

Work Environment Factors Affecting Employee Productivity: Evidence from Nigerian University Administrative Staff

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Abstract

Employee productivity in Nigerian public universities remains a persistent concern, particularly in administrative units that operate under resource constraints, workload pressure and variable workplace safety conditions. This study examines how workplace safety and workload influence employee productivity among bursary staff at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Guided by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Affective Events Theory and the Job Demands-Resources perspective, the study employed a quantitative survey design. Data were collected from 87 bursary staff using a structured questionnaire, while the sample size was determined using G*Power based on a medium effect size, 0.80 statistical power and a 0.05 significance level. The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that workplace safety ($\beta = 0.323$, $p < 0.001$) and workload ($\beta = 0.544$, $p < 0.001$) significantly and positively affect employee productivity, with the model explaining 57.5% of the variance. Practically, the findings suggest that university administrators should prioritise safe work conditions, systematic workload monitoring and employee feedback mechanisms to improve productivity. The study contributes to work environment theory by demonstrating how motivational and affective pathways jointly explain productivity in a non-Western, resource-constrained higher education context.

1. Introduction

The work environment is a central determinant of employee productivity and institutional effectiveness. In higher education institutions, administrative staff support financial management, records, procurement, student services and other operational functions that sustain academic delivery. When these employees operate in an unsafe, poorly organised or psychologically demanding environment, their capacity to perform accurately and consistently may be reduced. Conversely, when work conditions are safe and demands are managed

appropriately, staff are more likely to experience positive work attitudes, better concentration and improved task output.

In Nigeria, the quality of the work environment is particularly important because many public institutions operate under resource constraints, growing administrative workloads and infrastructural limitations. University administrative units often face pressure to deliver services despite limited staffing, outdated facilities and rising expectations from students, academic departments and regulatory bodies. These conditions make the study of workplace safety and workload especially relevant to productivity in Nigerian higher education.

Existing studies generally agree that physical and psychological work conditions influence employee outcomes (Basit et al., 2018; Prasetyo et al., 2021; Stefvy et al., 2023). However, the literature remains fragmented. Some studies emphasise physical work conditions such as office design, ventilation and safety, whereas others focus on psychological demands such as workload, stress and interpersonal support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Sorensen et al., 2021). Less attention has been paid to how safety and workload jointly operate through motivational and emotional pathways to shape productivity among university administrative staff in Nigeria.

The research gap is therefore both contextual and theoretical. Contextually, empirical evidence on work environment factors in Nigerian university administrative settings remains limited, even though public universities are important workplaces with complex administrative demands. Theoretically, previous studies have rarely integrated Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory with Affective Events Theory (AET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) perspective to explain how workplace safety and workload influence productivity. This study addresses these gaps by testing the direct effects of workplace safety and workload on employee productivity among bursary staff at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

The objectives of this study are to: (i) examine the effect of workplace safety on employee productivity; and (ii) assess the effect of workload on employee productivity. The study contributes to scholarship by extending work environment theories to a non-Western, resource-constrained higher education context. It also provides practical guidance for university administrators seeking to improve productivity through evidence-based safety and workload management strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Integrated Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Affective Events Theory and the Job Demands-Resources perspective. Herzberg's theory distinguishes between hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, and motivators, which stimulate positive work attitudes and performance (Herzberg, 2015; Maidani, 1991). In this study, workplace safety is treated as a hygiene factor because it represents a basic condition that reduces anxiety, dissatisfaction and distraction. When safety is absent, productivity may decline because employees devote attention to physical risks instead of work tasks.

Affective Events Theory complements Herzberg's perspective by explaining how events and conditions in the workplace trigger emotional reactions that shape behaviour (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Weiss et al., 1999). Unsafe working conditions may create fear, uncertainty or frustration, while safe and supportive conditions can produce confidence and positive affect. Workload can also generate emotional responses: moderate workload may be experienced as meaningful challenge, whereas excessive workload may become a source of strain and burnout.

The JD-R perspective further clarifies the dual role of workload. Workload is commonly considered a job demand; however, when it is manageable and supported by adequate resources, it may operate as a challenge demand that stimulates engagement and productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; LePine et al., 2005). Thus, Herzberg explains why basic work conditions matter, AET explains the emotional processes connecting workplace events to performance, and JD-R explains why workload may have either positive or negative consequences depending on its intensity and support structure. Together, these theories provide an integrated framework for understanding employee productivity in Nigerian university administration.

