

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RELATED FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE AMONG PART-TIME ACADEMIC STAFF IN UGANDAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Part-time academic staff form a significant proportion of the academic staff force in Ugandan public universities. However, their performance is reportedly poor, despite the fact that they are comparable to their fulltime counterparts in terms of academic qualification and relevant work experience. Grounded on the propositions of Frame of Reference Theory, therefore, this study probed the impact of the way the part-time dons are managed, relative to their fulltime counterparts, on their performance. Data were collected, from a sample of 298 part-time academic staff, on how they are recruited, selected, appointed, deployed and compensated; and on the extent to which they would agree that these ways affect their performance. The findings were that majority of them were selected through their personal contacts in the respective universities; were not appointed by the universities' directorates of human resources; were not given detailed job descriptions; were not usually given notice of meetings; and felt that their rewards are not equitable, relative to those of their fulltime counterparts, all of which have affected their performance. Thus, it is recommended that, to improve their part-timers' performance, the universities should endeavour to depersonalize their appointment; provide them with detailed job descriptions; and align their rewards with those of their fulltime counterparts.

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Introduction

To attend to their task mandate of teaching, research and community service effectively, universities need sufficient academic staff that are sufficiently qualified, motivated, and facilitated, to work effectively. Indeed, RoU (1992) suggests that the quality of a university cannot exceed that of its academic staff, which is congruent with the view advanced by Maicibi (2003) who opines that the lifeblood of any organization is in its ability to attract and retain good human resources. In many cases, however, the procurement, development, motivation, facilitation and retention of an academic staff force that is sufficiently qualified and motivated to work effectively is difficult (Ssekamwa, 1999), often necessitating colossal financial resources--because the market rate of academic staff, and the cost of their development through further education and training, are usually high. In Ugandan university education, the availability of these resources has been particularly meager since the 1970s (Mamdani, 2007; Ssempebwa, 2007; Bakkabulindi, 2006; Wanambi 2004; Muvawala 2003; Kasozi, 2003; Mayanja, 1996). Thus, there has been limited capacity to attract academic staff let alone retain the existing ones, many of whom have drained out of public university service. Incidentally, through the years, this limited capacity to procure and retain academic staff has coincided with multifold expansions in the number of enrollees at public universities (NCHE, 2004; Byaruhanga, 2002; PDD, 2000; Kassam, 1999; MOES, 1993), leading to acute inadequacies of academic staff (Mamdani, 2007; Kwesiga & Ahikire, 2006; Liang, 2004; Nakayiwa et al.,

2004). Moreover, the inadequacy of academic staff also coincided with a ban, by the government, on staff recruitment in public organizations (Kasozi, 2003).

To close its academic staff demand gap, despite these resources capacity constraints, Makerere University, Uganda's flagship Higher Education Institution, procured academic staff on a part-time schedule (Altbach, 2005; Mayanja, 1996), a development that attracted significant support from the World Bank and Government of Uganda among other university education publics (see, for example, Court, 1999; Kassam, 1999). Indeed, Mamdani (2007) found that part-time academic staff form a significant part of the university's core labor force, with some departments having more part-time than fulltime academic staff. The other public universities in the country, notably Kyambogo University, Gulu University and, more recently, Busitema University; and all of the private universities followed suit in the employment of academic staff on part-time schedules, as is clear from university staffing statistics from the National Council for Higher Education (see, for example, NCHE, 2004). Moreover, Altbach (2005)'s sobering analysis of Makerere University dons' part-time work involvement indicates that part-time work in Ugandan university education is more widespread than such statistics reveal. He reports that faculty members have been encouraged to engage in consultancy work, some professors work for international organizations and the local private sector while others teach on part-time schedules in the private higher education institutions in the country; and that Makerere has a teaching program that operates mainly in the evening, where classes are taught by regular faculty in a kind of "on-campus moonlighting." This is corroborated by Mamdani (2007), who affirms the existence of widespread on and off-campus part-time teaching at the University, meaning that part-time teaching is a major feature of Ugandan university education.

Nonetheless, a significant body of literature (e.g. Elman, 2003; Maicibi, 2003; Schuster, 2003; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Tansky & Gallagher, 1995; D'souza, 2000) concludes that the employment of staff on part-time schedules has peculiar dynamics that, in turn, have implications for the part-timers' work performance. This means that, in employing staff on part-time schedules, relevant human resource management (HRM) practices have to be tailored to this peculiarity, if the part-timers are to be retained and motivated to work effectively. This view is corroborated by Kasozi (2003). Yet, on the contrary, several authors note that, often, universities hire part-time academic staff in apparent incognizance of this peculiarity, to the detriment of the quality of their service delivery (Benjamin, 2002; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Metzner, 1985). In Uganda, the part-time schedule has come under heavy criticism (see, for example, Mamdani, 2007; Altbach, 2005), with critics contending that the part-time academic staff are pecuniary workers that are neither teaching well nor conducting in research. This is in consonance with Goldenberg (2003), Ehrenberg & Zhang (2004), Elman (2003) and Schuster (2003), who observe that, often, part-time academic staff teach poorly; offer little, or no, out-of-classroom support to their students; do not do research; do not attend meetings; mark and submit students' marks belatedly; and exhibit higher rates of absenteeism and attrition, sometimes leaving work without notice to their supervisors and students--even when they have students' marks and/or projects.

