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## WORK AUTONOMY AS A PREDICTOR OF LECTURERS' JOB SATISFACTION IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The study investigated work autonomy as a predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research questions and three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level. Correlation research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 3,072 lecturers in all the five State and four Federal Government-owned Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. A sample size of 614 lecturers was drawn for the study using proportionate stratified sampling technique. A researcher developed instruments titled "Work Autonomy Questionnaire (WAQ)" and "Lecturers Job Satisfaction Scale (LJSS)" were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy, and one from the Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Cronbach alpha was used for a test of internal consistency of the instruments which yielded overall reliability coefficients of 0.80 and 0.82 for WAQ and LJSS respectively. The researchers together with three research assistants collected data for the study using the direct approach method and 98 percentage return was recorded. Simple regression was used to analyze research questions and hypotheses one and two, while multiple regression was used to analyze research question and hypothesis three. The findings of the study revealed among others that work method autonomy is a strong predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. It was also found that work autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Management of Colleges of Education should develop hand book on work autonomy to serve as guideline in granting freedom to lecturers to perform their duties in a way to improve their job satisfaction.*

**Key Words:** Work Autonomy, Lecturers, Job Satisfaction, Method, Criteria

## Introduction

Tertiary institutions are highest level of education which train and supply manpower required for social, economic and political development of any nation. The tertiary institutions in Nigeria are Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education among others. The focus of this study is College of Education which is an institution of higher learning where individuals are trained to be highly skilled teachers to meet the manpower needs of basic and secondary education. Enwezor and Obi (2022) noted that College of Education provides learning opportunities for prospective teachers which leads to award of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Lecturers are the academic staff who plan and present lectures on their specialized areas to students to meet partial requirements for the award of Nigeria Certificate in Education. The lecturers are more inclined to be productive when they are satisfied with their job.

Job satisfaction is the positive emotional reaction to work situations. Alasin (2022) defined job satisfaction as the staff's feelings and attitudes about variety of intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the work and the organizations in which they perform their duties. Job satisfaction is the feeling of gratification towards a job condition. Angwaomaodoko (2023) described job satisfaction as how safe, appreciated and happy an employee feel about the work conditions and environment. Lecturers who are satisfied with their job tend to be motivated to put substantial efforts in discharging their duties. Lecturers are likely to be more satisfied with their job when they are granted work autonomy.

Work autonomy is the freedom inherent in a given job. According to Saleh, Aminu and Mustapha (2021), work autonomy is about given employee freedom of choice on how his or her job is designed and performed. It is the act of exercising authority, control and freedom of choosing how or ways of executing duties in an organization. It is act of performing tasks at one's discretion. Fradkin-Hayslip (2021) defined work autonomy as the ability to make independent choices about how to perform tasks in the workplace. Lecturers' work autonomy is associated with freedom to choose set learning goals, make choice of teaching methods, and ways of assessing the students. Lin and Ping (2016) defined autonomy as a favourable workplace condition that allows employees to exercise their decision-making skills in fulfilling job-related tasks. It is a substantial freedom to take actions and carry out one's duties in the workplace. Job autonomy is the degree to which members of staff are granted freedom and authority to plan and use their initiatives to carry out their duties in an organization.

Different elements of work autonomy outlined by various scholars include: method, scheduling and criteria work autonomy (Abay & Zhao, 2021, Shah & Haseeb, 2019). The interest of this study is work method and criteria autonomy. Method autonomy is concerned with freedom of deciding how and when to execute tasks in the work place. Similarly, Abay and Zhao (2021) noted that method autonomy is freedom to choose the ways or procedures to perform job in an organization. Work method autonomy is the freedom of employee to use different procedures in discharging their duties in an organization. Work method autonomy allows lecturers to use their initiatives to teach the students and also assess their academic performance. Method autonomy improves their creativity of lecturers in Colleges of Education. Criteria autonomy is concerned with granting freedom to members of staff to set work objectives and means of evaluating their performance in an organization. Muhammad and Najma (2019) asserted that autonomy of criteria is associated with freedom in altering the means of job evaluation. Criteria autonomy gives freedom to lecturers to set goals, targets and deadlines to achieve the predetermined goals.

The bureaucratic procedures and rigid leadership styles of some management of Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria tend to limit the freedom of lecturers to decide how to carry out their tasks and undertake work-related activities. Ezinine and Ughamadu (2021) asserted that management of Colleges of Education in South East States, Nigeria is so hostile and inflexible in running affairs and exercising over activities which limit use of initiatives and create low job satisfaction among lecturers. Enwezor and Obi (2022) asserted that the consequences of lecturers' dissatisfied with their jobs in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria are absenteeism, early departures from workplace, poor job involvement and low in commitment in performing their duties. The authors added that this has contributed to supply of unskilled teachers to teach students at the basic and secondary school levels of education. It is against these backdrops that the researchers sought to investigate work autonomy as a predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in colleges of education in South East, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to investigate work autonomy as a predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in colleges of education in South East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to investigate:

1. Work method autonomy as a predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.
2. Work criteria autonomy as a predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.
3. Work autonomy as a predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does work method autonomy predicts lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria?
2. How does work criteria autonomy predicts lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria?
3. How does work autonomy predicts lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

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

1. Work method autonomy is not a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.
2. Work criteria autonomy is not a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.
3. Work autonomy is not a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

### **Methods**

Correlational design was adopted for the study. The area of the study was South East, Nigeria which has five states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The population of the study comprised 3,072 lecturers in all the five State and four Federal Government-owned Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. A sample size of 614 lecturers which represented 20% of the population was drawn for the study using proportionate stratified sampling technique.

