EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF MANAGEMENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC STAFF ENGAGEMENT OF SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is a smart strategy for creating and maintaining a competitive advantage. However, recent studies have consistently reported declining employee engagement in many tertiary institutions worldwide. This study examined the perceived influence of management support on academics' engagement in selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design and Social Exchange Theory as a conceptual guide. One hundred and nine (109) respondents were surveyed across the selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria using a stratified sampling technique. The questionnaire was used as a research instrument and a Smart Partial Lease Square (SPLS) to test the perceived influence of management support on academics' engagement. The findings of the study showed that management supports significantly influenced Academic Staff (teaching, research, and community service) engagements at (β= 0.732, R^2=0.535, t-statistics=19.020>1.96, P-value=0.000<0.05). The findings also revealed that management supports have significant influence on Academics' research output at (β= 0.619, R^2=0.383, t-statistics=11.508>1.96, P-value=0.000 <0.05). Statistical analysis also revealed that management supports have a significant influence on Academics' community service engagement at (β=0.538, R^2=0.290; t-statistics=9.495>1.96, P-value=0.000 <0.05). The findings further revealed that teaching engagement of the Academic Staff has the most predictive value, followed by research and community service engagement, respectively. The result implies that the institution supports provided by the management of universities in Nigerian private universities contributes significantly to the teaching engagement of Academic Staff. The study concludes that management support in terms of a research grant, publication support, enabling environment, and conference support significantly affects academics' engagement in teaching, research output, and community engagement. The study recommends the need for management and stakeholders of universities to develop an appropriate strategy for academic engagement.

Keywords: Academics, Job-Hopping, Remuneration, Teaching-Engagement, University.

INTRODUCTION

Recently,"*World-class University*" has become a catchphrase in emerging nations. This phenomenon reveals the rapid growth of new universities and high ranking among the top-notch universities in the world. The competition of universities to be considered among the high-ranking universities demands an exceptional competitive advantage, and sustainability resides in their academic staff engagement (Thanuja et al., 2016). The attractiveness and maintenance of the academic profession in higher learning institutions are

some of the critical challenges affecting the management of higher institutions (Mulu, 2014). The challenge of academics' engagement is of concern for the management of universities worldwide, which is also a peculiar situation in Nigerian universities (Akpa, 2016). Akpa et al. (2016) posits that many privately owned universities worldwide have experienced a loss of their critical faculty due to a lack of work engagement and loyalty.

Consequently, this has reduced contribution to their core obligations such as research output, a teaching engagement, and community service engagement). This imposes a severe barrier to achieving the desired objectives of concerned universities. In response to these challenges facing the management of tertiary education in Africa, Kyaligonza and Kamagara (2017) posit that poor management support, such as insufficient facilities, inadequate access to publishing facilities, low-paid staff, and lack of research grants account for the lack of academic commitment among academics of universities. Also, Weng'u, Chibouk & Kogos (2018) identified insufficient research support as the main factor that has limited the growth of research in the Kenyan university system. However, these studies reveal factors that dictate academics' intention to either stay or leave most universities worldwide and Africa in particular. However, these studies failed to establish the perceived relationship between the determinants of choice to go and how such intention may affect academics' engagement in teaching, research output and community engagements. Hence, this study explored the underlying research gap (Adekalu et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the study intends to provide empirically tested information on factors affecting academic engagement. The result of the survey will improve policy decisions on staff engagement. Similarly, the study aimed to generate new knowledge regarding management support as a predictor of academics' engagement in research output, teaching, and community service engagement, which greatly benefit university management.

