



Analysis of Job Demands and Performance of Academic Staff in Private Universities in Kenya

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Abstract: *Quality of university education is dependent on the role that members of academic staff perform in their curriculum and instructional tasks. In recent times, issues of burnout amongst members of the university faculty appears to be increasing. This paper analysed how job demands affected the performance of academic staff in private universities in Kenya. The study is anchored on job demand resources theory to explain how job demands influences workplace performance by employees. The study research design is descriptive. The target population for this study involved academic staff from 10 private universities in Kenya. The respondents were selected using stratified and purposive sampling technique. The data has been collected using questionnaire. Data analysis has been undertaken using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis. The study has found out that job demands present amongst universities academic staff negatively affected their performances. The workload was high, job ambiguity was present and lecturers worked over time in order to complete tasks given. Further, they experienced burnout, mental fatigue and emotional distress due to the demands placed on their desks by their university management. The result effect of job demands was that instructional tasks were not undertaken to the professional standards resulting to subpar performance. The study recommends for private university management to consider employing additional lecturers (on contract basis) to manage the students admitted in their universities as a way of ensuring quality university education is provided.*

Keywords: Job, Demands, Burnout, Academic, University, Lecturer, Workload

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1. Introduction

Every employee wants a peaceful job, a good salary, and a calm environment because it brings happiness in the workplace, including those working in the higher education level, universities. Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis (2021) observed that university has been through an array of changes, such as globalisation, massification, lack of job security, decolonisation and a number of technological advancements. These changes have impacted academic workload and have increased work pressure with resultant effects on family and work life balance. University academic staff perform important role in higher education sector and conduct activities

which are not easy because they have to improve their performance through; carrying out lecturing (teaching), undertake research, perform community service and undertake various duties as required by their university management (Ainun, 2024). Universities academic staff are also required to carry out responsibilities, cooperation, loyalty, leadership, among others (Izuchi & Omukwufor, 2019). Jomuaad, et al. (2021) said that teaching is a rewarding but demanding profession. Teachers are prone to burnout due to long hours of teaching and a heavy workload. Research shows that universities remain the main battlefield for burnout amongst academic staff faculty members. Yousaf, Naseer, Ahmed and Rehman (2025) said that in today's

fast-paced academic landscape, university teachers encounter a considerable workload while managing strict deadlines and diverse responsibilities.

In their efforts to maintain high performance, these members of faculty face significant job demands that can affect both their psychological well-being and job performance. There are factors influencing lecturer performance, one of which is the number of students. The higher the number of students, the higher the teaching load on a lecturer, which in turn can affect their performance. (Anra, et al, 2017). Garcia-Arroyo and Segovia (2019) observed that changes in the education system in Ecuador have increased the workload of university teachers, producing stress and burnout. The reasons for increased stress and burnout among members of university academic staff is due to job demands. Job demands have been identified as a cause of emotional exhaustion, and sustained job demands can lead to high emotional exhaustion among employees (Panari et al., 2019).

The paper is informed by The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001). It is one of key framework for understanding the influence of work characteristics on workers (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 2020). This model highlights the role of two categories of work conditions, job demands and resources. Job demands refer to aspects of a job that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort and are associated with physiological and/or psychological costs. In contrast, job resources refer to job characteristics that support employees in achieving their goals, help reduce the costs of job demands, and stimulate development.

Other countries across the world have perfected the need to align job demands with employees' performance. For example, in Indonesia, Ainun (2024) reported that lecturer performance must be optimised in an effort to improve the quality of university education. When not properly taken care of, job demands and overload can have significant negative consequences for employees in organisations. Oderinde, Akintunde and Ajala (2024) explained that job demands and work overload was a common issue faced by academic professionals and it could result to negative consequences for their physical and mental health. Ojukwu and Nwankwo (2021) pinpointed that that stress has always been an issue that tends to hinder the performance of employee in organisations as well as educational institutions. In Kenya, Kinuthia, Wambua and Kiiru (2022) observed that the performance of university academic staff has become an issue of concern as different governments continue to push for quality higher education globally. It is expected that universities contribute to national development by offering first-class professionals in various fields. But the job demands appear to be a challenge towards the realisation of higher education goals and objectives. Therefore, this paper investigated

job demands and performance of academic staff in private universities in Kenya.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The higher education sector across the world is encountered with significant transformative challenges including in Kenya occasioned by decreased government capitation to private university students. The academic field is recognised for its rigorous demands, necessitating lecturers to perform a variety of tasks, including teaching, research, administrative work, and mentoring, especially in the private university sector. Elsewhere, job demands of academics have also escalated due to the forces of internationalisation and open-learning technology while the levels of support and other resources have declined. This state of affairs has significantly affected private university enrolment by students resulting to massive layoff of academic and non-academic staff to manage the situation. This has created additional demands to the retained members of the academic faculty but research examining the association with performance and productivity is inadequate. It was therefore significant for the paper to analyse how job demands affected performance of academic staff in private universities in Kenya.

