

INFLUENCE OF MANAGEMENT APPLICATION OF ESPRIT DE CORPS ON ACADEMIC STAFF JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of management application of esprit de corps on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 3,262 academic staff drawn from three public universities in Cross River State. A sample size of 344 academic staff was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling model. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Management Application of Esprit de Corps and Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (MAESAJOPQ). To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to expert review for face and content validity, while reliability was established through a pilot test involving which yielded a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients average of 0.82 indicating high internal consistency of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the hypotheses were tested using Chi-square test of goodness of fit at a 0.05 level of significance. The major findings of the study revealed that management application of esprit de corps significantly influenced academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. Specifically, the study found that team cohesion, mutual trust and sense of belonging. Based on the findings, the study concluded that management application of esprit de corps had a significant and positive influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made among others University management should strengthen team cohesion among academic staff through collaborative academic structures and team-based teaching and research activities. This should be implemented by Heads of Departments, who should ensure effective coordination of teamwork and collaborative academic engagements within departments.

Keywords: esprit de corps, Staff job performance, Public universities, Team Cohesion, Mutual Trust and Sense of Belonging

Introduction

Teaching is a multifaceted and complex professional activity that requires effective interaction, cooperation, and coordination among academic staff for institutional goals to be achieved. In universities, academic staff are not only responsible for classroom teaching but are also expected to undertake research, supervise students, participate in community service, contribute to curriculum development, and perform various academic and administrative responsibilities. The effectiveness with which these responsibilities are discharged is therefore critical to the quality and sustainability of higher education. However, concerns about declining academic staff job performance have continued to attract the attention of educational researchers, university administrators, and policymakers. Manifestations such as declining research output, inconsistent lecture delivery, inadequate student mentoring, weak institutional commitment, and poor participation in institutional activities raise concerns about the capacity of universities to effectively fulfil their core mandates of teaching, research, and community service.

Globally, concerns about academic staff job performance have been reported in different higher education systems, although the nature and intensity of the challenges vary across contexts. In developed countries, including the United Kingdom and Australia, concerns have been associated with declining teaching effectiveness, reduced research engagement, weakened staff morale, absenteeism, and limited participation in institutional development activities (Altbach, 2015). Nevertheless, many universities in these contexts have responded through professional development programmes, performance-based incentives, supportive leadership practices, and flexible workload arrangements aimed at improving staff engagement and productivity. These experiences suggest that academic staff performance is not determined solely by individual competence but is also influenced by the organizational and managerial environment within which academic work is performed.

The situation is particularly challenging in developing regions, including parts of Asia and Africa. In countries such as India and China, concerns about academic performance have been reflected in irregular class delivery, inadequate student support, and inconsistent scholarly productivity (Gupta & Shah, 2018). Across sub-Saharan Africa, academic staff have similarly been associated with declining classroom engagement, reduced publication output, and weaker commitment to mentoring and community service (Ofoegbu, 2020). In Nigeria, disruptions to academic activities, delayed examination processes, incomplete course coverage, and inadequate attention to administrative responsibilities have become recurring concerns within the university system (Ejiogu, 2019). These conditions indicate the need for management approaches capable of strengthening cooperation, commitment, morale, and collective responsibility among academic staff.

Within the Nigerian university system, academic staff job performance is particularly important because lecturers constitute a major human resource through which universities achieve their academic and societal mandates. Academic staff job performance refers to the extent to which academic employees effectively and efficiently perform assigned

responsibilities in areas such as teaching, research, student supervision, community service, and related academic and administrative duties. Onuma (2015) described academic staff job performance in terms of how university lecturers execute their assigned academic and administrative responsibilities, while Aminu (2017) viewed it in relation to the effectiveness and efficiency with which academic staff contribute to institutional goals through scholarly and professional activities. Consequently, the performance of academic staff has implications for the quality of graduates produced, the research visibility of universities, student development, institutional reputation, and the contribution of higher education to societal development.

Academic staff job performance is influenced by several organizational and individual factors. Motivation and incentives can encourage commitment when staff receive appropriate rewards and recognition, while leadership style can promote innovation, responsibility, and staff participation in institutional activities (Okeke, 2018). Similarly, a conducive physical and psychological work environment can strengthen staff morale and productivity (Ugwoke, 2021), while professional development opportunities can enhance competence and institutional capacity through training and career advancement (Ibrahim & Oboegbulem, 2019). Although these factors are important, the quality of relationships and collective spirit existing among members of an organization may also determine how effectively employees perform their responsibilities. This provides a basis for considering management application of esprit de corps as another potentially important influence on academic staff job performance in public universities.

