

## **Membership of Professional Association and Work Engagement of Female Lecturers in Public Universities in Rivers State**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated the relationship between membership of professional association and work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State. Three research questions were formulated in line with the objectives of the study. The study adopted the correlation research design. The targeted population of the study was 978 female academics in the three public universities in Rivers State from which 284 female lecturers were selected as sampled for the study using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data gathering was a structured questionnaire which was validated by three experts in measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was estimated using Cronbach alpha statistics and a 0.81 reliability coefficient was obtained. Out of the 284 copies of questionnaire administered, 280 copies representing 98.6% were retrieved and used for data analysis. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings of the study indicated that membership of professional association and rank of female lecturers were significant determinants of female lecturers' work engagement. However, marital status, discipline and employment type were not significant determinant of work engagement of female lecturers. It was also revealed that the major barriers to the lecturers' membership of professional association were high cost of participation and time constraint among others. It was recommended among others, that female lecturers should be provided with some form of institutional support to subsidize the cost of membership which will no doubt improve their work engagement and overall performance in the university.

**Keywords:** Female, Lecturers, Professional Association, Universities, Work Engagement

### **Introduction**

University education plays an important role in nation building through its functions in the areas of teaching, research and community development. These functions are often carried out majorly by the academic staff irrespective of whether they are males or females. However, the quality and quantity of services rendered by these lecturers depend on their level of involvement and commitment to the goals and objectives of the university. It was on this premise that Agbionu et al., (2018) stated that tertiary institutions particularly in Nigeria have been struggling with the challenge of engaging their workforce especially the academic staff as a result of frustrating work

conditions such as inadequate or lack of teaching and research facilities, poor remuneration, and unfavourable policies among others.

There are several factors that determines lecturers' work engagement across different institutions, but these factors in some cases do not favour female lecturers, which is explained by the low ratio of male to female lecturers in elective positions both in the universities and other tertiary educational institutions. Despite the fact that every lecturer sees their research and teaching services as their contributions to the development of the society (Harini et al., 2019), the output of some female lecturers is often lower as a result of family demands and the manner in which they are engaged into positions which can improve on the quality and quantity of their services to the society.

The concept of work engagement has been defined variously by several scholars; Schaufeli *et al.*, as cited in Nordin and Hamzah (2021) stated that work engagement refers to a positive and fulfilling state of mind defined by the level of vigor, dedication and absorption which an individual displays on the job. Similarly, Patro *et al.*, (2013) defined work engagement as the level of attachment that an employee shows toward his or her work, which often results to higher level of performance, commitment and loyalty. However, several institutional policies can affect how workers are engaged on the job. Agbionu et al., (2018) alluded to the fact that university management support system has the capacity to influence the work engagement of lecturers which is what some female lecturers experience when the system fails to provide them an enabling environment to engage.

For women to compete favourably with their male counterparts, it is important that they exhibit personal and professional competence. This is because the employees in any formal organization are regarded as the most important and tangible assets required for goal attainment (Onyeizugbe & Orogbu, 2015) and as such, workers irrespective of their gender must be able to show mastery before they can be saddled with additional responsibilities. For several decades, gender disparity has always been noticed in organizational performance (Islam *et al.*, 2021) and no worker will show commitment or engagement at work when their interest is not properly covered (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2015). These female academics therefore continue to strife to change this narrative by improving on their contribution to their institutions by developing better professional capability by belonging to professional associations where their competencies can be enhanced.

Several studies including that of Haugsnes (2016) have revealed that professional commitment and organizational climate are very critical to work engagement. This means that the more professionally associated female academics become, the better their chances of work engagement across all levels. Adding to their position, Lichtsteiner *et al.*, (2015) noted that being a member of a professional association create a healthy member base and stimulate members' engagement and volunteers' activity which are critical in sustaining collective performance. Scholars such as Amaewhule and Nwogu (2019) have also stated that one of the ways that teachers can build emotional intelligence on the job is to network. Membership of professional association can therefore foster increased engagement which will improve the performance of female lecturers irrespective of their institutions and this is essential for national development (Chankseliani et al., 2020) as well as their professional advancement.

Hager (2013) conducted a study on engagement motivations in professional associations. Based on membership surveys from two health care groups and three engineering associations, the study found that while public incentives appear to have some effect on involvement, private incentives are not always effective motivators. The two professional association fields showed unexpected differences from one another.

