

Full Length Research Paper

Institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in Uganda: A mediating effect of work environment

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This study focused on establishing the intervening effect of work environment in the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction among administrative staff in universities in Uganda. The study was undertaken because most private universities could not afford to pay their staff a living wage and meet their staff's welfare needs, resulting in the challenge of managing dissatisfied administrative staff. The study involved purposive and simple random sampling approaches. The study adopted a descriptive approach to generate data from the targeted population of 495 and a sample size of 215. The study also used a cross-sectional survey to obtain responses, and this generated a response rate of 100% for both the unit of analysis and unit of inquiry. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed to analyze the data. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Amos statistical software. The unstandardized bootstrapping results show that the total effect of institutional staff policies' implementation on employee job satisfaction of selected universities in East and Northern Uganda was significant ($B = 0.786, p < 0.01$). Upon the inclusion of the mediating variable (work environment) in the model, the impact of institutional staff policies' implementation on employee job satisfaction remained significant ($B = 0.366, p < 0.01$), though it reduced in magnitude from 0.786 to 0.366. This suggests that the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction is mediated by work environment. The findings reveal a partial mediation ($B = 0.366, p < 0.01$), implying that the effect of institutional staff policies' implementation on employee job satisfaction is partially transmitted by work environment. This suggests the critical need for a conducive work environment for staff. Thus, the study recommends that universities prioritize improving the work environment and ensure that employees are provided with a decent working context.

Key words: Institutional staff policies, job satisfaction, work environment, Universities.

INTRODUCTION

Employees' job satisfaction in any workplace is only realized through the establishment of effective human

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resource management practices and admirable implementation of the set staff policies from the inception of recruiting and hiring prospective employees (Tajeddini et al., 2017). Policies that support the training and empowerment of workers, reward systems, motivation, and communication are among the key areas that leaders must exercise to drive and reinforce workers' gratification and performance (Hadi et al., 2018). Influenced by the elevation of staff rank, good salary, and achievement of personal objectives through the employment one has (Kaliski, 2007). Job satisfaction shows encouraging feelings from staff, job knowledge, and experience linked to workers' attitudes, moods, and judgments of the employment performed, the nature of the institutions they serve, and relationships with co-employees (Parker and Ohly, 2008). Job satisfaction highlights a blend of psychological, physiological, and environmental situations that encourage staff to confess honestly to being satisfied with employment (Hoppock, 1935).

Jude et al. (2024) allude that employees' job pleasure takes a multiplicity of assembled essentials like a staff reward system, cordial relationships with colleagues at the place of work, an adorable work environment, and professional growth. Additionally, Jude et al. (2024) attest that improved organizational citizenship behavior and commitment are realized when staff are satisfied with their employment terms and benefits. Akinwale and George (2020) acknowledged that the nature of the job is not just a facial expression of happiness that may be portrayed. Opeke et al. (2020) noted that institutions of higher learning, especially private universities, struggle to finance their activities. This is coupled with low infrastructure growth and restricted opportunities for professional advancement. Furthermore, private universities exploit staff with low pay and benefits compared to Government Universities (Gopinath, 2020). Ariani (2023) postulate holistic workplace policies that cover multiple staff needs. The provision of a competitive living wage, attractive bonuses, flexible work schedules, long tenure of service terms, staff performance-led training programs, working requirements, and working tools that are critical influencers to staff job satisfaction, performance, and love for their job (Ridwan and Mulyani, 2023).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention (1951) on Equal Remuneration (No. 100) states *the principles for equal remuneration for work of equal value* and addresses gender discrimination in employment (International Labour Organization, n.d.). ILO encourages the promotion of adorable and productive work that entails freedom, equity, security, and dignity (International Labour Organization, n.d.). The Employment Policy Convention (1964) states that policies should be set to promote rights at work, minimum income, and skills development to enhance human capital and skills development through training and work-based learning to enhance workplace adaptability. ILO encourages countries

to establish a national adequate, minimum income to provide a dignified life to workers as contained in the agenda of the 86th Session Conference, and the Employment Act, 2006, which stipulates entitlement to wages and mode of payment (Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995; The Employment Act, 2006; International Labour Organization, 2014).

Despite universities being hubs of knowledge, development, and brain power, the study revealed gaps in the implementation of staff policies regarding compensation and benefits, promotion, and staff training and Development. Most private universities in Uganda face financial constraints due to dependence on student fees as a source of revenue. Private universities in Uganda face financing challenges mainly because the Government of Uganda does not provide financial support to private universities, while private universities are also partners in Human Capital Development (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE], 2018, 2022). Most private universities cannot afford to pay their staff a living wage and meet their staff's welfare needs. The little funds generated are invested in expansion programs of the universities rather than staff welfare. Inadequate funding, facilities, limited office space, furniture, and poor infrastructure are the burdens most private universities are struggling with (Kasozi, 2003). Oyat and Aleni (2015) revealed an increasing need for research on Human Resource management practices, especially in academic institutions in Uganda. Unequal and poor compensation systems, nepotism, understaffing, unfair promotion practices, gaps in leadership, accountability, and lack of adherence to human resources management practices, and rigidity in promotions are some of the drivers and enablers of job dissatisfaction, supported by the findings of (Sengendo, 2012).