Esprit de corps is a French expression commonly interpreted as the “spirit of the group.” It represents a shared feeling of unity, loyalty, cooperation, morale, and pride among members of an organization. The concept is particularly relevant to management because organizational objectives are rarely achieved through isolated individual efforts; rather, they require cooperation and coordinated action among members. Fayol (1916), in his classical management principles, identified esprit de corps as one of the fourteen principles of management and emphasized the importance of cultivating harmony, unity, and team spirit among employees. From this perspective, management has a responsibility to create conditions that encourage employees to work together, trust one another, identify with the organization, and pursue shared objectives. In university environments, where academic activities require collaboration across departments, faculties, and other institutional units, the deliberate application of esprit de corps may therefore provide an important foundation for improved staff performance.

The relevance of management application of esprit de corps to academic staff performance becomes clearer when its specific dimensions are considered. Esprit de corps can be expressed through several organizational practices and conditions, including team cohesion, mutual trust, sense of belonging, open communication, shared vision, organizational loyalty, recognition and appreciation, conflict resolution culture, participative leadership, and social bonding activities (Adeleke, 2016). While all these elements can contribute to a positive organizational climate, team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging are particularly relevant to the present study because they represent fundamental relational conditions through which management can cultivate unity and collective commitment among academic staff.

Team cohesion refers to the degree of unity, cooperation, and attachment that exists among members of a group in pursuing shared objectives. In the university environment, effective team cohesion enables academic staff to collaborate in teaching, share professional knowledge, coordinate research activities, participate in curriculum development, mentor students, and jointly address institutional challenges. Where academic departments operate as cohesive units, staff are more likely to combine their knowledge and skills toward common academic goals. Such cooperation can facilitate interdisciplinary research, improve academic planning, strengthen student support, and enhance collective responsibility for institutional outcomes. However, team cohesion can be weakened by internal rivalry, individualism, lack of transparency, and ineffective departmental administration. Obasi (2017) noted that disunity among academic staff can undermine knowledge sharing, weaken morale, and reduce productivity. Thus, the extent to which university management promotes unity and cooperation among academic staff may have implications for their job performance.

Mutual trust constitutes another important dimension of esprit de corps. It refers to the confidence that employees have in the integrity, competence, fairness, and intentions of their colleagues and organizational leaders. Trust is particularly important in university settings because academic work involves considerable professional autonomy, collaboration, information sharing, joint research, peer assessment, committee responsibilities, and collective decision-making. Where academic staff trust one another and have confidence in management, they may be more willing to collaborate, share ideas, assume responsibilities, communicate concerns, and participate actively in institutional activities. Conversely, perceived favouritism, lack of transparency, politicization of promotions, and inequitable access to research opportunities can weaken trust and create divisions among staff. Nwankwo (2016) observed that such conditions can contribute to the development of professional silos, discourage joint efforts, and diminish commitment to institutional objectives. This suggests that management practices that strengthen fairness, transparency, openness, and interpersonal confidence may be important for sustaining academic staff performance.

Closely related to mutual trust is sense of belonging, which refers to the extent to which academic staff feel accepted, valued, included, and connected to their institution and its community. A strong sense of belonging can encourage employees to identify with organizational goals and regard institutional success as partly their own responsibility. In universities, staff who feel that their contributions are recognized and that they have a meaningful place within the institution may be more willing to participate in academic and administrative activities, collaborate with colleagues, and remain committed to institutional development. Conversely, when academic staff perceive themselves as excluded, undervalued, or unsupported, they may develop feelings of alienation that can weaken motivation and commitment. Eze and Ugwoke (2018) noted that poor management–employee relations, inadequate recognition, and insufficient staff welfare can leave academic staff feeling disconnected and demotivated. Therefore, the extent to which university management creates an inclusive environment in which academic staff feel valued and connected may influence their willingness and ability to perform effectively.