Two sets of instruments titled “Work Autonomy Questionnaire (WAQ)” and “Lecturers Job Satisfaction Scale (LJSS)” were used for data collection. The instruments were developed based on literature reviewed and consultation with experts in the field. WAQ had 15 items spread across two clusters A and B. Cluster A had 8 items on method autonomy and Cluster B contained 7 items on criteria autonomy. LJSS which measured job satisfaction of lecturers had 25 items. All the items in the instruments are structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instruments were subjected to face validation. To ascertain this, the researcher presented the title, purpose of the study, research question and hypotheses with a copy of the questionnaire to three experts who are lecturers; two in Educational Management, and one in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Educational Foundations, all in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The experts suggested some double barrel items which should be restructured and more items should be added to the instruments. Their suggestions were used to produce the final edition of the questionnaires. The internal consistencies of the two instruments were ascertained using Cronbach Alpha. The coefficient values obtained for clusters A and B 0.78 and 0.82 with the overall reliability of 0.80. On the other hand, coefficient of 0.82 was obtained for LJCSS.

A total of 614 copies of the questionnaires were administered on the respondents and 602 copies representing 98% were properly completed and successfully retrieved. Data analysis was done using simple regression to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses one and two, while multiple regression was used to analyze research question and hypothesis 3. For decision on the research questions, the coefficient  $r$  and the size of the relationship was interpreted using the correlation coefficient by Obilor and Amadi (2018), as follows .00-.39 for low predictor; .40-.60 for moderate predictor and .61-.100 for strong predictor. In taking decisions on the null hypotheses, if  $p$ -value is equal to or less ( $\leq$ ) than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis was rejected, but if  $p$ -value is greater than ( $>$ ), 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis was accepted.

## Results

**Research Question 1:** How does work method autonomy predicts lecturers’ job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria?

**Table 1: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Method Autonomy as a Predictor of Lecturers’ Job Satisfaction**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
1	.795	.651	.649	.32108	Strong

Table 1 revealed that the correlation coefficient of simple regression analysis between work method autonomy and lecturers’ job satisfaction is .795 with a coefficient of determination of .649. This shows that 64.9 % variation in lecturers’ job satisfaction can be attributed to work method autonomy. The regression coefficient  $r$  of .795 indicated that work method autonomy is a strong predictor of lecturers’ job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Research Question 2:** How does work criteria autonomy predicts lecturers’ job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria?

**Table 2: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Criteria Autonomy as a Predictor of Lecturers' Job Satisfaction**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
1	.574	.454	.451	.21134	Moderate

The result in table 2 shows that the correlation coefficient of simple regression analysis between work criteria autonomy and lecturers' job satisfaction is .574 with a coefficient of determination of .454. This shows that work criteria autonomy makes 45.4 % contributions to lecturers' job satisfaction. The regression coefficient  $r$  of .574 indicated that work criteria autonomy is a moderate predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Research Question 3:** How does work autonomy predicts lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria?

**Table 3: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Autonomy as a Predictor of Lecturers' Job Satisfaction**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Remarks
1	.738	.589	.587	.29237	Strong

Table 3 indicated that the correlation coefficient of simple regression analysis between work autonomy and lecturers' job satisfaction is .738 with a coefficient of determination of .589. This shows that 58.9 % variation in lecturers' job satisfaction can be attributed to work autonomy. The regression Coefficient  $r$  of .738 indicated that work autonomy is a strong predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Hypothesis One:** Work method autonomy is not a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Table 4: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Method Autonomy as a Significant Predictor of Lecturers' Job Satisfaction**

Predictor	R	$R^2$	$F$	$P$ -value	Remark
Work Method Autonomy	.795	.651	504.231	.020	*S

\*Significant

Table 4 shows that the simple regression coefficient ( $R$ ) is .795, while the  $R^2$  is .651 revealing that work method autonomy makes 65.1% contribution to the variance in lecturers' job satisfaction. The  $F$  (1/602) =504.123 and the  $p$ -value of .02 is less than .05. Therefore, since the  $p$ -value is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, work method autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Two:** Work criteria autonomy is not a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.



