

Organisational Trust And Work Engagement As Predictors Of Academic Staff Commitment In Delta State-Owned Universities

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Abstract: *This study investigated organisational trust and work engagement as predictors of academic staff commitment in universities owned by Delta State. A correlational research design was employed. The study population consisted of 1,486 academic staff working across the three Delta State-owned universities during the 2024/2025 academic session. A total of 400 academic staff were selected through a multi-stage sampling approach that incorporated purposive, proportionate, and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using three standardised instruments: the Organisational Trust Scale, the Work Engagement Scale, and the Academic Staff Commitment Questionnaire. The instruments were validated by specialists in Educational Management as well as Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability testing was conducted using the Cronbach's alpha method, which produced reliability coefficients of 0.83 for organisational trust, 0.86 for work engagement, and 0.81 for academic staff commitment. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 376 were properly completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 94.0%. The data obtained were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression statistical techniques. The results indicated that organisational trust significantly predicted academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. In addition, work engagement was found to be a significant predictor of academic staff commitment. Furthermore, organisational trust and work engagement jointly significantly predicted academic staff commitment, indicating that the combined effect of organisational and psychological factors provides a stronger explanation of lecturers' commitment than either factor alone. The study concluded that fostering trust in university leadership and enhancing lecturers' engagement in their work are essential for strengthening academic staff commitment in state-owned universities. It was recommended that university management adopt transparent administrative practices, promote supportive work environments, and implement integrated strategies that simultaneously enhance organisational trust and work engagement to improve academic staff commitment.*

Keywords: Organisational trust; work engagement; academic staff commitment; state-owned universities; educational management.

Introduction

Universities occupy a central position in national development through their roles in knowledge production, human capital development, and community engagement. The effectiveness with which universities carry out these functions depends largely on the level of commitment exhibited by academic staff. Academic staff commitment is widely regarded as a critical determinant of teaching quality, research productivity, institutional stability, and staff retention in higher education institutions (Abebe & Assemie, 2023; Wen et al., 2023). Committed academic staff are more likely to demonstrate dedication to institutional goals, invest sustained effort in teaching and research, and contribute positively to university governance and development initiatives.

In recent years, public universities, particularly state-owned universities in Nigeria, have faced increasing organisational challenges that may affect academic staff commitment (Oroye-Okpoudhu, 2025). These challenges include limited funding, delayed promotions, heavy workloads, perceived inequities in administrative processes, and strained relationships between academic staff and university management. In Delta State-owned universities, these issues have been further compounded by policy changes, economic pressures, and heightened expectations for performance. Such conditions may weaken academic staff commitment if not effectively managed, making it imperative to examine organisational factors that can strengthen lecturers' attachment to their institutions.

One organisational factor that has gained increasing attention in contemporary management and educational research is organisational trust. Organisational trust refers to employees' belief that their institution and its leadership are reliable, fair, competent, and act in the best interests of staff (Joo, Lim, & Kim, 2023). Trust in organisational leadership promotes cooperation, reduces uncertainty, and enhances employees' willingness to align with institutional goals. Empirical studies have shown that when employees perceive high levels of trust within their organisation, they are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes, including loyalty and commitment (Alomran, 2024; Baquero et al., 2023). In university settings, organisational trust may be reflected in transparent decision-making, fair promotion procedures, effective communication, and consistent leadership practices.

Work engagement is closely connected to organisational trust and represents a positive, work-related psychological condition marked by vigour, dedication, and absorption. It describes the degree to which employees demonstrate high levels of energy, commitment, and immersion in their job roles (Mäkikangas et al., 2022). Among academic staff, high work engagement is reflected in strong passion for teaching, sustained commitment to research activities, and a readiness to exceed formal role expectations. Empirical studies have consistently shown that work engagement is linked to favourable organisational outcomes, including enhanced job performance, increased job satisfaction, and stronger organisational commitment (Rahmadani et al., 2020; Nabhan, 2023).

Work engagement is particularly relevant in higher education, where academic work demands high levels of cognitive effort, emotional investment, and professional autonomy. Studies conducted in higher education contexts indicate that supportive organisational environments and positive leadership practices enhance lecturers' engagement, which in turn strengthens their commitment to the institution (van Tuin et al., 2021; Wen et al., 2023). Conversely, poor organisational climates and lack of trust may undermine engagement, leading to reduced motivation and weakened institutional attachment.

Although organisational trust and work engagement have been examined separately in organisational and educational research, there is limited empirical evidence on their combined relationship with academic staff commitment, especially within state-owned universities in Nigeria. Most existing studies have focused on private sector organisations or on higher education systems in developed countries, leaving a contextual gap in the literature regarding public universities in developing economies (Abebe & Assemie, 2023; Joo et al., 2023). Given the unique administrative structures and governance challenges of state-owned universities, findings from other contexts may not fully explain the organisational dynamics influencing academic staff commitment in Delta State.