In Nigeria, the management of Universities seems to be getting the wrong end of the stick. Instead of seeking to engage academic staff, most Universities in Nigeria spend endless energies and resources on 'attracting and 'admitting students and only to be churned out as unemployable graduates. Without the proper engagement of academics, Universities can hardly deliver on their responsibilities and produce good graduates. This issue opens up the need for an inquiry into the domain of job-hopping intention and academics' engagement in Nigerian Universities. Consequently, the study investigates the significant role of management support (Enabling environment and Research Grant Supports Publication support) on academic engagement of Selected Private Universities in Southwest Nigeria.
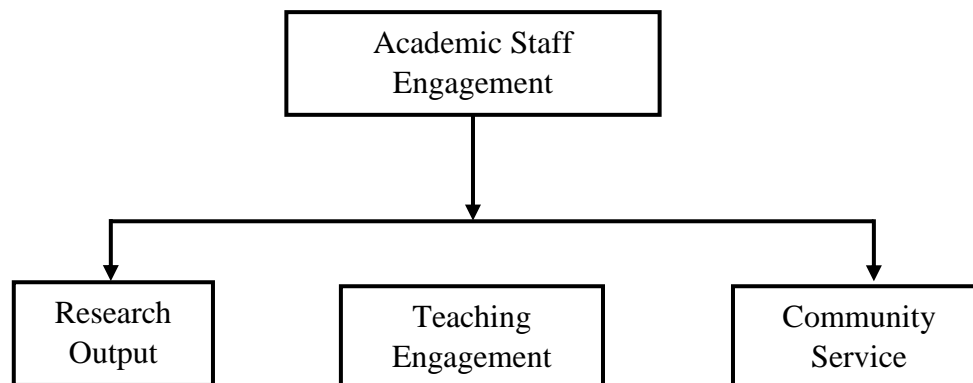
Academics Engagement

Three primary functions characterize academic engagement in any University: research, teaching, and community engagement (Okpe et al., 2013: Sulaiman, 2018). Higher institutions are well known for teaching, research, and service delivery. The quality and quantity of these three indicators determine the advancement of academic staff, performance, and ranking of a University.

Historically, teaching has been the primary function of university lecturers. Later in the mid-19th century, after Alexander von Humboldt's intellectual revolution, scientific research became the second significant role of university lecturers but was closely linked to teaching engagement. Community service, the third function of academics, became the focus of debate only in the late decades of the 20th century. The argument on community service is triggered by shifts in culture, globalization, and networking (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000).

Ologunde et al. (2013) also found that the performance measures for lecturers in Nigeria were teaching, research, and community service participation. Similarly, Fapohunda (2015) stated that the job description of academics included three main elements: research,

teaching, and community service participation. These roles are key performance indicators for academics' engagement in most universities worldwide. Qualifications and criteria required for promotion were based on the engagement of some or all of these essential functions of academics. Okpe et al. (2013) affirmed these functions as key performance indicators for academics' engagement in most universities worldwide.

Source: (Okpe, Simisaye & Otuza, 2013)

FIGURE 1
SHOWING KEY ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS OF ACADEMICS' ENGAGEMENT

Research Output

One of the academic staff's fundamental responsibilities is conducting ground-breaking research that could lead to national growth and development. Research output is considered one of the academics' engagements (Imhonopi & Urim, 2013: Mahar & Quiliam, 2018). Over the years, research output has been the channel through which academics contribute their quota to the existing body of knowledge (Okonedo, 2015). Noted that research output at the university is the most important measure of academic participation, measured by the number of papers published in refereed journals and reputable conference proceedings.

Concluded that the universal approach to measuring research output was to count the number of published books, papers, technical reports, and book reviews. Okpe et al. (2013) argued that without research, universities would lose their capacity to deliver their primary responsibilities, such as producing employable graduates, inspiring and attracting the best minds, and ultimately losing the ability to train new-generation academics and scientists. As a result, the progress of national growth depends on the research production's consistency and how these results are used. The authors argued that the acknowledgement and promotion of academics depend significantly on the quantity and consistency of their research output, presented in journal articles, books, and research papers.

However Okpe et al. (2013) investigated the publication output level among Babcock University faculty members from 2001-to 2012. It was discovered on average, each faculty member produces one publication yearly, which was minimal (Okpe et al., 2013). They further recommend management support for academic research. Also, Okeji (2018) carried out a bibliometric analysis from 2000 to March 2018 on the growth of academics' research output in Nigeria. The author concluded that only a few authors were productive in their research output. This assertion is in line with the submission of Umar et al. (2017), who

remarked that regardless of the benefits of publications to academics, they hardly meet the publication requirement for their advancement in the profession.

Okpe et al. (2013) identified several militating factors against research output. These include poor linkage between research and end users, poor research-industry linkage, weak centres for disseminating research results, the exodus of outstanding scholars, and inadequate research funding mechanisms. Others include an obsolete library, laboratory, ICT, workshop facilities, publish or perish syndrome, and poor webometrics ranking of Nigeria research and research personnel due to poor web presence.