**Table 5: The Summary of Simple Regression Analysis on Work Criteria autonomy as a Significant Predictor of Lecturers' Job Satisfaction**

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P-value	Remark
Work CriteriaAutonomy	.574	.454	321.065	.030	*S

\*Significant

Table 5 indicates that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .574, while the R<sup>2</sup> is .454 showing that work criteria autonomy makes 45.4% contribution to the variance in lecturers' job satisfaction. The  $F(1/602) = 321.065$  and the  $p$ -value of .03 is less than .05. Therefore, since the  $p$ -value is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, work criteria autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Three:** Work autonomy is not a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

**Table 6: The Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis on Work Autonomy as a Significant Predictor of Lecturers' Job Satisfaction**

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P-value	Remark
Work Autonomy	.738	.589	402.557	.000	*S

\*Significant

It is revealed in table 6 that the multiple regression coefficient (R) is .738 while the R<sup>2</sup> is .589 showing that 58.9% variance in lecturers' job satisfaction could be associated with work autonomy. The  $F(1/602) = 402.557$  and the  $p$ -value of .00 is less than .05. Therefore, since the  $p$ -value is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, work autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria.

## Discussion

The finding of the study revealed that work method autonomy is a strong predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. This agreed with the finding of Allan (2019) which revealed that work method autonomy has strong positive relationship with job satisfaction of staff. This finding is explained by fact that work method autonomy which allows lecturers to decide procedures to use in performing tasks make them feel more valued and this contributes to increase in their job satisfaction. Work method autonomy encourages lecturers to carry out their duties in a way that suits them. It was also found that work method autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. This is also in line with the finding of Allan (2019) which showed that there was no significant relationship between work method autonomy and job satisfaction of employees. Work autonomy which encourages lecturers to carry out their official responsibilities at their own pace using their initiatives might account for significant relationship with their job satisfaction.

The result of the study showed that work criteria autonomy is a moderate predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. This disagreed with the finding of Anual, Zamri, Zakaria and AbdulKarim (2023) which indicated work

criteria autonomy had weak positive relationship with job satisfaction of employees. The difference in participants and organizations in which the studies were conducted could account for the disagreement in the findings. This finding is explained by the fact that work criteria autonomy enables lecturers set benchmark of performance which guides them in discharging tasks in such a way to increase their productivity and job satisfaction. Work criteria autonomy gives lecturers the opportunity to set deadlines, shoulder their responsibilities and live up to their work expectation which increase their job satisfaction. Further result indicated that work criteria autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. This refuted the finding of Anual, Zamri, Zakaria and AbdulKarim (2023) which revealed that work criteria autonomy had no significant relationship with job satisfaction of employees. The difference in geographical location and organizations in which the studies were conducted might explain the disagreement in the findings. Work criteria autonomy which allows lecturers to gain greater insights of their strengths and weaknesses to enable them make modifications and also take charge of their responsibilities might explain the significant predictor of their job satisfaction in Colleges of Education, South East, Nigeria.

It was found that work autonomy is a strong predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. This is in consonance with the finding of Amarasena, Ajward and Haque (2015) which reported that work autonomy had a strong correlation with academic staff job satisfaction of state universities in Sri Lanka. This is also in conformity with the finding of Dilekci (2022) which revealed that work autonomy is a strong predictor of job satisfaction. The institutions of learning in which the studies were conducted might explain the agreement in the findings. Work autonomy allows lecturers to make inputs about their official duties which give them a sense of belongings and increase their job satisfaction. Lecturers feel valued and taken seriously by management who grant work autonomy to them and this leads to greater level of job satisfaction. It was also revealed that work autonomy is a significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. This affirmed with the finding of Uwannah, Egwuonwu and James, (2022) which revealed that there was significant positive significant relationship between job autonomy and job satisfaction. This is also in line with the finding of Dilekci (2022) which revealed that work autonomy is a significant predictor of job satisfaction. The studies were conducted in educational institutions which might account for the agreement in the findings. Work autonomy encourages creativity, innovation and self-motivation which might explain the significant predictor of job satisfaction of lecturers in Colleges of Education, South East, Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it is concluded that work autonomy is positive and significant predictor of lecturers' job satisfaction in Colleges of Education in South East, Nigeria. When lecturers are granted freedom to decide their work method and criteria, they develop positive feelings and greater contentment level which foster their job satisfaction. The greater sense of control and ownership of tasks enjoyed by lecturers who are granted work autonomy is associated with their higher level of their job satisfaction. Granting work autonomy to lecturers could makes them accountable for the tasks which they are in charge of executing and motivate them to work hard to improve their productivity and job satisfaction.

## **Recommendations**

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

1. Management of Colleges of Education should grant freedom to lecturers to decide their work method to breeds creativity and innovation which contribute to their job satisfaction.
2. Lecturers should be encouraged by Management of Colleges of Education to participate in training programmes on work criteria autonomy to enable them upgrade their knowledge and skills of setting realistic bench mark of performance for higher job satisfaction.
3. Management of Colleges of Education should develop hand book on work autonomy to serve as guideline in granting freedom to lecturers to perform their duties in a way to improve their job satisfaction.

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