2.2 Work Environment and Employee Productivity

The work environment is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, psychological and social conditions under which employees perform their duties (Dullah et al., 2023; Stefvy et al., 2023). Comparative evidence suggests that productivity is not shaped by a single workplace factor but by the interaction between environmental adequacy, employee well-being and organisational support. Physical factors such as lighting, ventilation, office arrangement and equipment affect concentration and comfort, while psychological factors such as workload, stress and leadership support influence motivation and energy for work (Perkasa et al., 2023; Schilleci, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, these relationships require contextual interpretation. Public institutions often experience infrastructural constraints, limited resources and high administrative pressure. Such conditions may make basic work environment factors more consequential than they might be in better-resourced contexts.

Therefore, examining workplace safety and workload among Nigerian university administrative staff provides a useful empirical basis for understanding how work environment factors influence productivity in a developing economy.

2.3 Workplace Safety and Employee Productivity

Workplace safety refers to the extent to which employees are protected from physical hazards, unsafe practices and health-related risks in the work setting. Previous studies show that safety improves productivity by reducing accidents, stress and work disruptions while enhancing trust and well-being (Asamani, 2020; Dziuba et al., 2020; Mutegi et al., 2023). Compared with studies focusing on industrial or health sectors, research on university administrative environments is relatively limited, even though safety also matters in offices through ergonomics, crowding, emergency preparedness and facility maintenance.

Theoretically, workplace safety aligns with Herzberg's hygiene factors because it represents a basic requirement for preventing dissatisfaction. AET further suggests that safe work environments create positive affective experiences, such as confidence and psychological security, which support sustained productivity. In Nigeria, where enforcement of safety standards and resource availability may vary across institutions, safety becomes an important contextual factor affecting employee outcomes (Moda et al., 2021).

H1: Workplace safety has a significant effect on employee productivity.

This hypothesis is supported by prior findings that safe working conditions reduce stress and enable employees to focus on their core responsibilities, thereby improving productivity.

2.4 Workload and Employee Productivity

Workload refers to the volume, intensity and complexity of tasks assigned to employees within a given period. Prior studies often associate excessive workload with fatigue, stress, burnout and reduced performance (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Msuya & Kumar, 2022; Nápoles, 2022). However, the literature also suggests that workload is not automatically harmful. When workload is moderate, meaningful and supported by adequate resources, it may encourage focus, responsibility and higher productivity.

This interpretation is consistent with the challenge-hindrance stressor framework, which argues that some job demands can motivate employees when they are perceived as achievable and developmental (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; LePine et al., 2005). Herzberg's theory explains how poorly managed workload may create dissatisfaction, whereas AET explains how workload produces emotional responses such as frustration or accomplishment. In Nigerian public universities, where staffing and administrative demands are often uneven, workload management becomes central to sustaining productivity.

H2: Workload has a significant effect on employee productivity.

This hypothesis is grounded in studies showing that workload, when properly managed, can function as a challenge demand that promotes engagement and output, while excessive workload may undermine well-being and performance.

2.5 Research Gap and Contribution

The reviewed literature demonstrates that workplace safety and workload are important predictors of productivity; however, there is limited empirical evidence on how these factors operate among university administrative staff in Nigeria. The literature is also theoretically fragmented because many studies discuss workplace conditions without explicitly connecting them to motivational and affective mechanisms. This study contributes by integrating Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, AET and JD-R perspectives to explain how workplace safety and workload influence productivity. It further extends work environment research to the context of Nigerian higher education administration.

3. Research Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature and integrated theoretical framework, the study proposes a direct relationship between workplace safety, workload and employee productivity. Workplace safety is expected to enhance productivity by reducing dissatisfaction and creating positive affective conditions. Workload is expected to influence productivity because manageable task demands may stimulate engagement and output when they are supported by adequate resources.