Prior studies seem to suggest that poor employee job satisfaction, including lower retention rate and employee commitment, can be explained by the concept of institutional staff policies' implementation and the work environment. In this study, employee job satisfaction is expounded based on Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) and the Institutional theories of organization (Zucker, 1987). Thus, the research question is derived, which states: What is the mediating role of the work environment in the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction?

The studies conducted by Katebi et al. (2022) and Rafiq et al. (2022) revealed that satisfied workers are more motivated to even work beyond the work schedules and are seen to be more enthusiastic and productive. The Employees that have been reporting high level of job satisfaction has also reported good working environment at their places of work (Gazi et al., 2024). According to Mather and Bam (2025) the importance of creating a good working environment would encourage work life balance and recognizing personnel that increase

job satisfaction and reduce labour turnover in an institution. The work environment and working conditions play an important role in determining a person's job satisfaction, job security and remunerations which are very crucial in an organization (Sabeng and Mensah, 2023). Relatedly, Efimova and Latyshev (2023) revealed that supportive environment and staff development programs are a major factor that would make employees satisfied with an institution. It has been established that Positive work environment such as effective communication, collaboration, social respect and trust is supportive in job performance (Bella, 2023) while a negative relationship between managers and employees are toxic for a growth of any institution (Abun et al., 2018). According to Hung and Huy (2023) Institutional policies have a positive effect on job satisfaction and thus leading to a positive job performance.

Theoretical foundation

This study was grounded on Herzberg's two factor theory.

Herzberg's two factor theory

This study was premised on Herzberg's two-factor theory, which was brought into existence by Herzberg et al. (1959). The theory notes that a satisfied worker is a valuable gift to the employer. Herzberg pointed out that staff prefers engagement in their work. Workers vividly describe work situations in which they attain satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their employment (Jones, 2011). The two factors are clustered into hygiene and motivational factors. Hygiene factors are factors that illustrate the context or environment of work. It can lead to job dissatisfaction if not appropriately handled by the firm. These relate to the working environment, institutional policies, leadership styles, and level of rewards or pay, referred to as hygiene factors (Robbins and Judge, 2014). While Motivational factors refer to 'satisfier', which involves appreciation and elevation in job positions and achievements, institutions should harness long-lasting rapport with staff for a win-win relationship that propels staff to be committed to the institution and hence job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1966). The theory explains the link between the employment relationship and how it affects staff work gratification. Herzberg's two-factor theory aids managers in acquiring an in-depth knowledge of work gratification alongside performance matters that include job tasks known as work content and job context. Poor hygiene should be avoided to spur job satisfaction in an institution. This theory puts this study into perspective as it identifies two factors referred to as motivators and hygiene for job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The theory, therefore, ameliorates the investigator's ability to identify the founding factors linked

to job satisfaction (Schermerhorn Jr, 2011). This theory was criticized for being silent on workplace productivity and for its uncertainty in reliability. Because it is exhibited by those responsible for assessing employee job satisfaction, it follows the behavior of the staff, while blaming external factors for failure to perform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee job satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction relates to optimistic feelings that an employee draws from his or her employment, indicating constructive emotional status experienced in one's employment regarding individual behaviors, and emotional touch (Prameswari et al., 2020). Employee job satisfaction entails the feelings and attitudes attained by an employee, which may be positive or negative regarding the work being performed. The feelings are both externally and interior motivated (Chukwura, 2016). The dimensions of employee job satisfaction are employee labor turnover, job productivity, job motivation, commitment, and positive employee engagement. Productivity refers to the degree of energy of individual staff or a collection of people to translate input resources effectively and efficiently into output (Cocker et al., 2013) or the period spent in accomplishing institutional goals (Faisal et al., 2015). Employee job satisfaction is tied to an enjoyable and pleasing job that can enhance the level of satisfaction of staff and improve the institution's performance at a leveraged position above another rival firm (Kalsoom et al., 2018).

Institutional staff policies' implementation

In this study, institutional staff policies' implementation is conceptualized as the process of putting into action the guidelines and policies established by an institution for the purpose of governing the actions and responsibilities of its staff. Well-laid-out institution policies, if well-implemented, aid operations and programs to be run systematically.