Teaching Engagement

Teaching engagement represents an important performance indicator of academics. Some studies have revealed this as a performance indicator of academics. Teaching engagement is assessed based on length of teaching, delivery quality, coverage of course outline, number of courses taught, and overall student performance (Zilahy & Huisingh, 2009). Similarly, the teaching task includes preparing and delivering lectures, supervising the senior students' projects, and grading scripts. Other roles include creating and promoting new teaching techniques, student counselling, and preparing teaching and learning materials. (Agbionu et al., 2018).

Despite the significance of academics' teaching engagement to all universities' stakeholders, The statement that most academics fail to deliver on teaching engagement. They often interact with students only half the regular contact hours or are not regular in class. This attitude can indicate job-hopping intentions.

Community Service Engagement

Globally, creating knowledge and sharing through university-community interaction research has been recognized as a means of advancement and national growth among developing countries. Nigeria is fully committed to this view. Community service is generally referred to as the third function, although closely related to the first and second functions. Community service has become highly valued in recent years, especially in the countries of young democracies (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000). Although studying, learning and teaching typically occur within the boundaries of the university setting, for the most part, community involvement generally is outside the university. It involves acquiring new information and its physical application to a real-life situation to impact people's lives at the community level positively.

Involvement with the community and wider society is one of the central roles of higher education in which institutions use their experience and resources to solve issues relevant to their communities (Ward, 2003). Community service has taken its place alongside teaching and research programs. Community service, academic staff support, social services, financial literacy, health, and crime prevention are incorporated into communities (Preece, 2011). Rapid growth presupposes that a university can develop a closer relationship with its climate, adapt more quickly, and be more responsive in meeting the community's needs. Community service promotes learning and R&D programs by delivering services to companies and public sector organizations Waribo et al. (2020). Community service has taken its place alongside research and study programs but is tightly incorporated into them (Chatterton & Goddard 2000).

However, Onwuemele (2018) observed that institutional policies have little or no incentive mechanisms to foster or encourage participation in university community service. While teaching and research performance are moderately rewarded in academic promotion

assessments, there is currently no institutional community involvement in most Nigerian universities. Furthermore, most university engagements have little connection to immediate local communities Edgar & Pair (2005). Universities' reward systems do not support community involvement as a valid scholarship form. (Onwuemele, 2018). Also, most academics of universities have not lived up to expectations due to low morale and poor attitudes, particularly towards their primary responsibilities (Research output, teaching, and community engagements) (Okebukola, 2005). Hence, the study examines the effect of job-hopping intention on academic engagement (teaching, research output, and community engagement) Atwebembeire et al. (2018).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory was introduced in 1964 by Blau. The theory suggests that benefits and costs to an individual determine a relationship. According to Blau (1964), exchange practices are evolving because people strive to weigh inputs and outputs and achieve a good balance in their transactions. Moreover, the basic tenet of social exchange theory is that relationships develop into trust. Moreover, the basic principle of social exchange theory is that relationships develop into trust (Reader et al., 2017). Such rules tend to include the laws of reciprocity or repayment, such that the actions of one party contribute to the reaction or efforts of the other party. Reciprocity is a fundamental principle of social exchange theory. Rich et al. (2010) stated, One way for employees to compensate their organization is through their commitment to work, and they do this in several ways in response to the resources they obtain from their employer. Employees prefer to trade their loyalty for incentives and benefits offered by their organization. Therefore, as workers receive support and have growth opportunities, they are likely to reciprocate by displaying higher levels of organizational commitment. Skarzauskiene's (2010) study offered a rational explanation for employee engagement based on the social exchange theory, in line with many other studies. In addition, Skarzauskiene (2010) reported that the lack of unbalanced social exchange processes predicts employee engagement and turnover intention. Skarzauskiene (2010) suggests that the major force in interpersonal relations is the satisfaction of the self-interest of both parties. The study further indicated that the imbalanced social exchange, such as organizations that demand more from their workers and offer nothing in return other than work, would lead to employee cynicism and distrust Ascher & Fruchter (2001).

By application, employee engagement will depend on the level of perceived benefits from the management. Hence a relationship exists between employees' intention and engagement. In other words, trust within a team of employees is developed and engendered through a fair workplace environment. Therefore, the theory tends to give a theoretical explanation of the perceived relationship between job-hopping intention and academic engagement Arbo and Benneworth (2007).