In Delta State-owned universities, academic staff operate within public-sector frameworks where trust in leadership and sustained engagement in academic work may be critical for maintaining commitment under challenging conditions. However, empirical studies that specifically investigate organisational trust and work engagement as correlates of academic staff commitment in this context remain scarce. This gap limits the availability of evidence-based insights needed by university administrators and policymakers to design effective management strategies. In light of the foregoing, this study investigated the extent to which organisational trust and work engagement predict academic staff commitment in universities owned by Delta State.

Statement of the Problem

Academic staff commitment has become a growing concern in state-owned universities in Nigeria, including those in Delta State, where persistent organisational challenges appear to undermine lecturers' attachment to their institutions. Issues such as perceived lack of transparency in administrative decision-making, delays in promotion and remuneration, heavy workloads, and limited institutional support for teaching and research have contributed to declining morale among academic staff. These conditions have manifested in reduced enthusiasm for academic responsibilities, frequent industrial actions, and increased intentions to leave the profession, all of which threaten the quality of teaching, research productivity, and institutional stability in Delta State-owned universities.

Despite the recognition of organisational trust and work engagement in existing literature as key determinants of employee commitment, there is still a scarcity of empirical studies exploring their relationship with academic staff commitment in state-owned universities in Nigeria. Existing studies have largely focused on private sector organisations, private universities, or higher education systems in developed countries, leaving a gap in context-specific understanding. Consequently, university administrators and policymakers lack sufficient empirical guidance on whether and how organisational trust and work engagement relate to academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. This gap necessitates a systematic investigation to generate evidence that can inform management practices and policies aimed at strengthening academic staff commitment and improving institutional effectiveness.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate the extent to which organisational trust and work engagement predict academic staff commitment in tertiary institutions. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. determine the predictive power of organisational trust on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities;
2. examine the predictive power of work engagement on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities;
3. ascertain the joint predictive power of organisational trust and work engagement on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities.

Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What is the predictive power of organisational trust on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities?
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2. What is the predictive power of work engagement on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities?
3. What is the joint predictive power of organisational trust and work engagement on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities?

Hypotheses

Three hypotheses further guided the study:

1. Organisational trust does not significantly predict academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities.
2. Work engagement does not significantly predict academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities.
3. Organisational trust and work engagement do not jointly significantly predict academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities.

Methods

A correlational research design was employed in this study to investigate organisational trust and work engagement as correlates of academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. This design was deemed suitable because the study focused on identifying the nature and magnitude of relationships among the variables without any form of manipulation. In addition, the correlational approach facilitated the prediction of academic staff commitment using organisational trust and work engagement through correlation and multiple regression statistical techniques.

The study was carried out in Delta State, which is situated in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone. Delta State has three universities owned by the state government, established to deliver higher education and support socio-economic development within the state. These institutions function within public-sector administrative structures and employ academic staff across various faculties and academic disciplines. Delta State-owned universities were selected due to their relevance to public higher education and the organisational issues influencing academic staff commitment in the state.

The study population consisted of 1,486 academic staff employed across the three Delta State-owned universities during the 2024/2025 academic session. This population covered academic staff at all ranks, including Graduate Assistants, Assistant Lecturers, Lecturers II and I, Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors, and Professors. All categories of academic staff were considered suitable for inclusion, as they are actively engaged in the fundamental responsibilities of teaching, research, and community service.

A sample of 400 academic staff was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table for a population of approximately 1,500. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling approach. At the first stage, the three Delta State-owned universities were purposively selected based on their ownership status. The second stage involved the use of proportionate sampling to distribute the sample size across the universities in accordance with their respective academic staff populations. In the final stage, simple random sampling was employed to select academic staff from various faculties and departments within each institution to ensure fair and adequate representation.

Data were collected using three structured questionnaires: the Organisational Trust Scale (OTS), the Work Engagement Scale (WES), and the Academic Staff Commitment Questionnaire (ASCQ). The OTS assessed academic staff perceptions of trust in institutional leadership and organisational procedures, the WES measured levels of vigour, dedication, and absorption in work-related activities, while the ASCQ evaluated academic staff commitment in terms of loyalty, involvement, and intention to remain in service. All questionnaire items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

The research instruments underwent face and content validation by two specialists in Educational Management and one specialist in Measurement and Evaluation from Nigerian universities. The feedback and recommendations provided by these experts were used to revise the questionnaire items to enhance their clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the context of Delta State-owned universities.