Activities and decisions of the institution are guided by a set of legal frameworks in place (Huffman et al., 2017). Policies can be those that are made by the company (internal) (Guo et al., 2016). Other policies are from the Government and international communities (external), like the National Constitution, National Employment laws, International Labor Organization Laws, international declarations on human rights, and other relevant laws where all institutions operating within the country must abide/adhere (Guo et al., 2016).

Work environment

Work environment refers to the conditions that prevail

around the workplace that affect their well-being (Sastry and Simha, 2002). Employment environment involves virtuous working rapport amongst workers, staff well-being, employment job safety, and acknowledgment of good performance; all these actions motivate staff zeal to work (Edem et al., 2017). Astuti and Iverizkinawati (2019) consider work environment as tools and materials provided to an employee to carry out his or her duties; defective tools and poor materials do not provide quality work. The available facility, like offices, supports the employee to do work, while the social environment is the conditions at work occasioned by colleagues, supervisors, and systems or work processes. Chandra et al. (2019) allude to a combination of physical and social factors that make up a work environment. The physical work environment is a vital driver of staff productivity, commitment, and job fulfillment. It entails both the physical and emotional aspects of the place of work. Comfort, serenity, and safety are ideal for a work atmosphere for the employees to conduct their business as appointed to perform (Hicklenton et al., 2019). The dimensions of work environment are physical environment, leadership and management practices, and social /interpersonal dynamics. Leadership refers to a practice and way of inducing human beings to perform actions for the realization of set objectives (Smith et al., 2018).

Mediating role of work environment in the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction

Establishing the mechanisms under which the work environment enhances the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction is necessary to guiding institutions in satisfying and boosting the productivity of their employees. Institutional staff policies entail guidelines and procedures that institutions establish so as to regulate the behavior, expectations, and responsibilities of their employees (Guo et al., 2016). Employee job satisfaction refers to optimistic feelings that an employee derives from the employment (Prameswari et al., 2020). Its dimensions are employee retention, positive engagement, and commitment. Employees who are satisfied with their job tend to stay in it longer, and their good job performance is realized when they contend with the organizational policies and other available benefits (Yildiz and Amin, 2020). Institutional policies enhance employee job satisfaction by designing and using market-led competitive remuneration schemes (Febrianti et al., 2020). Enabling policies like opportunities for growth, better compensation, work schedules, and employment security are enabling frameworks that must be embraced to spur workers' job contentment and consequently job satisfaction (Mefi and Asoba, 2020). Tugade and Arcinas (2023) attest that a fair institutional policy on employee

compensation boosts employee job satisfaction by inducing employees' engagement level due to the financial capabilities that enable them to settle their financial personal obligations. Job satisfaction is a result of the provision of suitable compensation policies and a conducive work environment (Top et al., 2020).

Well documented policies in the absence of an enabling work environment may fail to satisfy employees thus, institutional policies' implementation alone may be inadequate. Institutional policies facilitate an enabling work environment where employees derive a sense of accountability and feel motivated to work and achieve organizational goals, along with their career development (Yaya, 2019). The relationship seems robust and encourages employee retention only when the working environment is present (Mwosi et al., 2024). Work environment involves the physical environment, leadership and management practices, and interpersonal dynamics within an organization. Ambrosius (2016) stressed that companies through their human resource unit are capable of devising the means of keeping employees glued to their jobs by offering attractive pay, creating a considerate work environment for all categories of employees, minimizing work risk, and providing appealing staff offices to induce gratification, encouraging the staff to stay longer with the firm. Uzun (2019) argues that when employees are content and feel a sense of job security and safety from injury or harm while carrying out their duties, they experience happiness, love for the job, and improved job performance. Job security gives job satisfaction to an employee, amongst other factors like leadership skills, remuneration, work schedule, and the private lives of employees (Top et al., 2020). Mathimaran and Kumar (2017) state that good compensation policies for employees culminate in their retention in the current employment (Ponnuru and Gupta, 2018). In as much as health schemes and flexible working hours are paramount in enticing employees, especially older ones, to consider continuing to serve the organization.

When workers realize that the institution prioritizes their welfare, they show a higher level of devotion and residency (Adegoke et al., 2015; Edem et al., 2017). Attractive job-related entitlements and ingredients, including an appropriate reward system, good leadership, training, and development, provide an insightful environment for employees to work with ease (Almaamari and Alaswad, 2021). Abdi and Nyang'AU (2021) emphasized the good working atmosphere that encompasses flexible work time policies and the safety of employees as the great forces that influence employee job satisfaction. Siddiqui and Ijaz (2022) believe that employee work engagement is because of the company's good care for its staff, and that employee satisfaction diminishes where there is a lack of a supportive work environment. This notion is in tandem with the views of (Mehrad, 2020) who stressed the importance of a supportive work atmosphere in creating admirable work

satisfaction, thereby spurring the positive engagement of staff at their workplace (Herzner and Stucken, 2020). A favorable work environment is handy in enhancing employees' job satisfaction, particularly in academic institutions, as it also mitigates unbecoming employee behaviors. The physical and emotional atmosphere advances clear knowledge of employment situations, human rights, safe conditions of work, team spirit of members, and supportive leaders (Akinwale, 2019).