Holm *et al.*, (2020) carried out a study on what drives engagement in professional associations. A purposeful sampling of 251 registered students nationwide was carried out in the study. According to the survey, students who reported being members of their state and national associations and those who participated in an organized student association were statistically related. Even in cases where their educational institutions did not offer assistance, students actively pursued membership in professional associations. Most students said they intended to join the American Occupational Therapy Association upon graduation. Students proposed that more affordable conference attendance, membership, and academic support may promote sustained involvement in their professional groups beyond graduation.

Similarly, Sanchez (2022) investigated the influence of professional commitment and organizational climate on the work engagement of employees in the Department of Education in Philippines. The study employed a quantitative, non-experimental approach and collected data from non-teaching workers in public schools located in the Davao de Oro Division of the Philippines. The data was analyzed using mean, Pearson-r, and regression analysis. The results

demonstrated extremely high levels of work engagement among non-teaching staff, strong levels of organizational climate, and professional commitment. Significant correlations were found between organizational climate and work engagement as well as between professional dedication and work engagement.

In a cross-sectional study, Chandel (2023) examined the level of work engagement among women faculties in higher education institutes in India. The study used a sample of 360 female faculty members. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The study's findings showed that the majority of female faculty members only engaged in their work once a week, which necessitates further changes for improved engagement. In another study, Agbionu *et al.*, (2018) investigated the engagement and performance of lecturers in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive survey research design which utilized a correlation approach. Three tertiary universities in Nigeria were chosen by stratified random sampling, and 314 lecturers were selected and given questionnaires to complete in order to collect data. The data was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient, which revealed a positive correlation ( $r$ ) value of 0.710 between employer reciprocity and research output of the lecturers.

Sood and Sharma (2023) conducted a gender based multi-group analysis on authenticity and work engagement among teachers in India. For the study, a convenience sample of 263 teachers was selected in a study that utilized a cross-sectional design. The data collected was analyzed using structural equation modeling, and the study's findings showed that vigor is significantly and favourably correlated with both self-alienation and embracing outside influence. Gender was not found to be an influencing factor of work engagement or authenticity at work, with the exception of self-alienation and commitment.

Further study was conducted by Mbulle *et al.*, (2023) on membership in professional associations and productivity of teachers in Anglo-Saxon universities in Cameroon. Convergent mixed method design was adopted for the study. There were 20 administrators, 603 postgraduate students, and 436 lecturers in the study's sample. The instruments that were used to collect the data needed for the study were an interview guide and a questionnaire. According to the study's findings, 45.6% of students believe their professors are not very productive, whereas 54.4% agree. Additionally, 61.0% of instructors do not belong to any professional associations, compared to 39.0% who do. Even though only a small portion of teachers are members of professional academic societies, a

large portion of them representing 66.5% believed that membership in these associations is crucial for teachers, while 33.5% disagreed.

These findings lead to suggestions for future research and practitioners to consider field differences and avoid making unwarranted generalizations about the motivations, results, and commitment of engagement in different professional fields. These studies indicate that workers in any formal organization have a lot to benefit from being members of a professional association.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of membership of professional association on work engagement of female lecturers in public Universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. examine the relationship between membership of professional association and work engagement of female lecturers in public Universities in Rivers State;
2. find out how demographic factors (e.g., rank, Marital status, discipline and employment type) moderate the relationship between membership of professional association and work engagement of female lecturers in public in public Universities in Rivers State; and
3. examine the barriers that hinder female lecturers' membership of professional associations.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between membership of professional association and the work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State?
2. How do demographic factors (e.g., rank, marital status, discipline and employment type) contribute to the relationship between professional association membership and work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State?
3. What are the barriers that hinder female lecturers' membership in professional associations for work engagement in public universities in Rivers State?

### **Hypotheses**

Two of the research questions were hypothesized and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Membership in professional associations does not significantly predict the work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State.
2. Demographic factors (e.g., rank, marital status, discipline and employment type) do not significantly contribute to the relationship between professional association membership and work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State.

## Methodology

The correlational research design was adopted for the study which targeted 978 female academics in the three public universities in Rivers State as the target population. The sample of the study was made up of 284 lecturers who were selected using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula to estimate the minimum sample size required for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of the respondents used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire which was validated by three measurement and evaluation experts. The reliability of the instrument was estimated using Cronbach alpha statistics and a reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. Out of the 284 copies of questionnaire administered, 280 copies representing 98.6% were retrieved, scored, coded and analyzed. Research question three was answered using frequency counts percentage and rank. Hypotheses one and two were tested using OLS regression analysis.