Purpose of the Paper

The aim of this paper is to analyse how various job demands present in private universities in Kenya affect members of academic faculty performance.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory which was developed by Bakker et al. (2005). The theorists argue that high job demands and low job resources may result to stress and burnout, whereas positive job attributes can mitigate the effects of high demands and promote motivation and engagement (Mwakyusa, & Mcharo, 2024). According to JD-R theory, job characteristics can be categorized into two main types: job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to social, psychological, physical, or institutional requirements of an individual's job which involve continuous skill or effort, and they are associated with various costs like role ambiguity and job stress (Zhao, ShouChen & Hong, 2024). On the other hand, job resources are the material, social, psychological, or institutional factors which support individuals in achieving their work goals, reducing demands, and promoting personal growth, learning, and development. The JD-R model is widely recognised by scholars undertaking research relating to job stress and burnout. This theory helps to bring more understanding on how job demands happen in the higher education sector and how it influences their productivity. This will highlight the interplay between job demands and job performance

of university academic staff in private universities in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

The academic teaching profession involves lecturers being subjected to various job demands that often underpin a perception of a heavy workload (Arvidsson et al., 2019). Job demands entails multiple meetings that interfere with preparation time, administrative paperwork generated by the management, and being subjected to constant reforms and changes that demand re-organisation of work and work tasks that members of academic staff encounter (Jomoad et al., 2021). According to Mahawati et. al. (2021), job demands that employees perceive as being too much to fulfil in the given time and as too complex. Employees often have no choice and they are forced to perform the task against their will. Every employee must not be able to do work at one time; this will make the employee's morale decrease at that time. When work overload increases, it can pose anxiety for the employee (Abidin et. al., 2020). This is because work overload necessitates a lengthy process to restore employees' well-being, and it also has an impact on the organisation's survival (Abd Aziz, et al., 2024). Within the university sector, the profession was attractive due to light workloads, tenure, and other perks, such as overseas trips to conferences. However, new studies have revealed that university teaching staff experience high-stress levels, qualifying them among the most stressed professionals. There have been sporadic changes in universities in the recent past, and these changes have increased the job demands on lecturers, which causes a lot of strain. For instance, an academic year was split into two semesters, giving the lecturers enough time to engage in research and service. Today, the academic year is divided into three semesters affecting the lecturers' work-life balance and causing strain (Kinuthia et al., 2022). Job demands in universities can have a significant impact on lecturers' stress levels, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. When lecturers have an excessive workload, they often experience higher levels of stress (Oderinde et al., 2024). The pressure to complete numerous tasks within tight deadlines can lead to feelings of overwhelm and anxiety. Chronic stress can have detrimental effects on mental and physical health, leading to burnout, exhaustion, and decreased productivity (Dalbudak & Saricam, 2020) This means that academic staff have added job demands which could affect their performance.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

This section reviews empirical investigation undertaken from other contexts with relation to study objective. In Latin America, Garcia-Arroyo and Segovia (2019) analysed the relation between work overload, coping styles and emotional exhaustion in a sample of 202 university lecturers by using a hierarchical regression

model analysis. Results showed that work overload and evasive coping were positively related to emotional exhaustion, whereas active coping was negatively related to emotional exhaustion. Evasive coping moderated the relationship between work overload and emotional exhaustion so that lecturers who used more evasive coping in situations of high work overload experienced less burnout than teachers who used this coping style less.

In Switzerland, Sandmeier, Baeriswy, Krause and Muehlhausen (2022) analysed the relationships between teachers' work overload, prolonging working hours as a coping strategy, autonomy, and exhaustion. It was a longitudinal survey of K-12 teachers using conditional effects model. Findings showed that the effect of work overload on exhaustion was fully mediated by prolonging working hours. Autonomy moderated the longitudinal effects of work overload on exhaustion. Simple slope analyses demonstrated that autonomy buffered the negative effects of work overload on exhaustion. In Malaysia, Shukri and Taha (2024) explored the relationship between work overload and stress among teachers using a quantitative approach with 80 participants from two secondary schools. Findings indicated that demographic factors do not significantly influence stress, as both male and female teachers report similar stress levels due to workload. Additionally, no significant correlation was found between teaching experience and stress, challenging the notion that more experienced teachers manage stress better. The study identifies non-teaching responsibilities, including administrative duties and technology adaptation, as primary contributors to stress.