Ironically, in Uganda's case, the reported poor performance among part-time academic staff is despite the fact that these dons are comparable to their fulltime counterparts, since they are all recruited on the basis of minimum standards of academic achievement

and relevant work experience, as is clear from Mujaju (1999) and RoU (2001). Noting, however, that the part-time schedule is peculiar (Elman, 2003; Schuster, 2003; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Tansky & Gallagher, 1995; D'souza, 2000); and that, in some institutions, part-time academic staff are marginalized with regard to workload, rewards, security, autonomy and opportunities for personal and professional advancement (Elman, 2003)--with the consequences of poor performance, as is predicted by the propositions of the Frame of Reference Theory, as cited by Miller & Terborg (1979)--this study investigated whether the poor performance of part-time academic staff in Ugandan public universities is related to their impressions of the appropriateness of the way they are managed, by their universities and supervisors.

The findings were that majority of the part-time academic staff feel that HRM-related factors, namely, the way they are recruited, appointed, deployed and compensated, affect their performance. They indicated that their selection through lobbying their personal contacts (in the respective universities); their having of no appointment letters from the respective universities' directorates of human resources; their lack of detailed job descriptions and tendency for their departments to exclude them from some of their activities; and the tendency for their departments' and/or universities' to exclude them from certain benefits affected their performance, just as is expected to be the case whenever workers perceive themselves to be treated in inequitable ways (Harrington & Schibik, 2001; Braxton, Hirschy & McLendon, 2004). It is, therefore, concluded that part of the responsibility for the part-timers' poor performance lies with the way they are managed. Thus, it is recommended that, to improve their part-timers' performance, the universities should endeavour to depersonalize the appointment of the part-timers; provide them with detailed job descriptions and involve them in their co-curricular activities; and align their rewards with those of their fulltime counterparts.

Method

Data were collected, from 298 part-time academic staff (response rate=89%), using a questionnaire. The sample size was determined using Morgan and Krejcie's Sample Size Estimation Table, after which the individual respondents were selected--using stratified random sampling--from Uganda's flagship public universities, namely, Makerere University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology and Kyambogo University. The questionnaire elicited data on how the respondents were recruited, selected, appointed, deployed and compensated; and whether they felt that these variables affected their performance. The data on data on how the respondents were recruited, selected, appointed, deployed and compensated were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. On the other hand, the respondents' views on whether the way they are managed impacts on their performance were subjected to chi-square goodness of fit tests, at the level of confidence alpha equals .05.

Results and Discussion

The findings were that 64% of the part-time academic staff were selected, for their jobs, through (lobbying) their personal contacts in the respective universities; 62% were not appointed by the universities' directorates of human resources; 79% were not given detailed job descriptions; 54% were not usually given notice of departmental meetings; and 77% felt that their rewards are not equitable to those of their fulltime counterparts.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents by the extent to which they “would agree that these variables have affected their work performance”.

Table 1: Distribution of Part-time Academic Staff by level of Agreement that HRM-Related Factors Affect their Performance

Factor	Level of agreement (n in %)				Df	Chi-square (alpha=.05)	
	SA	A	D	SD		Calculated	Critical
Nature of recruitment and selection	9	48	39	4	3	56.88	7.82
Nature of appointment	17	54	29	-	2	21.38	5.99
Job description provided	7	46	40	7	3	52.56	7.82
Rewards received	21	46	31	2	3	40.88	7.82

Key: SA=Strongly agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly disagree

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents “agreed” that the HRM-related factors enumerated affected their performance. Moreover, “this agreement” was found to be statistically significant, given that, for each of the factors, the calculated value of chi-square is greater than the respective critical value. Thus, the study suggests that majority of the part-time academic staff are not comfortable with the way they are managed, which has affected their performance. In this way, the findings of the study rhyme with Ssesanga and Garrett (2005), who, while probing the factors contributing to dons’ job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in Uganda, concluded that the stimuli that create dissatisfaction are largely extrinsic factors that relate to remuneration, governance and working environment. In view of these results, it is interesting to note that, strictly speaking, the management of part-time academic staff in the ways that they said they are uncomfortable with is permissible in the universities that participated in the study. This is because it suggests that, contrary to the counsel of Kasozi (2003), relevant HRM practices have not been tailored to suit the part-timers’ peculiarity, to the detriment of their performance, just as was found to be the case in other settings (see, for example, Benjamin, 2002; Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Metzner, 1985).

Thus, the study suggests that part of the responsibility for the part-timers’ poor performance lies with management’s tendency to approach their selection, appointment, deployment and compensation with incognizance of their peculiar needs for job security, clarity of assignments, involvement in their departments’ affairs and equity in compensation, just as was found to be the case in other settings. In lieu of concurring with Mamdani (2007), Goldenberg (2003), Ehrenberg & Zhang (2004), Elman (2003), Schuster, 2003 and Altbach (2005), who question the appropriateness of the part-time schedule, therefore, the study concludes that, if well managed, part-time academic staff may work well. The study suggests that, in Ugandan public university education, this could be done through depersonalizing the appointment of part-time academic staff; providing them with comprehensive job descriptions, so that they clearly understand what is expected of them; involving them in the co-curricular activities of their depart-

ments; and aligning their benefits with those of their fulltime counterparts, to mitigate their perception of marginalization and its impact on their performance.

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