The three dimensions are interconnected in the development of esprit de corps within an organization. Team cohesion provides the basis for collective action, mutual trust creates

confidence necessary for sustained collaboration, while a sense of belonging provides the emotional and professional attachment that encourages employees to remain committed to the group and its objectives. When these conditions are present, academic staff may be more willing to share knowledge, cooperate in research and teaching activities, support colleagues, participate in institutional responsibilities, and contribute to the achievement of university goals. Conversely, weak cohesion, declining trust, and feelings of exclusion may produce fragmented relationships, reduced cooperation, low morale, and diminished commitment, with possible consequences for staff job performance.

The need to examine these dimensions becomes particularly important within Nigerian public universities, which operate in an environment characterized by challenges such as inadequate funding, administrative difficulties, politicization of institutional processes, and concerns about staff welfare. These challenges can create conditions under which collegial relationships and collective morale become difficult to sustain. Adeleke (2021) and Okonkwo and Udeh (2019) observed that systemic challenges within Nigerian public universities can undermine staff morale, commitment, and institutional effectiveness. In such an environment, management application of esprit de corps becomes relevant because it provides a management-oriented approach through which university administrators can deliberately promote unity, trust, inclusion, and collective responsibility among academic staff.

The situation is also relevant to public universities in Cross River State, where concerns about academic staff performance and institutional effectiveness require closer empirical attention. Indications of fragmented staff relationships, weak interdepartmental communication, declining institutional loyalty, and ineffective management practices raise questions about the extent to which university management has successfully cultivated the spirit of unity and collective commitment required for effective academic work. Akpan and Ekpenyong (2020) observed that weaknesses in staff relationships and institutional management can affect organizational output and compromise teaching and research quality. Where academic staff experience limited cooperation, insufficient trust, or weak attachment to institutional goals, the collective effort required to sustain high-quality teaching, research, student supervision, and community service may be adversely affected.

Although previous discussions have identified several elements through which esprit de corps may contribute to organizational effectiveness, there remains a need to examine the specific influence of team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging on academic staff job performance within the context of public universities in Cross River State. This is important because the presence of these conditions cannot simply be assumed from the existence of formal university structures. Rather, their effectiveness depends substantially on how management creates, sustains, and reinforces relationships among academic staff. Examining these dimensions can therefore provide empirical evidence on whether the management application of esprit de corps contributes meaningfully to academic staff job performance.

It is against this background that the study examined the influence of management application of esprit de corps on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State, with particular emphasis on the influence of team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging. The study was premised on the view that academic staff performance may be

strengthened when university management deliberately cultivates a work environment characterized by unity, confidence, inclusion, and collective commitment.

A growing concern in Nigerian public universities, particularly those in Cross River State, is the apparent decline in academic staff job performance. This concern is reflected in inconsistent lecture delivery, low research and publication output, inadequate student mentoring, poor participation in institutional activities, weak institutional commitment, and reduced attention to some academic and administrative responsibilities. Such weaknesses are worrisome because academic staff are central to the achievement of the core mandates of universities, including teaching, research, student supervision, and community service. If the situation persists, it may undermine academic standards, institutional effectiveness, and the quality of graduates produced by public universities.

The problem may be partly associated with the quality of relationships and collective spirit existing among academic staff. In an ideal university environment, academic staff are expected to work cooperatively, trust one another, feel valued and included, and demonstrate collective commitment to institutional objectives. Esprit de corps, which emphasizes unity, cooperation, loyalty, morale, and group spirit, provides a management principle through which such conditions can be promoted. Fayol (1916) emphasized that management should cultivate team spirit and harmony among employees because organizational effectiveness depends substantially on collective rather than isolated efforts. However, where esprit de corps is weak or inadequately applied by university management, academic staff may experience fragmented relationships, weak cooperation, declining trust, and limited attachment to institutional goals.

The concern is particularly evident in the areas of team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging. Team cohesion may be undermined by internal rivalry, individualism, lack of transparency, and weak departmental cooperation, thereby limiting knowledge sharing and collective academic efforts (Obasi, 2017). Mutual trust may also be weakened by perceived favouritism, inadequate transparency in administrative processes, and concerns about promotions and research opportunities, which can discourage collaboration and diminish commitment to institutional objectives (Nwankwo, 2016). Similarly, academic staff who experience poor management–employee relations, inadequate recognition, or insufficient institutional support may develop a weak sense of belonging, leading to feelings of alienation and reduced motivation (Eze & Ugwoke, 2018). These conditions raise concerns about whether academic staff are operating within an organizational environment capable of sustaining the level of cooperation and commitment required for effective job performance.