Whereas other studies have examined the work environment, these studies have not focused on how it enhances the relationship between institutional staff policies and employee job satisfaction. This, therefore, led to the development of the hypothesis:

H0: Work environment has no significant mediating effect on the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in selected universities in Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study used a cross-sectional survey design for collecting quantitative data from the respondents. A cross-sectional study design is a design carried out at a particular point in time over a brief period that examines the prevalence of a specific condition (Levin, 2006). Data were gathered on various parameters as they occur in a given population over an explicit period (Ranganathan and Aggarwal, 2018). A self-administered closed-ended survey questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from 215 respondents. Questionnaires often follow a structured approach, and items are created after careful review of theory and prior evidence; hence, they are characterized as positivist (Saunders et al., 2003).

Simple random sampling was used to select respondents to participate in the study, with the aid of lists of non-teaching administrative staff from the selected private universities. With this simple random sampling, each respondent had an equal chance to be selected to partake in the study (Ahuja and Thatcher, 2005). For the choice of universities, purposive sampling was used to select five private universities to participate in the study. All measurement items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Employee job satisfaction was measured by employee labor retention, commitment, and positive engagement (Iswahyudi et al., 2025; Vincent and Navaneethkrishnan, 2024). Institutional staff policies comprised policies on compensation and benefits, staff promotion, and training and development. Employee compensation and benefits were measured by the staff's ability to meet their financial obligations (Tadeja et al., 2024). Training and development were measured by the number of trainings received, expansion of skills and knowledge, and the ability to apply the knowledge acquired. The work environment was measured by healthy and safe work offices, compounds, general surroundings, and interpersonal relationships between subordinates, colleagues, and their leaders. The unit of analysis was private universities in Uganda, while the unit of inquiry was the administrative staff.

Data management

Primary data from the field was sorted, coded, and entered into

SPSS software version 27. This was followed by data cleaning, including checking for missing values, which in our case there were no missing values. In the absence of missing values, we proceeded to establish the adequacy and suitability of the data for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in the Covariance-Based Structural Equation Model (CB-SEM) analysis. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests respectively were performed to check for sampling adequacy (Field, 2009). The rule of thumb is that the KMO value should be above 0.7, and Bartlett's test should be significant ($p < 0.05$) (Field, 2009). The results in Table 1 indicate that there was sampling adequacy and suitability to carry out EFA and CFA (KMO > 0.7) and Bartlett's test ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1).

Testing for non-response bias

This study used both statistical and procedural remedies to test the established presence of and control for CMB. Procedural remedies involved reminding respondents to answer the questionnaire and informing them of the purpose of the study and how they would benefit from the study. This was intended to motivate them to fill out the questionnaire. Statistical remedies involved conducting the Mann-Whitney U test to check for non-response bias, which proved insignificant for all the study variables since $p > 0.05$ (Table 2). This confirmed the absence of non-response bias since there was no significant difference between the respondents based on age for all the variables in the data.

Common methods bias

CMB is a matter of concern as it can undermine the reliability and validity of the research findings, thus resulting in misleading conclusions and recommendations. CMB can lead to the rejection of a true null hypothesis (type 1 error) or failure to reject a false null hypothesis (type 2 error). To resolve the worry of CMB, we used the routine controls like pretesting of the questionnaire protocol besides requesting respondents to be honest will answering the questionnaire protocol (Kock et al., 2021). The questionnaire protocol was also pre-tested in 5 local government entities, where a total of 20 survey questionnaires were administered to 20 human resource practitioners working in those 5 entities.

Statistically, Harman's single factor test was conducted, as guided by Kock et al. (2021), via SPSS version 27, and the values extracted were 26.89%, which is less than the cutoff of not more than 50% (Hair et al., 2021). This reveals that CMB may not be a significant issue regarding the data, since a single factor accounted for only 26.89%.

RESULTS

Measurement validation

The suitability of the measurement scales was assessed using the reliability and validity tests. The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability, with the coefficients for all the latent variables exceeding the recommended cut-off value of 0.7 for both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability.

This affirms the internal consistency of the measurement scales (Ringle et al., 2024) (Table 3). Convergent validity was assessed using the Average

Table 1. Results of KMO and Bartlett's test for the study variables.

Variable		Institutional staff policies' implementation	Work environment	Employee staff satisfaction
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.853	0.857	0.934
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	619.103	592.930	4010.935
	Df	28	21	435
	Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Primary data

Table 2. Non-response bias test.