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the perceived influence of management support on academics' engagement in selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive research design enabled the researcher to examine respondents' perceptions of measuring variables using a structured questionnaire and Likert-type scale format as contained in this study. The study adopted a 5 Likert scale to minimize biases that could result from forcing respondents into expressing agreement or disagreement.

One hundred and nine (109) respondents were surveyed across two selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria Robyn & Du Preez (2013). Multistage sampling techniques include purposive, stratified, and simple random. Purposive sampling was selected because it focused only on academics, stratified because it cut across all academic strata, and simple random because every academic staff within the selected universities was given equal opportunity of being selected. This made the purpose of assessing the degree to which the respondents or participants agree with the particular item in the instrument. Also, Smart Partial Least Square (SPLS) was used to test the perceived influence of management support on academics' engagement. The purpose of (SPLS) was to predict the effect of one variable on the other.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

H_o: *Management support does not play a significant role in academic engagement.*

PLS algorithm model depicted in Figure 1 shows the interrelatedness of management support and Academic Staff (teaching, research, and community service) engagement. The structural path coefficient illustrates the level and the extent of relationships between the observed variables, and the r-square values are depicted in Figure 1. Meanwhile, the bootstrapping was increased from 500 to 5000, as suggested by Garson (2016) and Falola et al. (2020). The aim was for the enhancement of the model outcomes. The path coefficients and the p-values of the observed variables are depicted in Figure 2, while the t-statistic and structural path coefficients are also presented in Figure 3.
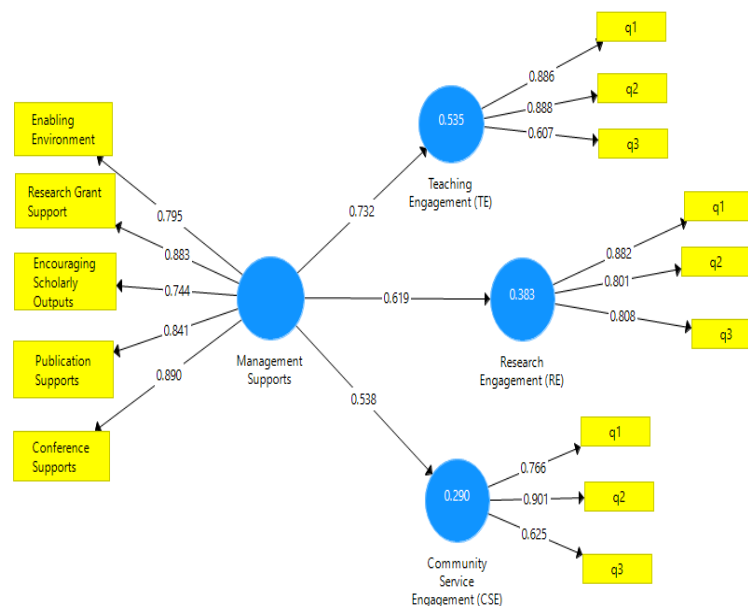