## Results

*Research Question Three: What are the barriers that hinder female lecturers' membership in professional associations for work engagement in public universities in Rivers State?*

**Table 1: Barriers that Hinder Female Lecturers' Membership of Professional Association for Improved Work Engagement**

	Factors	Frequency	Percent	Rank
Valid	Participation Cost	70	25.0	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Family Demands	40	14.3	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Political Interference	46	16.4	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Time Constraint	69	24.6	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Unclear Goals	15	5.4	6 <sup>th</sup>
	Attitude of Members	40	14.3	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Total	280	100.0	

Table 1 indicates the barriers that hinder female lecturers' membership of professional association for better work engagement. The ranking in the table shows that participation cost ranked highest,

closely followed by time constraint. The third is political interference, while there is a tie between family demands and attitude of members and the least is unclear goals.

*Hypothesis One: Membership in professional associations does not significantly predict the work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State.*

**Table 2: Relationship Between Membership in Professional Associations and Female Lecturers' Work Engagement**

Model	R	R Square	Model Summary	
			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.663 <sup>a</sup>	.439	.429	3.74039

The model presented in Table 2 shows a moderate to strong positive relationship ( $R = 0.663$ ), with 43.9% of the variance in the dependent variable – work engagement explained by the predictor variable – membership in professional associations ( $R^2 = 0.439$ ), and a standard error of 3.74039, which indicates moderate variability in the prediction.

*Hypothesis Two: Demographic factors (e.g., rank, marital status, discipline and employment type) do not significantly contribute to the relationship between professional association membership and work engagement of female lecturers in public universities in Rivers State.*

**Table 3: Contributions of Membership of Professional Association and Demographic Factors to Female Lecturers' Work Engagement**

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Standardized		
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	47.992	1.820		26.369	.000
	Membership_of_Professional_Association	2.241	.172	.638	13.053	.000
	Rank	1.401	.465	.139	3.009	.003
	Marital_Status	-.425	.469	-.043	-.907	.365
	Discipline	.030	.457	.003	.066	.947
	Employment_Type	.172	.523	.016	.329	.743

a. Dependent Variable: Work\_Engagement

The regression analysis in Table 2 reveals that membership of professional association ( $B = 2.241$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and rank ( $B = 1.401$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) significantly predict work engagement of female lecturers, with membership having a stronger effect. While marital status ( $B = -0.426$ ,  $p = 0.365$ ), discipline ( $B = 0.030$ ,  $p = 0.947$ ), and employment type ( $B = 0.172$ ,  $p = 0.743$ ) do not significantly influence work engagement.

## Discussion

The findings revealed that that membership in professional association significantly predict female lecturers' work engagement in public universities in Rivers State. Although scholars such as Sood and Sharma (2023) have indicated in their study that gender does not affect work engagement, but other researchers agree otherwise. Factors such as the respondents' employment type, discipline, rank at work and marital status had a high and positive relationship to the female lecturers' professional association contributing about 43.9% and this calls for a gender view of the entire situation. This means that these variables have some level of influence on the ability of the female teachers to network professionally. However, in more specific terms, it was shown that membership of professional body was significant to female lecturers' work engagement and made the highest contribution to their work engagement above other interrogated variables. This means that there is the possibility for female teachers to be more involved in their work if they have adequate opportunity for professional association.

Membership of professional association comes with a lot of benefit it does not only provide an avenue for members to be informed on best practices in their profession but also provides them with a platform to network for wider service delivery. Holm *et al.*, (2020) indicated in their study that those who belong to professional bodies have better chances of networking which can open doors for more engagement in and outside their institution. Belonging to a professional association enable members to be informed about development in their field of endeavour which can help enhance their organizational relevance. Alluding to this, Agbionu *et al.*, (2018) revealed in their study that a positive correlation (r) value of 0.710 existed between reciprocity and research output produced by lectures implying that building relationships can affect performance of workers. Similarly, it is through this kind of partnership that members can get called up for higher responsibilities which helps to promote the member's expertise, interpersonal ability as well as the corporate image of the institution he or she represents. This agree with the outcome of the study by Sanchez (2022) which showed that being professionally committed aligns with getting more work engagement in any formal organization. All of these attributes are significant to how much an employee will be able to deliver in terms of performance on the job and this may explain why it was highly rated by the respondents of the study.