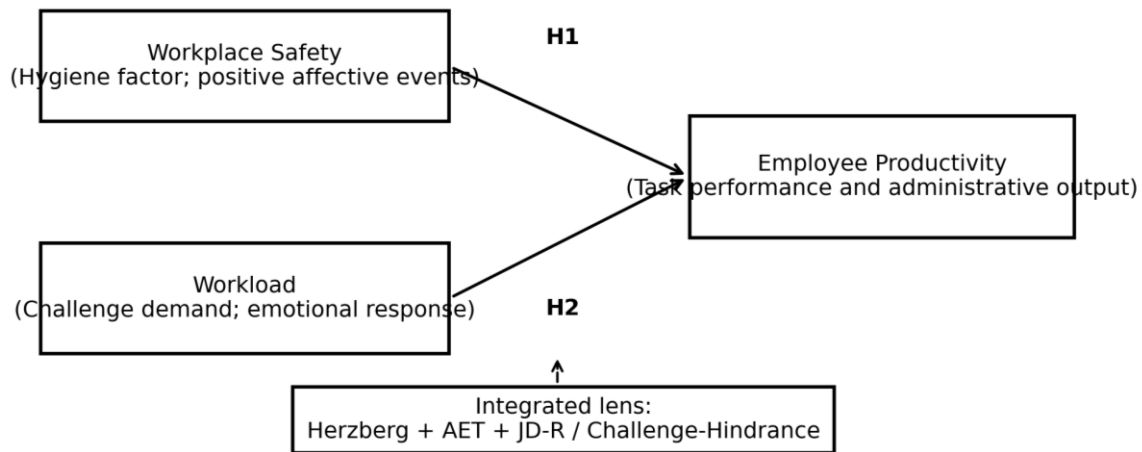


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework of the study

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Context

The study adopted a quantitative survey design to examine the effect of work environment factors on employee productivity at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study focused on bursary staff because their administrative responsibilities are central to financial processing, reporting and institutional service delivery. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data on workplace safety, workload and employee productivity.

4.2 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprised 135 bursary staff. The sample size of 87 was determined using G*Power statistical software. The calculation assumed a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a statistical power level of 0.80 and a significance criterion of 0.05, which are commonly used in behavioural and organisational research (Faul et al., 2009). Respondents were selected using simple random sampling to give staff members an equal opportunity of participating in the study. All 87 distributed questionnaires were returned and found usable for the main PLS-SEM analysis, representing a 100% response rate. Since some respondents did not complete all demographic items, demographic data are reported using item-level valid responses in Table 1.

4.3 Instrument, Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire contained items measuring employee productivity, workplace safety and workload. Face and content validity were established through the review of three domain experts who assessed the clarity, relevance and suitability of the items. A pilot test involving 10 respondents was conducted to refine the instrument. Reliability and validity were further assessed statistically using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

4.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The analysis involved two stages: assessment of the measurement model and assessment of the structural model. Harman's single factor test was used to check potential common method bias. Ethical considerations were observed by informing respondents about voluntary participation, confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study.

5. Results

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents based on valid responses for each demographic item. The valid responses indicate that most respondents were between 36 and 55 years old, married and male. Among

respondents who reported their educational qualification, most possessed tertiary education qualifications, suggesting that the administrative workforce was relatively well educated.

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents

Parameter	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18-25 years	5	7
	26-35 years	8	11
	36-45 years	29	42
	46-55 years	27	39
	56 years and above	1	1
Marital Status	Single	16	23
	Married	48	68
	Divorced	4	6
	Widowed	2	3
Gender	Male	50	71
	Female	20	29
Educational Qualification	O'Level	1	2
	NCE/OND	11	17
	HND/Bachelor	36	55
	Masters	15	23
	PhD	2	3

Note: Percentages are based on valid responses for each demographic item; missing responses were excluded from percentage calculations.

5.2 Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed through indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. Table 2 shows that most outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Employee productivity and workplace safety recorded satisfactory Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values. The workload construct showed slightly lower internal consistency values; however, its AVE exceeded 0.50 and its indicators demonstrated strong loadings, suggesting acceptable convergent validity for exploratory analysis (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 2 Validity and reliability of constructs

Construct	Items	Outer Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Employee Productivity	EP1	0.777	0.815	0.842	0.726
	EP2	0.808			
	EP3	0.727			
	EP4	0.750			
	EP5	0.759			
Workload	WL1	0.815	0.658	0.660	0.595
	WL2	0.841			
	WL3	0.871			
	WL4	0.830			
	WL5	0.855			
Workplace Safety	WS1	0.759	0.804	0.807	0.628

Construct	Items	Outer Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
	WS2	0.830			
	WS3	0.808			
	WS4	0.841			
	WS5	0.871			

Note: CA = Cronbach's alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

5.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT criterion. As shown in Table 3, all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating that employee productivity, workload and workplace safety are empirically distinct constructs.

Table 3 Discriminant validity using HTMT criterion

Construct	Employee Productivity	Workload	Workplace Safety
Employee Productivity			
Workload	0.658		
Workplace Safety	0.689	0.664	

5.4 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model results are presented in Table 4. Both hypotheses were supported. Workplace safety had a significant positive effect on employee productivity ($\beta = 0.323$, $p < 0.001$), while workload also had a significant positive effect on employee productivity ($\beta = 0.544$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 57.5% of the variance in employee productivity, indicating substantial explanatory power for the proposed model.

Table 4 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	Std Dev	T-Value	P-Value	f^2	Decision
H1	Workplace Safety -> Employee Productivity	0.323	0.024	13.626	<0.001	0.184	Supported
H2	Workload -> Employee Productivity	0.544	0.021	25.386	<0.001	0.522	Supported
R ²		0.575					

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that workplace safety and workload are significant predictors of employee productivity among bursary staff at the University of Ilorin. The positive effect of workplace safety supports the argument that employees perform better when they perceive their work environment as secure, organised and less threatening. This finding is consistent with safety-related studies showing that safe work environments reduce stress and promote performance (Asamani, 2020; Mutegi et al., 2023). Through Herzberg's lens, workplace safety operates as a hygiene factor that prevents dissatisfaction. Through AET, safety also generates positive emotional experiences, such as confidence and psychological security, which enable employees to focus on their tasks.