In Cross River State, the concern is further heightened by indications of fragmented staff relationships, ineffective interdepartmental cooperation, weak institutional commitment, and management challenges within public universities. Akpan and Ekpenyong (2020) observed that weaknesses in staff relationships and institutional management can affect organizational output and compromise teaching and research quality. Similarly, broader challenges confronting Nigerian public universities, including administrative inefficiencies, inadequate funding, and weak institutional support, can adversely affect staff morale and commitment (Adeleke, 2021; Okonkwo & Udeh, 2019). However, while these studies provide useful explanations for variations in academic staff performance, relatively less attention has been given to the

relational dimensions of management application of esprit de corps, particularly team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging.

The problem, therefore, is that although management application of esprit de corps may provide a basis for strengthening unity, trust, inclusion, and collective commitment among academic staff, it remains unclear to what extent team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging influence academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. Existing studies have largely concentrated on factors such as funding, leadership, infrastructure, motivation, and job satisfaction, leaving an empirical gap concerning these specific dimensions of esprit de corps within the study area. Without empirical evidence on these relationships, university administrators may have limited basis for determining whether strengthening team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging can contribute to improved academic staff performance. It is this problem and empirical gap that necessitated the present study, which examined the influence of team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

The purpose of the study was to find out the influence of management application of esprit de corps on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. More specifically, this study seeks to:

1. examine the influence of Team Cohesion on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.
2. determine the influence of Mutual Trust on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.
3. assess the influence of Sense of Belonging on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. how does team cohesion influence the academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State?
- 1 in what ways does mutual trust influence academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State?
- 2 what is the influence of Sense of Belonging on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State?

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. team cohesion has no significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.
2. mutual trust has no significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.
3. sense of belonging has no significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Nworgu (2015) asserts that the descriptive survey design is concerned with collecting data at a single point in time and systematically describing the characteristics of a given population without manipulating variables. In the same vein. The design was adopted because it enables the researcher to study a large population of academic staff in public universities in Cross River State within a relatively short period and at minimal cost.

The population of this study consisted of 3,262 academic staff drawn from three public universities in Cross River State. Specifically, University of Calabar has 2,555 academic staff, University of Cross River State, Calabar has 565 academic staff and University of Education and Entrepreneurship, Calabar has 142 academic staff.

The sample size for this study consists of 344 academic staff, determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination formula. The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure involving proportionate stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques.

The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled “Management Application of Esprit de Corps and Academic Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (MAESAJOPQ)”, which was developed by the researcher and sighted by the supervisors. The questionnaire was made up of 15 carefully constructed items designed to elicit information directly related to the objectives, research questions, and hypotheses of the study. To ensure clarity and focus, the instrument was organized into three clusters, each representing one of the esprit de corps variables under investigation. The questionnaire items were presented on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point).

To ensure both the face and content validity of the instrument, the researcher subjected the questionnaire to expert review. These experts carefully scrutinize the instrument to determine the extent to which the items are relevant to the research objectives and capable of measuring the specified variables of the study. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was conducted using a sample of 40 academic staff drawn from a public university in Benue State, specifically Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. The scores obtained from the study were used to determine its reliability using Cronbach Alpha. The instrument yielded reliability coefficients of 0.84, 0.87, 0.90, for (clusters A, B and C respectively). The overall average reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained for the whole instrument. These coefficients were considered high enough to establish the instrument’s reliability for the study.

The data collected was analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) to answer the research questions. The decision level was determined by the use of criterion mean of 2.50 ($\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = 2.50$). The hypotheses were tested using chi-square test of goodness of fit to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision to reject or not reject a null hypothesis was based on comparison between the level of significance alpha ($\alpha=0.05$) and the statistical or probability value (P). When $P \leq 0.05$, the null hypotheses were rejected, and where $P \geq 0.05$ the null hypotheses were not rejected. All the computation were calculated using SPSS version 20

RESULTS

Out of 344 questionnaire distributed three were found to be inappropriately completed and were excluded. Analysis and interpretation of data are done in line with the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: How does team cohesion influence academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Team Cohesion on Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Cross River State