Variable	Institutional staff policies' implementation	Work environment	Employee job satisfaction
Mann-Whitney U	2118.500	2073.500	2151.500
Wilcoxon W	5604.500	5559.500	5637.500
Z	-1.368	-1.555	-1.230
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.171	0.120	0.219

^aGrouping variable: Age
Source: Field Data (2025).

Variance Extracted (AVE); all the coefficients exceeded the recommended minimum value of 0.5 for validity of the instrument (Ringle et al., 2024) (Table 3). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio as guided by Ringle et al. (2024), and all the values obtained were less than the more conservative cut-off value of not more than 0.85, implying the presence of discriminant validity of our instrument (Table 4).

Descriptive and correlation results for study variables

Respondent rate

Out of the 226 targeted respondents, only 215 participated, which showed a response rate of 95.1%. This response rate was attributed to participant interest in the study area and, therefore, willingness to participate. Generally, the high and adequate response rate obtained in the selected private universities in Uganda implies that the results are representative of the broader population and that that non-response bias which could undermine the validity and reliability of the findings is reduced (Manstein et al., 2023).

Respondent characteristics

Table 5 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents who happened to be

non-teaching administrative staff; respondents' characteristics are depicted by gender, age, educational qualification, and duration of university service. These variables offer insights into the composition of the group, highlighting the distribution of gender and age, educational backgrounds, and levels of experience within the university setting. This data helps to better understand the diverse profiles of the individuals involved in the survey and provides context for interpreting the results and findings. The gender distribution of the respondents shows a higher representation of males, with 61.4% (132 respondents) identifying as male compared to 38.6% (83 respondents) identifying as female. The age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents are relatively young to middle-aged. The largest group is in the 31 to 40 age range, comprising 38.6% (83 respondents), followed by 27.44% (59 respondents) in the 21 to 30 age bracket. A notable portion of respondents, 24.19% (52 respondents), fall within the 41 to 50 age groups. Only a small percentage of respondents are aged above 50, with 8.37% (18 respondents) in the 51-60 category and just 1.4% (3 respondents) over 61 years old.

The educational qualifications of the respondents show a highly educated sample. The largest group holds a degree, with 40.93% (88 respondents) of the respondents having a bachelor's degree. Additionally, 23.72% (51 respondents) have a master's degree, and 10.23% (22 respondents) hold a certificate. A smaller portion, 2.79% (6 respondents), has a PhD. The high proportion of respondents with at least a degree (65%) suggests that

Table 3. Results of Cronbach's Alpha value and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Variable	Anchor	Cronbach Alpha Value	Composite reliability	AVE
Institutional staff policies' implementation	Five points	0.844	0.776	0.635
Work environment	Five points	0.914	0.876	0.639
Employee job satisfaction	Five points	0.965	0.902	0.698

Source: Field Data (2025).

Table 4. Discriminant validity (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)).

Constructs	1	2
Employee job satisfaction		
Institutional staff policies' implementation	0.625	
Work environment	0.804	0.669

Source: Field Data (2025).

Table 5. Characteristics of the respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	132	61.4
Female	83	38.6
Total	215	100
Age		
21-30	59	27.44
31-40	83	38.6
41-50	52	24.19
51-60	18	8.37
Above 61	3	1.4
Total	215	100
Education qualification		
Certificate	22	10.23
Diploma	48	22.33
Degree	88	40.93
Masters	51	23.72
PhD	6	2.79
Total	215	100
Duration of university service		
Less than 1 year	30	13.95
1 - 5 years	55	25.58
6 - 10 years	45	20.93
11 - 15 years	42	19.53
More than 15 years	43	20
Total	215	100

Source: Field data (2025).

the sample consists mostly of well-educated individuals, potentially indicating the professional nature of the survey participants, likely from higher education institutions or

specialized fields. Respondents exhibit a broad range of tenures in their university service, with no single group dominating. The largest group, 25.58% (55 respondents),

Table 6. Descriptive results and correlations for study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Institutional policies' implementation	3.1215	0.88454	1		
Work environment	2.5528	0.94833	0.566**	1	
Employee job satisfaction	2.9840	0.82633	0.664**	0.816**	1

** : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N= 215.
Source: Field Data (2025).

has been in service for 1 to 5 years, while 20% (43 respondents) have served for more than 15 years. The 6 to 10 and 11 to 15 years groups make up 20.93% (45 respondents) and 19.53% (42 respondents), respectively. Only 13.95% (30 respondents) have been in service for less than a year. This distribution suggests a diverse mix of experience levels within the sample, representing both newer and long-standing staff of the university. The range of tenure could provide a varied perspective on university-related issues, reflecting different levels of experience and engagement with the institution.