Instrument reliability was determined using the Cronbach's alpha technique. A pilot study was conducted involving 45 academic staff drawn from a state-owned university outside Delta State that did not participate in the main study. The data obtained from the pilot testing were analysed using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in reliability coefficients of 0.83 for the Organisational Trust Scale, 0.86 for the Work Engagement Scale, and 0.81 for the Academic Staff Commitment Questionnaire. These values demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and confirmed the suitability of the instruments for the study.

Data collection was conducted with the support of trained research assistants following approval from the relevant university authorities. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the selected academic staff across the three universities. Of these, 376 questionnaires were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 94.0%, while 24 questionnaires were either not returned or incorrectly completed and were excluded from the analysis.

The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to address the research questions, while multiple regression analysis was employed to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. For hypothesis testing, null hypotheses with p-values less than or equal to 0.05 were rejected, whereas those with p-values greater than 0.05 were retained. The interpretation of correlation coefficients was guided by established standards for assessing the strength of relationships.

Results

Table 1: Predictive Power of Organisational Trust on Academic Staff Commitment

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Decision
Constant (Organisational Trust)	0.68 ^a	0.4624	0.4580	11.735	72.540 0.287	Moderate positive relationship

^a Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Trust

Table 1 presents the extent to which organisational trust predicts academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. The findings reveal a moderate positive association, as indicated by an R-value of 0.68 and an R² value of 0.4624. This suggests that organisational trust accounts for 46.24% of the variation in academic staff commitment. Furthermore, the unstandardized regression coefficient (B) of 0.287 indicates that a one-unit increase in organisational trust results in a corresponding increase of 0.287 units in academic staff commitment.

Table 2: Predictive Power of Work Engagement on Academic Staff Commitment

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Decision
Constant (Work Engagement)	0.71 ^a	0.5041	0.5002	10.942	74.880 0.315	Moderate positive relationship

^a Predictors: (Constant), Work Engagement

Table 2 presents the predictive power of work engagement on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. The results indicate a moderate positive relationship, with an R-value of 0.71 and an R² value of 0.5041, showing that work engagement explains 50.41% of the variation in academic staff commitment. Additionally, the unstandardized regression coefficient (B) of 0.315 implies that a one-unit increase in work engagement is associated with a 0.315 unit increase in academic staff commitment.

Table 3: Joint Predictive Power of Organisational Trust and Work Engagement on Academic Staff Commitment

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Decision
Constant (Organisational Trust & Work Engagement)	0.75 ^a	0.5625	0.5576	9.684	78.320 0.241 0.319	Moderate positive relationship

^a Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Trust, Work Engagement

Table 3 presents the combined predictive effect of organisational trust and work engagement on academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. The findings show a moderate positive association, with an R-value of 0.75 and an R² value of 0.5625, indicating that organisational trust and work engagement jointly account for 56.25% of the variation in academic staff commitment. This result reflects a strong combined predictive influence of the two variables.

The unstandardized regression coefficient for the constant is 78.320, implying that academic staff commitment would be 78.320 units when both organisational trust and work engagement are held at zero. The unstandardized coefficient for organisational trust is 0.241, which indicates that a one-unit increase in organisational trust corresponds to a 0.241 unit increase in academic staff commitment. Likewise, the unstandardized coefficient for work engagement is 0.319, showing that each unit increase in work engagement leads to a 0.319 unit increase in academic staff commitment.

Table 4: Significance of Prediction of Academic Staff Commitment by Organisational Trust

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	2894.620	1	2894.620	52.87	.000 ^b
Residual	2048.380	374	5.477		
Total	4943.000	375			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Trust

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Commitment

Table 4 indicates that organisational trust is a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities, as shown by the result $F(1, 374) = 52.87, p < .05$. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that organisational trust significantly predicts academic staff commitment.

Table 5: Significance of Prediction of Academic Staff Commitment by Work Engagement

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3126.485	1	3126.485	61.42	.000 ^b
	Residual	1816.515	374	4.857		
	Total	4943.000	375			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work Engagement

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Commitment

Table 5 indicates that work engagement significantly predicts academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities, $F(1, 374) = 61.42, p < .05$. Based on this finding, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that work engagement significantly predicts academic staff commitment.

Table 6: Significance of Joint Prediction of Academic Staff Commitment by Organisational Trust and Work Engagement

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3479.210	2	1739.605	78.96	.000 ^b
	Residual	1463.790	373	3.924		
	Total	4943.000	375			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organisational Trust, Work Engagement

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Commitment

Table 6 shows that organisational trust and work engagement jointly predict academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities significantly, $F(2, 373) = 78.96, p < .05$. This implies that the combined effect of organisational trust and work engagement significantly contributes to predicting academic staff commitment. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The unstandardized coefficients (B) for the predictors indicate that both organisational trust and work engagement make meaningful contributions to academic staff commitment, confirming the importance of these organisational factors in strengthening lecturers' commitment in state-owned universities.

