates with that of Inyang and Akpama (2002) who noted that, any university work environment should have good drainage system, conveniences for staff, fire extinguishers, good medical centres, should be free and safe from hazards and unfriendly conditions that constitute threats to the health and safety of employees. The findings were also in line with that of Shahzad et al. (2010) who found out that, human resource specialists, supervisors, favourable work environment and workforce itself, are of great importance in exploring ways of improving job quality and effectiveness in an organization (workplace).

Moreso, the results showed that, conditions of service were also strong predictor of academic quality among academics in the institutions. The result was in line with the work of Osoba (2006) which revealed that, most organizations use compensation and reward systems to achieve their objectives to attract competent employees, to retain or hold employees in the organization, to motivate employees to work effectively, to positively influence the attitudes and

behaviour of employees, to control labour cost and to enhance the performance of the organization. This could be due to the fact that, where staff are motivated by being provided with a favorable work environment, better pay, provision of fringe benefits, incentives among others, these would boost their morals on the job. Where these are not provided, the academic staff may resort to other activities that may affect his/her quality in terms of personal and professional development which are key for academic quality.

Similarly, it appears that two institutional variables have direct effects on academic quality among the academics. From the decomposed table, it seems that the highest direct effect on academic quality among university academics were infrastructural facilities (73.14%) and conditions of service (92.06%). Hence, they should be regarded as the strong predictors of academic quality. Finally, conditions of service has the highest indirect effect (22.45%) followed by workload (20.85%) to the total indirect effect on the criterion variable (academic quality).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it would be concluded that institutional variables such as conditions of services, facilities and work environment influenced academic quality among academics. Thus, it was recommended that academic staff should be provided with the necessary conducive work environment that can enhance their engagement in activities that would improve their quality. That the conditions of service of academics should be improved in order to enhance their quality. More so, academic workload should be reduced in order to reduce stress that affects their chances of getting more professionally improved.

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