S/No	Item Description	n	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ	Remark
1	My department works together as a team, which improves my ability to achieve set academic goals.	341	98	109	70	64	2.71	1.08	Agreed
2	I collaborate with colleagues to complete academic tasks, and this enhances my job performance.	341	111	114	62	54	2.83	1.06	Agreed
3	I feel a sense of unity when working with my team members, and this motivates me to perform better in my duties.	341	120	124	51	46	2.93	1.02	Agreed
4	Team cohesion helps me to deliver my duties on time.	341	112	115	59	55	2.83	1.06	Agreed
5	Lack of teamwork negatively affects the timeliness of my job performance.	341	111	109	68	53	2.82	1.06	Agreed
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation							2.82	1.06	Agreed

The findings from Table1 indicate that team cohesion influences academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. Item 1 has a mean score of 2.71, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that working together as a team improves the ability of academic staff to achieve set academic goals. Item 2, with a mean score of 2.83, suggests that collaboration among colleagues enhances job performance. Similarly, Item 3 has a mean score of 2.93, indicating that a sense of unity among team members motivates academic staff to perform better in their duties. Item 4, with a mean score of 2.83, shows that team cohesion contributes to timely delivery of duties. Item 5 has a mean score of 2.82, implying that lack of teamwork negatively affects the timeliness of job performance. The cluster mean of 2.82 being above the cutoff mean of 2.50 confirms that team cohesion positively influences academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

Research Question 2: In what ways does mutual trust influence academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Mutual Trust on Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Cross River State

S/No	Item Description	n	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ	Remark
1	I trust my colleagues to carry out their teaching responsibilities effectively.	341	141	111	47	42	3.03	1.02	Agreed
2	I can rely on my colleagues to support me in academic tasks which enhances my job performance.	341	140	113	57	31	3.06	0.97	Agreed
3	I trust my university management to treat staff fairly in decision-making, which motivates me to perform my duties better.	341	130	116	48	47	2.96	1.04	Agreed
4	My colleagues' honesty when working together on tasks enhances our collective performance.	341	117	127	57	40	2.94	0.99	Agreed
5	I trust that confidential issues shared with colleagues build confidence that improves my performance.	341	109	118	63	51	2.84	1.04	Agreed
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation							2.97	1.01	Agreed

The findings from Table 2 indicate that mutual trust influences academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. Item 1 has a mean score of 3.03, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that trust in colleagues' ability to carry out teaching responsibilities effectively enhances job performance. Item 2, with a mean score of 3.06, suggests that relying on colleagues for support in academic tasks improves academic staff performance. Similarly, Item 3 has a mean score of 2.96, implying that trust in university management to treat staff fairly in decision-making motivates academic staff to perform their duties better. Item 4, with a mean score of 2.94, indicates that colleagues' honesty in collaborative tasks enhances collective performance. Item 5 has a mean score of 2.84, showing that trust regarding confidential issues shared among colleagues builds confidence that improves performance. The cluster mean of 2.97, which is above the cutoff mean of 2.50, confirms that mutual trust positively influences academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of sense of belonging on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Sense of Belonging on Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Cross River State

S/No	Item Description	n	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ	Remark
1	I feel accepted as a member of my department, and this motivates me to perform better.	341	117	115	55	54	2.87	1.06	Agreed
2	I am proud to belong to my university community, which strengthens my work commitment.	341	120	96	65	60	2.81	1.10	Agreed
3	Being included in departmental activities makes me perform better.	341	112	108	62	59	2.80	1.08	Agreed
4	Exclusion from university activities reduces my motivation.	341	111	115	61	54	2.83	1.06	Agreed
5	A sense of belonging improves my job performance.	341	115	111	63	52	2.85	1.06	Agreed
Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation							2.83	1.07	Agreed

The findings from Table 3 indicate that sense of belonging influences academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. Item 1 has a mean score of 2.87, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that feeling accepted as a member of one's department motivates academic staff to perform better. Item 2, with a mean score of 2.81, suggests that pride in belonging to the university community strengthens work commitment. Similarly, Item 3 has a mean score of 2.80, implying that inclusion in departmental activities enhances job performance. Item 4, with a mean score of 2.83, indicates that exclusion from university activities reduces motivation and affects performance. Item 5 has a mean score of 2.85, showing that a sense of belonging contributes positively to job performance. The cluster mean of 2.83, being above the cutoff mean of 2.50, confirms that sense of belonging positively influences academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Team cohesion has no significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of Team Cohesion on Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Cross River State