In Pakistan, Yousaf et al. (2025) investigated the role of job demand in shaping the job performance of university teachers. They focused on the mediating roles of Psychological Well-Being (PWB), anxiety and depression, and the moderating role of social support. The study was informed by Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Theory. A cross-sectional design was used and data collected quantitatively from university teachers through use of electronic structured questionnaire. Structural equation modelling show that PWB, anxiety, and depression act as mediators in the relationship between job demands and job performance. Social support moderated the effects of job demands on anxiety and depression. Social support moderated the relationship between job demands and PWB. In Nigeria, Oderinde, Akintunde and Ajala (2024) examined the impact of work overload on the well-being of lecturers at Obafemi Awolowo University. The study used a qualitative approach and collects its data from secondary sources such as textbooks, newspapers, academic journals, dissertations and theses. Findings indicated that lecturers faced high levels of work overload which had a significant negative impact on their physical and mental health.

At Makerere University Uganda, Baguma, Karoya, Nalusiba, Nyiraguhirwa, Nassiwa and Nduhura (2024) study was about working conditions, job stress and job performance of employees. A sample of 80 respondents were selected. findings showed that time allocated to the job, workload and health and the nature of workload affect motivation, which adversely affects the academic's performance. The findings also show that causes of job stress within the limits of this study include time required to complete a task; academics' use of personal time; heavy workload requirements; stress from co-workers, sub-ordinates and supervisors and gender stereotypes. In Kenya, Kinuthia, Wambua and Kiiru (2022) investigated the effect of occupational stress interventions on the performance of academic staff in selected public universities. The study adopted an explanatory design and a cross-sectional survey. The findings showed a positive and significant relationship between occupational stress intervention and the performance of academic staff. The gap created from this study is that it was conducted within public university setting whereas the present paper focused on private universities in Kenya.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was adopted since it enabled the researcher to carry in-depth survey to understand the subject matter from a population that is spread across a large area. The target population for this study were all the academic staff in private universities in Kenya. The target

consisted of male and female academic staff. Data from Commission for University Education shows that there are 30 chartered private universities that are spread across the country though most of them are situated in Nairobi City. Two sampling techniques were used in the selection of respondents involved in the study. First, the study identified all the private universities in Kenya (30 in number) then by use of simple random sampling and selected one third (10 universities) to be involved in this study. Secondly, purposive sampling was used in selecting all the 750 academic staff in the 10 private universities. The research instrument used in the study was 3-scale Likert questionnaire. The items on the selected workplace relationship stressors and work performance Questionnaire (WSWP) as represented by the physical working conditions. Data was analysed using the SPSS computer programme (Version 25.0). The data, which is quantitative was summarised and presented using descriptive statistics including percentages, frequency distribution tables and figures.

4. Results and Discussion

The objective of the paper was to investigate the effect of job demands on the work performance of academic staff in private universities. To achieve this objective, the following research question was asked to respond to ten statements that were measuring their feelings about the effect of job demands on their work performance. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented on Table 1.

Table 1: Description of Effect of Job Demands on Performance

Job demands	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
1 Multiple role demands is making work difficult	450	70.3	105	16.4	85	13.2
2 Work overload is a daily struggle at work	400	62.5	90	14.06	150	23.4
3 Workers usually experience no role ambiguity	445	69.5	110	17.1	85	13.2
4 I work extra hours in order to accomplish my tasks	430	67.1	30	4.6	180	28.1
5 I have foregone leave several times due to job demands	395	61.7	25	3.9	220	34.3
6 I occasionally forgo breaks in order to accomplish tasks	440	68.7	15	2.3	185	28.9
7 I feel exhausted at the end of each working day	475	74.2	88	13.7	77	12.0
8 The work I do is engaging and challenging	500	78.1	45	7.0	95	14.8
9 Blame culture and bullying is rampant at workplace	370	57.8	200	31.2	70	10.9

The results show that 450 (70.3 %) of the respondents agreed that multiple role demands is making work difficult, 105 (16.4%) were undecided and 150 (23.4%) disagreed. The above result indicates that lecturers from

private universities in Kenya face increased role demands which makes their work become difficult. The result also points out that the lecturers are not only engaged in academic matters but more which put them

under a lot of pressure resulting to work overload and this could have significant impact on their work productivity. When asked as to whether work overload was a daily struggle at work, 62.5% agreed, 14.1% were neutral and 23.4% disagreed. The result reveal that most academic staff in private universities experience work overload on daily basis which makes them struggle in their service delivery. In line with the study findings, Oderinde et al. (2024) research in Nigeria found out that heavy workload and related stressors was inked to many unfavourable effects, such as diminished physical health, burnout, and job dissatisfaction faced by academic professionals.