Mean and standard deviation

The descriptive results in Table 6 show the mean and standard deviation for the latent variables, in a scale of 1-5. For institutional policies' implementation the mean of 3.1215 and SD of 0.88454 implies that there is a moderate implementation of institutional staff policies in selected private universities in Uganda. The work environment remains uncondusive to enhance the productivity of the non-academic staff (mean =2.5528, SD = 0.94833) while mean value of 0.29840 and SD of 0.82633 for employee job satisfaction reveals that the non-academic staff in the selected private universities are fairly satisfied with their job.

Correlation results

The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction ($r = 0.664^{**}$), and between the work environment and job satisfaction ($r = 0.816^{**}$) (Table 6).

These results suggest that improvements in the implementation of institutional staff policies and the work environment significantly enhance employee satisfaction. This high correlation implies that factors such as compensation and benefits, training and development, staff policies, leadership effectiveness, recognition, communication, and working conditions play a crucial role in shaping employees' overall job contentment. When employees perceive a supportive and well-structured work environment with favorable staff policies, they are more likely to feel valued, motivated, and satisfied with

their jobs.

Assessment of the measurement model

Measurement model for employee job satisfaction

The measurement model for employee job satisfaction was assessed using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 27 through the CFA test to ascertain whether the proposed model fits well with the data. The model showed a good fit with the data, as indicated by the following indices: $\chi^2/df = 1.187$ (Chi-Square = 29.667, degree of freedom = 25, $p = 0.237$); RMR = 0.047, Standardized RMR = 0.0267, CFI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.030, IFI = 0.996, TLI = 0.993 and GFI = 0.974. Additionally, the standardized factor loadings for the measurement items for employee job satisfaction, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 8, ranged from 0.715 to 0.898, exceeding the recommended minimum value of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2010). These results suggest that the model is a good fit to the data, meeting the cut-off values recommended by Hair et al. (2010), Hu and Bentler (1999), and Kline (2023), as depicted in Table 7.

Structural model evaluation

A structural model was derived and assessed using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique in IBM SPSS Amos 27 since it is capable of testing the complex relationships amongst latent variables including our proposed hypothesis which stated that work environment has no significant mediating effect on the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in selected universities in Uganda. Figure 2 is a pooled model comprising the model for employee job satisfaction, which is the dependent variable; institutional staff policies' implementation as the independent variable, and work environment as the mediating variable. In Figure 2, the goodness-of-model indices reveal a satisfactory match between our structural model and the dataset, with results showing $\chi^2/df = 1.187$ ($df = 29.667$, $df < 25$), CFI = 0.996, GFI = 0.974, TLI = 0.993, IFI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.030, RMR = 0.047, SRMR = 0.0267, and $p = 0.237$. The results show that all the values are within acceptable

Table 7. Fit criteria for good fit and goodness of fit test for employee job satisfaction.

Variable	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	GFI	SRMR	RMR
Measurement model	1.187	0.030	0.996	0.716	0.974	0.0267	0.047
Fit criteria for good fit	< 3	0.03 to 0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.05	<0.05

Source: Field Data (2025).

Table 8. Standardized Regression Weights for the final measurement model.

Code	Items	Latent variable	Estimate
WE71	I am satisfied with the working conditions	Work_environment	0.796
JOB74	I am satisfied with my annual salary increments	Work_environment	0.715
WE66	I am satisfied with the recreational facilities provided by my university	Work_environment	0.865
OC58	I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it	Employee_job_satisfaction	0.898
JOB73	I feel I am being paid a fair salary for the work I do	Work_environment	0.815
OC56	I would be very pleased to spend the rest of my career with this university	Employee_job_satisfaction	0.829
OC60	I do feel "emotionally attached" to this organization	Employee_job_satisfaction	0.798
OC61	I do feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my organization	Employee_job_satisfaction	0.814
INST6	In our university, there is a mechanism to reward good work done by employees	Institutional_staff_policies_implementation	0.745
INST7	The recognition and reward system practiced in our university is fair and justified	Institutional_staff_policies_implementation	0.846

Source: Field Data (2025).