On the other hand, the rank of the female lecturer, whether senior or junior was also a significant determinant of their work engagement with a high level of contribution on the teachers' work engagement. This explains that the position occupied by the female academic also has some level of influence on how much they are able to be engaged on the job. This is understandable given the fact that senior academics tend to be assigned more responsibilities than the junior ones as a result of their vast experience. Similarly, as lecturers progress on the ladder of their profession, they are exposed to more administrative roles in addition to academic responsibilities which makes them more engaged in university activities. Therefore, engagement may be higher for senior academics than the junior ones even among the female teachers and this can determine how much work they are able to cover at a time. The implication of this is that when female lecturers are promoted as when due, they are likely to be saddled with additional responsibilities which will enable them to contribute more to the administration of the University that they represent.

However, the findings showed that the marital status of lecturers, their discipline and the employment type (full time or part time) were not significant determinants of their work engagement. This means that whether or not the female lecturers were married did not really influence their work engagement significantly. However, the contribution was inverse indicating that being married or single can reduce the work engagement of the lecturers but not to a significant level. It may suffice therefore to assume that being married may reduce the work engagement of the female lecturers which has the likelihood to reduce their work engagement which is likely due to additional responsibilities at home. Mbulle et al., (2023) indicated in their study that students who identified that their lecturers did not belong to professional association also revealed that such lecturers' productivity was low and some of these students may think in like manner about lecturers based on their marital status which is why the issue of teachers' marital status should not be ignored in assessing female academics work engagement. However, this may not be to a significant level since these lecturers all have responsibilities that must be covered per time irrespective of their marital status which makes it difficult for them to perform below expectation. However, other non-statutory responsibilities which were previously discharged may be affected by the change in their marital status.

Similarly, the discipline of the female academic also made no significant effect on their work engagement and this may be so given the fact that all lecturers irrespective of their discipline have clearly established roles that they must carry out no matter their area of specialization. Similarly,

whether the employment type is full time or part time may not make much difference based on the work schedule assigned to each category of worker but a difference may only exist based on the time available to cover the assigned tasks and not necessary based on the volume of work that they are expected to cover.

According to the respondents of the study, there are several factors that inhibits their professional association and the major determinant was the cost of participation. Membership of professional association can be capital intensive particularly at the global or international level which may sometimes be unaffordable especially for workers in developing countries which also affect female academic. The membership of professional association sometimes requires attending meetings, paying for membership subscription fee and travels which is sometimes difficult to sustain for a long period of time and this may be the reason it was rated as a major challenge. Additionally, the respondents pointed out that time constraint was also a barrier. It is understandable that female academics have teaching, research and community service functions to perform every years and this may be the reason why time remains a constraint to professional association. However, every lecturer who wishes to progress in his or her profession must make out time to engage with other professionals as this will have an influence on their level of productivity in the long run.

Similarly, political interference was also identified as a barrier which is common in public institutions where membership registration, election into leadership position and sponsorships are often politically motivated. This agree with the result of the study by Chandel (2023) which showed that the majority of female faculty members were only engaged in their work once a week calling for further changes for improved engagement. This sometimes happen when the political climate does not favour the female academic and this can hinder their ability to get professionally recognized in very high professional associations in and outside their discipline. This sometimes affect who is privileged to belong to professional association especially the ones that are not generally open to the public. Those without political support may therefore find it difficult to reach this height. Again, Hager (2013) revealed that while public incentives appear to have some effect on involvement, private incentives are not always effective motivators and this is why political actors should provide a level playground for academics to grow in their profession and contribute to national development by limiting the place of political interference in University administration. Other factors such as family demands, attitude of members and unclear goals of the organization were also identified as limiting factors. It is therefore important for these obstacles to be addressed

by relevant stakeholders in order to provide a platform for female academics to be better engaged for the delivery of quality educational services in the institutions that they represent.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion from the findings of the study was that female lecturers who are members of professional association are more likely to be more engaged at work and the other factor that affect the work engagement of the female lecturers was their rank at work. However, the cost associated with professional membership was the major barrier that hindered their professional association and this calls for urgent intervention in order to increase the chances of female lecturers to be members of their professional bodies and to be more engaged at work.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. There is need for university administrators to provide some form of subsidy for female academics to be registered members of their professional associations as this will enable the lecturers to contribute more to the goals and objectives of the University.
2. The issue of promotion in the university should also be based on merit and carried out at the appropriate time as this can encourage or discourage academic and non-academic staff from being actively involved and committed to their assigned responsibilities in the university.
3. Gender based units also need to be set up in most universities to serve as a platform for more women to assist one another in meeting their professional needs and to grow in their career and meet their personal needs while also fulfilling their organizational expectations.

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