Study results also show that 69.5% of respondents agreed that most academic staff members normally experienced role ambiguity, 110 (17.1%) were undecided and 85 (13.2%) did not face role ambiguity. This resulted to mental exhaustion by members of academic staff. In line with the study results, a study by Mwakyusa and Mcharo (2024) in Tanzania healthcare setting discovered that role ambiguity significantly contributed to mental exhaustion by employees. Kinuthia et al. (2022) observed that management of the lecturer's performance which has often been characterised by role ambiguity was a concern if the universities were to reach their mandate in Kenya. This means that when there is continuous role ambiguity amongst academic staff, the university goals cannot be attained effectively. Study findings also showed that most, 430 (67.1%) of academic staff worked extra hours so as to accomplish their duties, 4.6% sometimes worked extra hours and only 28.1% admitted not to be working overtime. Because most private universities lay off their staff due to withdrawal of government support to students studying there. This means that the lecturers who remain end up working extra hours in order to accomplish their duties resulting to incidents of burnout amongst them.

When asked as to whether they had foregone leave several times due to job demands, 395 (61.7%) agreed, 25 (3.9%) were undecided and 220 (34.3%) disagreed. The result show that more than 60.0% of lecturers fail to go for their annual leave from their universities due to work demands. In most cases, it was found out that it would be difficult for lecturers to be given their 21 days' annual leave that run concurrently. On whether they occasionally forgo breaks so as to accomplish tasks, most 440 (68.7%) agreed, 15 (2.3%) were undecided and 185 (28.9%) disagreed. This result shows that most lecturers rarely went for health, breakfast or lunch breaks when they are in the universities in order to accomplish their tasks. From the above, it can be seen that the workload that academic staff members have in the public universities in Kenya is high which could be detrimental to their performance.

Study findings also reveal that close to three quarter (54.2%) of academic staff in public universities always felt exhausted at the end of each working day, 13.7% sometimes felt being exhausted and sometimes not and

12.0% did not experience exhaustion from their work. The above result suggests that the job demands for most lecturers are high and therefore by evening, most of them are exhausted completely. Result also show that 370 (57.8%) agreed that the duties they were engaged with were challenging and engaging, 45 (7.0%) were undecided and 95 (14.8%) disagreed. The above results suggest that lecturers are mostly occupied and cannot find time to rest or be engaged in other activities (including family) in private universities in Kenya. Lastly, the study found out that most, 370 (57.8%) of the respondents agreed that blame culture and bullying is common in their workplaces, 31.2% were undecided and 10.9% disagreed. Due to job demands and workload that most members of the academic staff experience, the blame incidents and bullying culture are rampant. This kind of an environment would affect the performance of the academic staff.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The paper has established that job demands continue to be challenge that most academic staff of Kenya's public universities continue to experience on daily basis. These demands placed upon lecturers from private universities were found to be depressing and challenging to many of them. Most of the lecturers complained of heavy workload, role ambiguity and high level of supervision when performing their duties. Specifically, the study found out that more than 60.0% of lecturers forego their annual leave in most cases because of the structure of their work schedule (most had trimesters instead of normal two semesters in an academic year). Some lecturers were found being unable to balance work-family-life, others worked over time and many reported that they did not take health, break and lunch breaks when in college. This sustained job demands were found to negatively affect employee productivity, emotional and mental health. From the results, most members of academic staff were drained and experienced burnout, low energy levels and chronic fatigue as a result of heavy workloads. The end result of job demands was low morale, poor work relationships and poor job satisfaction. Whereas university demands for academic staff to conduct their instructional duties well, the job demands affect the quality of instruction offered to students in schools. This makes academic staff to have limited times and opportunity to advance and conduct research, conduct individualised attention to students and struggle to perform their duties resulting to poor performance.

5.2 Recommendations

1. The paper recommends that private university management should strive to address job demands causes in order to ensure that there is conducive

environment for work by members of academic staff in order to increase their performance and productivity.

2. There is also need for private university management to consider employing additional lecturers (on contract basis) to manage the students admitted in their universities as a way of ensuring quality university education is provided.
3. There is also need for university management to ensure that all human resource policies are implemented to the latter to ensure issues of employees' job responsibilities, tasks and assignments are properly undertaken within the contexts of the labour laws.

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