FIGURE 1
PLS ALGORITHM MODEL OF MANAGEMENT SUPPORTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF (TEACHING, RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE) ENGAGEMENT
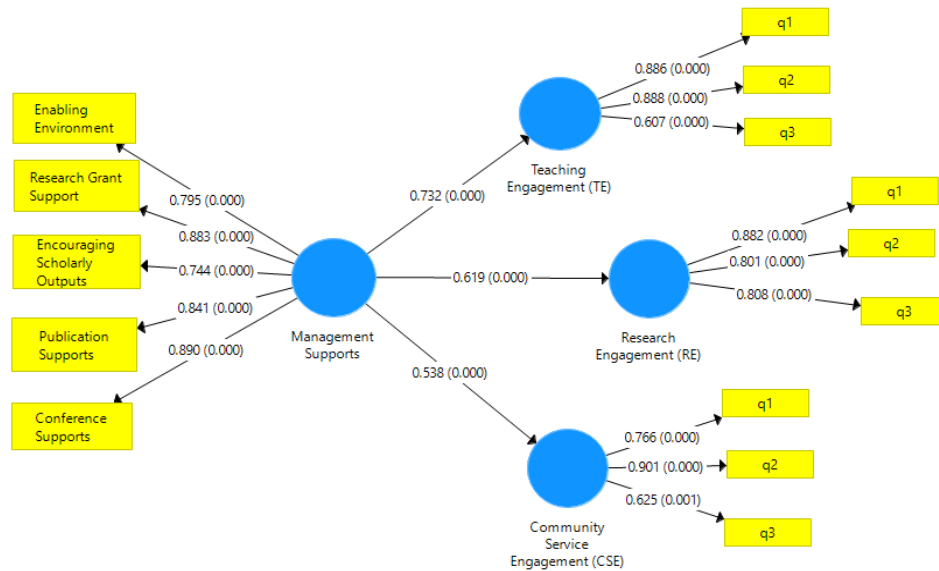
FIGURE 2
PLS BOOTSTRAPPING MODEL WITH B AND P VALUES OF MANAGEMENT SUPPORTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF (TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE) ENGAGEMENT
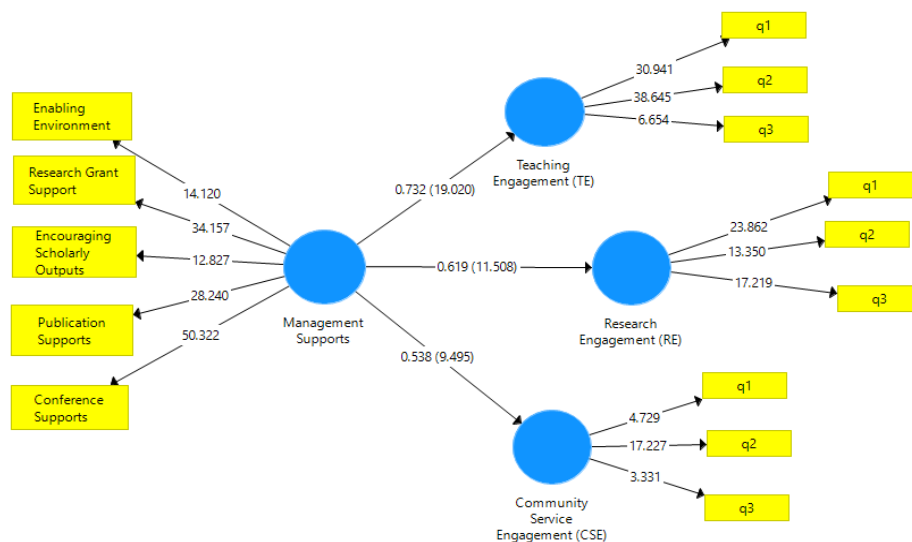

FIGURE 3
PLS BOOTSTRAPPING MODEL WITH B AND T VALUES OF MANAGEMENT SUPPORTS AND ACADEMIC STAFF (TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE) ENGAGEMENT

Table 1 shows the path coefficients, standard deviation, T-statistics, p-values, and R^2 of each observed variable that was tested with Smart Partial Lease Square Lucky et al. (2013). The path coefficients indicate the expected variance in teaching engagement, research engagement, and community service engagement for a unit variation in the management supports. However, the higher the coefficient, the more significant effect of management support on teaching, research, and community service engagement Collinson (2000). T-

statistics is used in this context to verify the substantial influence of management support on Academic Staff (teaching, research, and community service) engagement Eisenberger (2002).

Table 1
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Constructs	Loading	VIP	t-statistics	P value	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	RhO. A
	≥ 0.6	<3.0	>1.96	<0.05	≥ 0.5	≥ 0.8	> 0.7	
Management Supports					0.693	0.918	0.888	0.897
Enabling Environment	0.795	2.148	14.120	0.000				
Research Grant Support	0.883	2.914	34.157	0.000				
Scholarly Outputs Encouragement	0.744	2.011	12.827	0.000				
Publication Support	0.841	2.227	28.240	0.000				
Conference Support	0.890	2.992	50.322	0.000				
Teaching Engagement ($\beta= 0.732$; $R^2=0.535$; t-Statistic= 19.020)					0.647	0.842	0.715	0.766
TEq1	0.886	2.831	30.941	0.000				
TEq2	0.888	2.269	38.645	0.000				
TEq3	0.607	2.311	6.654	0.000				
Research Engagement ($\beta= 0.619$; $R^2=0.383$; t-Statistic= 11.508)					0.691	0.870	0.793	0.836
Req1	0.882	1.009	23.862	0.000				
Req2	0.801	2.434	13.350	0.000				
Req3	0.808	1.344	17.219	0.000				
Community Service Engagement ($\beta= 0.538$; $R^2=0.290$; t-Statistic= 9.495)					0.597	0.813	0.757	0.905
CSEq1	0.766	2.089	4.729	0.000				
CSEq2	0.901	2.081	17.227	0.000				
CSEq3	0.625	1.142	3.331	0.000				

DISCUSSION

Table 1 depicts the PLS statistical results. This study has management support as an exogenous variable and Academic Staff (teaching, research, and community service) engagement as an endogenous variable. The exogenous variable was measured with five specific items, as depicted in the table. In contrast, the Academic Staff (teaching, research, and community service) engagement was also measured with nine items shown in the table. The findings depict that management support significantly influenced Academic Staff (teaching, research, and community service) engagement.