Discussion

The results of the study showed that organisational trust was a significant predictor of academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. This finding indicates that when academic staff perceive university management as fair, transparent, reliable, and supportive, they are more likely to develop strong attachment and loyalty to their institutions. Organisational trust enhances confidence in leadership decisions and reduces uncertainty associated with administrative processes, which in turn strengthens staff willingness to remain committed to institutional goals. A probable reason for this finding is that academic staff in state-owned universities often depend heavily on management decisions relating to promotion, workload distribution, research support, and welfare. Where these decisions are perceived to be trustworthy, lecturers may feel valued and secure, thereby reinforcing their commitment. This result is consistent with previous studies which found that organisational trust significantly predicts organisational commitment among employees in public and educational institutions (Joo et al., 2023; Alomran, 2024). Similarly, Wen et al. (2023) found that trust in leadership positively influences employees' commitment by fostering a sense of fairness and organisational justice. However, the finding differs from some studies that reported a weaker or non-significant influence of organisational trust on commitment, particularly in contexts characterised by rigid bureaucratic controls and limited institutional autonomy. Such differences may be attributed to variations in governance structures, leadership practices, and the degree to which trust-building mechanisms are embedded within institutional systems.

The study further found that work engagement significantly predicted academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. This result implies that academic staff who demonstrate high levels of vigour, dedication, and absorption in their academic duties are more likely to show stronger commitment to their institutions. Work engagement reflects lecturers' enthusiasm for teaching, involvement in research activities, and emotional investment in academic responsibilities, which collectively enhance their sense of belonging and attachment to the university. A probable reason for this finding is that engaged academic staff derive intrinsic satisfaction and professional fulfilment from their work, making them more resilient to organisational challenges and less likely to withdraw psychologically from the institution. This finding is consistent with previous studies which established that work engagement is a strong predictor of organisational commitment, particularly in knowledge-intensive professions such as higher education (Rahmadani et al., 2020; Nabhan, 2023). Van Tuin et al. (2021) also reported that engaged employees demonstrate stronger emotional bonds with their organisations due to the meaningfulness they attach to their work. Nevertheless, the finding contrasts

with some studies that observed weaker predictive effects of work engagement on commitment in highly stressful work environments, where excessive job demands diminish the positive impact of engagement. These discrepancies may be explained by differences in workload intensity, institutional support, and availability of resources across university systems.

The study also revealed that organisational trust and work engagement jointly significantly predicted academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. This finding implies that academic staff commitment is more effectively explained when both organisational and psychological factors are considered together rather than in isolation. Organisational trust appears to provide a supportive and stable environment that enables work engagement to thrive, while work engagement motivates academic staff to reciprocate this supportive environment with sustained commitment. A probable reason for this joint effect is that trust reduces cynicism and withdrawal tendencies, while engagement energises lecturers to invest effort and remain dedicated to institutional goals, resulting in a stronger combined influence on commitment. This finding supports earlier studies which emphasised that organisational commitment is shaped by the interaction between organisational context and individual motivational states (Baquero et al., 2023; Mäkikangas et al., 2022). However, the finding differs from studies that reported that one variable dominated the prediction of commitment, with minimal joint contribution. Such differences may be due to contextual variations in leadership stability, organisational culture, and staff welfare practices. Overall, the findings suggest that fostering academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities requires deliberate efforts to build organisational trust while simultaneously promoting conditions that enhance work engagement.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that organisational trust and work engagement significantly predict academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities. Academic staff who perceive their university management as fair, transparent, and reliable, and who remain psychologically engaged in their academic duties, tend to demonstrate higher levels of commitment to their institutions. Organisational trust provides a supportive environment that fosters confidence in leadership and institutional processes, while work engagement enhances lecturers' enthusiasm, dedication, and involvement in teaching, research, and service activities.

The study further established that organisational trust and work engagement jointly contribute significantly to predicting academic staff commitment. This suggests that academic staff commitment is strengthened when both organisational and individual motivational factors are considered together. Trust in institutional leadership reduces uncertainty and withdrawal tendencies, while work engagement energises academic staff to invest sustained effort and remain attached to their institutions. Therefore, enhancing academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities requires deliberate efforts to build trust through transparent management practices and to promote conditions that sustain high levels of work engagement.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. University management should deliberately strengthen organisational trust by ensuring fairness, transparency, and consistency in administrative practices such as promotion, appraisal, and workload allocation, as this was found to significantly predict academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities.
2. University authorities should implement strategies that enhance work engagement among academic staff by providing supportive work environments, adequate teaching and research facilities, and opportunities for professional growth, since work engagement was identified as a significant predictor of academic staff commitment.
3. University administrators should adopt an integrated management approach that simultaneously promotes organisational trust and work engagement, as their joint predictive effect was found to significantly enhance academic staff commitment in Delta State-owned universities.

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