Responses	fo	Fe	df	χ^2	P	Remark
SD	55	85.3				
D	62	85.3				
A	114	85.3	3	33.956	0.000	Significant
SA	110	85.3				
Total	341					

Table 4 shows that the Chi-square (χ^2) value is 33.956, with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that team cohesion has a significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

Hypothesis 2: Mutual trust has no significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State

Table 5: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of Mutual Trust on Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Cross River State

Responses	fo	Fe	df	χ^2	p	Remark
SD	43	85.3				
D	54	85.3				
A	117	85.3	3	64.666	0.000	Significant
SA	127	85.3				
Total	341					

Table 5 shows that the Chi-square (χ^2) value is 64.666, with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that mutual trust has a significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

Hypothesis 3: Sense of belonging has no significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State

Table 6: Chi-Square Analysis on the Influence of Sense of Belonging on Academic Staff Job Performance in Public Universities in Cross River State

Responses	Fo	Fe	df	χ^2	p	Remark
SD	56	85.3	3	33.933	0.000	Significant
D	61	85.3				
A	109	85.3				
SA	115	85.3				
Total	341					

Table 6 shows that the Chi-square (χ^2) value is 33.933, with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that sense of belonging has a significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the analyzed data the following findings are thus discussed:

The first finding of this study revealed that team cohesion has a significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. This means that when academic staff work together in a united, cooperative, and supportive manner, their ability to achieve teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities improves significantly. Team cohesion strengthens coordination among staff, reduces workplace fragmentation, and enhances shared responsibility in academic tasks. This finding is in line with the work of Paganin, Avanzi, Guglielmi, Alcover and Mazzetti (2023) who found that transformational leadership had a positive and significant influence on team cohesion. The study further revealed that organizational identification mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and team cohesion, while emotional contagion moderated this relationship. Their findings imply that strong internal group dynamics enhance cohesion, which ultimately supports effective teamwork performance.

The second finding of this study revealed that mutual trust has a significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. This implies that when academic staff trust one another and also trust university management, there is improved cooperation in teaching, research, and administrative duties. Mutual trust strengthens collaboration, reduces suspicion, improves communication, and enhances overall productivity in the university system. This finding is in line with the work of Johnson (2015) who found that mutual trust significantly predicted faculty collaboration in research and teaching, thereby enhancing job performance. The study further revealed that trust between staff and university management was positively associated with reduced absenteeism and increased productivity, while lack of trust created communication gaps, reduced morale, and weakened collective responsibility in universities. This supports the present study by showing that trust is a key driver of effective academic performance.

The third finding of this study revealed that sense of belonging has a significant influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. This implies that when academic staff feel accepted, valued, and included in their departments and the wider university community, their level of commitment, motivation, and performance in teaching, research, and service delivery improves significantly. A strong sense of belonging enhances emotional attachment to the institution, reduces withdrawal behaviours, and promotes active participation in academic activities. This finding is in line with the work of Adebayo (2016) who found that sense of belonging significantly predicted job commitment among academic staff. The study further revealed that staff with a higher sense of belonging were more punctual, more involved in curriculum development, and showed stronger commitment to research supervision, while those with low belonging exhibited absenteeism and reduced student mentoring. This supports the present finding by showing that belongingness strengthens responsibility and engagement in academic duties.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that management application of esprit de corps had a significant and positive influence on academic staff job performance in public universities in Cross River State. It was concluded that when universities promote team cohesion, mutual trust, and sense of belonging academic staff tend to demonstrate higher levels of commitment, productivity, and effectiveness in their teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities. The study therefore established that esprit de corps is a critical managerial and relational framework for enhancing staff performance and strengthening institutional effectiveness in public universities.

Recommendations

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

- i. University management should strengthen team cohesion among academic staff through collaborative academic structures and team-based teaching and research activities. This should be implemented by Heads of Departments, who should ensure effective coordination of teamwork and collaborative academic engagements within departments.
- ii. University management should build and sustain mutual trust between staff and leadership by promoting fairness, transparency, and consistency in decision-making. This should be implemented by Governing Councils and University Management, who should enforce transparent policies and fair administrative procedures in staff matters.
- iii. University management should promote a sense of belonging by ensuring that all academic staff are actively involved in departmental and institutional activities. This should be implemented by Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments, who should ensure equitable participation of staff in academic planning and administrative responsibilities.

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