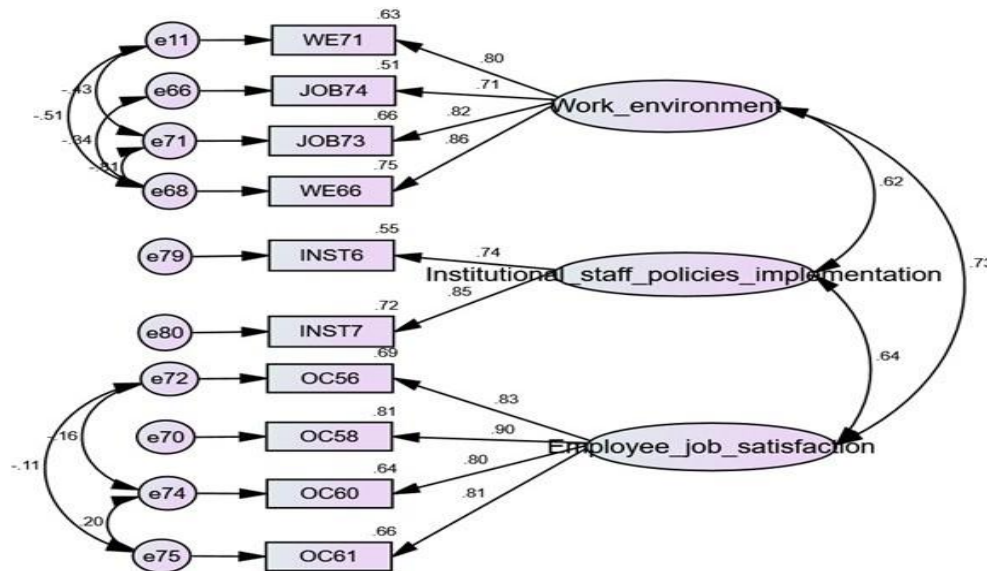


Figure 1. Measurement model for employee job satisfaction. Source: Field Data (2025).

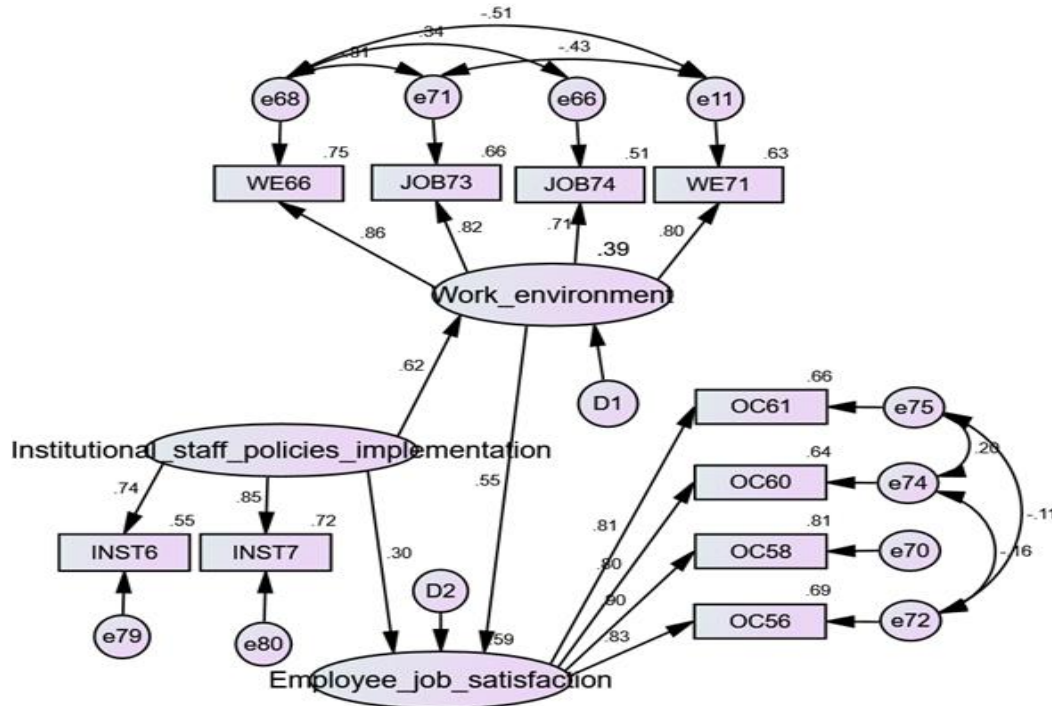


Figure 2. Structural model for employee job satisfaction. Source: Field Data (2025).

(Hair et al., 2010; Hu and Bentler, 1999), which is evidence that our structural model fits satisfactorily with the data.

Test for mediation

A mediation test was carried out to determine whether to accept or reject the hypothesis which stated that work environment has no significant mediating effect on the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in selected universities in Uganda. This was done through bootstrapping with 10,000 subsamples at 95% Bias-Corrected and Accelerated Confidence Interval (BCa CI) as recommended by Hair Jr et al. (2022) via AMOS version 26. The unstandardized bootstrapping results show that the total effect of institutional staff policies' implementation on employee staff satisfaction of selected universities in East and Northern Uganda was significant ($B = 0.786^{**}$, $\rho < 0.01$). The standardized total effect of institutional staff policies' implementation on employee staff satisfaction was also significant ($\beta = 0.636$). At 95%, BCa CI for the mediated effect of work environment ranged 0.275 and 0.654. Since 0 falls outside the range for the lower and upper bound, it further confirms that the mediated effect was significant. Besides, upon the inclusion of the mediating variable (work environment) in the model, the impact of institutional staff policies'