Explicitly, the findings revealed that management supports have significant influence on Academic Staff teaching, engagement at ($\beta=0.732$, $R^2=0.535$, t-statistics=19.020>1.96, P-value=0.000<0.05). The Path coefficient of 0.732 implies a substantial relationship between management support and teaching engagement of Academic Staff in the selected universities

in Nigeria. Also, the R^2 value of 0.535 suggests that management supports explaining 53.5% variance in teaching engagement.

The findings also revealed that management supports have significant influence on Academic Staff research engagement at (β=0.619, R^2=0.383, t-statistics=11.508>1.96, P-value=0.000<0.05). The Path coefficient of 0.619indicates a good relationship between management support and Academic Staff research engagement. On the other hand, the R^2 value of 0.383 suggests that management support can explain 38.8% variance in Academic Staff research engagement.

In the same way, the statistical analysis also revealed that management supports significantly influence Academic Staff community service engagement at (β=0.538, R^2=0.290; t-statistics=9.495>1.96, P-value=0.000<0.05). The Path coefficient of 0.538 suggests a moderate relationship between management support and Academic Staff community service engagement. The R^2 value of 0.290 suggests that management support can explain 29% variance in Academic Staff community service engagement. This simply means that all the measures of management support have a significant influence on academics' engagement. Therefore, the hypothesis of no significant relationship between management support and academics' engagement in research output, teaching, and community engagement was rejected.

The results thus confirm previous literature (Kose, 2016; Hajihasani & Kave, 2016; Yongxing et al., 2017: Agbionu et al., 2018) who echoed the importance of perceived management support in forecasting work engagement. Also, the results are confirmed with the study by Mahagura (2016) on the aspect of working environment, who argued that the existence of a friendly working environment such as availability of housing/accommodation and well-furnished lecture rooms, halls, offices, and other infrastructures in general enhanced most employees to serve longer with an employer. Also, Buberwa, (2015) findings concurred with this study on the working environment that satisfactory infrastructures for academia, such as availability of offices, renovated houses, lecture rooms, and halls, generated satisfaction and retention to employees.

Based on findings, there is a need for universities to establish management support-related programmers such as best teaching awards, research awards, community engagement awards, and performance-based reward systems. Also, to encourage research output, a strategic policy in support of academics that have attracted grants to the university to the extent of 5% of the total grant as a benefit to motivate the researcher for further engagement should be encouraged. Besides, sponsorships and support programmes such as training, conference, research grants, and publication supports should be encouraged in private universities to retain competent academics. It can be safely argued that an increased research output in private universities may be attributed to the level of management support available in private universities, as supported by Agbionu et al. (2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The relationship between perceived management support significantly influences Academics' engagement in teaching research output and community engagement. A closer look at management support shows that conference support and research grants have the most predicting effects on academics' engagement, with teaching engagement of the Academics having the most predictive value, followed by research and community service engagement, respectively. This implies that the institution supports provided by the management of universities in Nigeria contributes more to the teaching engagement of Academic Staff. Therefore, it can be concluded that management supports in terms of a research grant, publication support, enabling environment, and conference support have significant effects on

academics' engagements in teaching, research output, and community engagement. Consequently, the following recommendation was made:

(i) Management of universities should endeavour to improve resources and infrastructure by establishing research facilities that will expose academics to state of the art and global best practices. This will empower them to innovate and produce relevant research findings that can improve the visibility and competitiveness of the institutions both locally and internationally. By so doing, they will not need to engage in job-hopping

(ii) Management of universities should devise institutional and national-level policy frameworks to improve research involvement through the provision of funding, especially for young academics, to ensure the sustainability of the institutions in the future. This will give all academics a sense of embeddedness and loyalty, further encouraging academic engagement.

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