The positive relationship between workload and productivity requires careful interpretation. Although excessive workload is often associated with burnout and performance decline, the present findings suggest that workload in this context may be experienced as manageable and motivating. The relatively stronger effect of workload ($\beta = 0.544$) indicates that task demands may stimulate output when employees perceive them as meaningful, structured and achievable. This supports the challenge-hindrance stressor framework, which argues that some job demands can enhance motivation and performance when they are not perceived as obstructive or overwhelming.

Taken together, the findings suggest that productivity in Nigerian university administration is shaped by both structural and emotional work processes. Safety provides a basic condition for confidence and stability, while workload, when properly managed, can function as a challenge demand that encourages productivity. This

confirms the value of integrating Herzberg, AET and JD-R perspectives in explaining employee behaviour in resource-constrained institutional settings.

7. Theoretical Implications

This study clarifies the theoretical boundaries and interaction among Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, AET and the JD-R perspective. Herzberg explains why workplace safety is a fundamental hygiene factor that prevents dissatisfaction. AET explains how workplace events and conditions produce emotional responses that affect performance. JD-R and the challenge-hindrance framework explain why workload may become productive when it is perceived as a manageable challenge rather than an obstructive demand.

The positive workload-productivity relationship advances existing theory by challenging the assumption that workload necessarily reduces performance. In the present context, workload appears to serve as a motivating demand, possibly because staff perceive task responsibility as meaningful and manageable. This finding highlights the need for scholars to distinguish between excessive workload that causes strain and moderate workload that stimulates engagement.

Overall, this study advances the understanding of work environment theories by demonstrating their interactive relevance in non-Western, resource-constrained higher education contexts. It shows that productivity can be better explained when motivational conditions, emotional experiences and job demands are analysed together rather than separately.

8. Practical Implications

The findings provide data-driven guidance for university administrators and policymakers. In the short term, the significant effect of workplace safety ($\beta = 0.323$) suggests that universities should prioritise immediate safety improvements such as office risk assessment, ergonomic arrangements, clear emergency procedures, maintenance of facilities and staff awareness programmes. These actions are feasible and can quickly reduce safety-related distractions and anxiety.

In the medium term, the stronger workload effect ($\beta = 0.544$) suggests that productivity gains may be achieved through systematic workload management. University managers should monitor task distribution, clarify job roles, reduce unnecessary administrative bottlenecks and introduce digital tools where appropriate. Workload should be designed as a motivating challenge rather than an excessive burden. Regular employee feedback can help identify departments where workload has shifted from challenge to hindrance.

In the long term, workplace improvement should be institutionalised through policies aligned with national labour standards, occupational safety expectations and higher education workplace guidelines in Nigeria. Sustainable monitoring can be achieved through periodic productivity audits, employee satisfaction surveys, workload dashboards and safety compliance reviews. These mechanisms would ensure that workplace safety and workload management remain continuous institutional practices rather than one-off interventions.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of workplace safety and workload on employee productivity among bursary staff at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The results confirmed that both workplace safety and workload significantly and positively influence productivity, with workload showing the stronger effect. The study contributes to theory by integrating Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Affective Events Theory and the JD-R perspective to explain motivational and emotional pathways to productivity. Practically, the study highlights the importance of safe working conditions, balanced workload distribution and continuous workplace monitoring in improving administrative performance in Nigerian higher education institutions.

10. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it focused on a single university's bursary department, which may limit generalisability to other institutions or administrative units. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow conclusions about changes in workplace conditions and productivity over time. Third, although the sample size was adequate for the analysis, future studies may benefit from larger and more diverse samples across multiple universities.

Future research should examine additional variables such as leadership style, organisational culture, job autonomy and work-life balance. Longitudinal studies would also be useful for assessing whether safety improvements and workload interventions produce sustained productivity gains. Comparative studies across public and private universities may further clarify how institutional context shapes the relationship between work environment factors and employee productivity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Mohammed Lawan Bello, Abdulrazaq Kayode AbdulKareem and Farida Omotoyosi Adeyemi; **data collection:** Sulu Babaita Isiaka and Rafiu Jimoh Amosa; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Abdulrazaq Kayode AbdulKareem, Farida Omotoyosi Adeyemi and Rafiu Jimoh Amosa; **draft manuscript preparation:** Mohammed Lawan Bello, Sulu Babaita Isiaka and Farida Omotoyosi Adeyemi. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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