implementation on employee staff satisfaction remained significant ($B = 0.366^{**}$, $\rho < 0.01$) though it reduced in magnitude from 0.786 to 0.366. This suggests that the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation on employee staff satisfaction is mediated by work environment. In other words, institutional staff policies' implementation does not only directly influence employee job satisfaction but also exerts an indirect effect by fostering a favorable work environment which in turn influences employee job satisfaction. This is confirmed by the indirect effect of institutional staff policies implementation on employee staff satisfaction through work environment which was significant ($B = 0.420^{**}$, $\rho < 0.01$). Since institutional staff policies' implementation significantly impact the mediating variable (work environment) ($B = 0.637^{**}$, $\rho < 0.01$;) and the mediating variable significantly affects employee job satisfaction ($B = 0.659^{**}$, $\rho < 0.01$), this confirms the presence of a mediating effect (Table 9). This reveals that work environment partially mediates the relationship between institutional policies implementation and employee job satisfaction. Thus, the hypothesis that states that work environment has no significant mediating effect on the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in selected universities in Uganda is rejected. It is concluded that the work environment significantly mediates the relationship between institutional policies and employee job satisfaction in selected private universities in Uganda.

Table 9. Results for hypothesis testing.

Relationship	Variable	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Confidence Interval		P value	Conclusion
				Lower bound	Upper bound		
Institutional policies' implementation →Employee job satisfaction	Standardized (β)	0.296					Significant
	Unstandardized (B)	0.366		0.129	0.616	0.005	
Institutional policies' implementation →Work environment	Standardized (β)	0.622					Significant
	Unstandardized (B)	0.637		0.467	0.839	0.000	
Work environment → Employee job satisfaction	Standardized (β)	0.547					Significant
	Unstandardized (B)	0.659		0.425	0.919	0.000	
Institutional policies' implementation → Work environment → Employee job satisfaction	Standardized (β)		0.340				Partial mediation
	Unstandardized (B)		0.420	0.275	0.654	0.000	

Source: Field Data (2025).

DISCUSSION

The study established a partial mediating effect of work environment in the relationship between institutional policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction.

This suggests that the effect of institutional policies' implementation on employee job satisfaction is partially explained by the work environment. This indicates that when universities implement policies that enhance compensation, career advancement, and training opportunities, they also create a more supportive and conducive work environment. Thus, the null hypothesis (H0) that states that work environment has no significant mediating effect on the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in selected universities in Uganda is rejected. The findings further indicate that work environment itself has a strong positive influence on job satisfaction, suggesting that a well-structured work environment

plays a crucial role in shaping how employees perceive their jobs and overall satisfaction. The findings imply that while strong policies are essential, universities must also focus on improving workplace conditions, leadership practices, and interpersonal relationships to maximize job satisfaction. Institutions that invest in creating a positive work environment will likely experience higher employee engagement, retention, and overall organizational effectiveness.

A conducive work environment, both physical and social, plays a pivotal role in influencing employee job satisfaction, including improved, safe, habitable offices, compound, lavatory facilities, and a cafeteria. A conducive social surrounding at work, like strong staff associations, conducive stay with coworkers, supervisors, interdepartmental interactions, interpersonal relationships at the workplace, proper participation in decision-making processes, is very important in spurring employees' job contentment, among others, physical. Besides, an environment which

nurtures social engagements can upshot to a positive rise in employees' job gratification in selected private institutions of higher learning in Uganda. Application of personal desire not guided by the set principles (policies) is tantamount to abuse of power and authority. The study showed that staff complaints were high, working in silos and disassociating themselves with those they believed to be treated fairly compared to some of them. Employment legal framework: ILO declarations, the Constitution of Uganda, the Employment Act 2006 among other binding relevant employment laws, were found not to have great importance in the management of most of the private universities selected. This was attributed to understaffing and non-adherence to set human resource policies, some administrative staff work beyond the normal working hours, days and on public holidays under the instructions of the superiors without equitable compensation mechanism especially those considered to be offering essential services like technicians,

administrators, and security personnels in disregard to employment Act 2006 of Uganda. The study revealed that most universities do not practice the policies as they should. A non-teaching staff who would ask for a salary increment, allowance, or promotion would surely face it rough or the impartiality of the leadership. It was found that a greater percentage of staff had the right qualifications, skills, and experience, the study observed that low morale towards work, poor attitude, and forced dedication to keeping their jobs, most of them showed interest in leaving the university for other job opportunity and at least above 70% have ever tried applying for jobs elsewhere and done interviews in some other institutions, some confessed to having done interviews more than two times in one year and are determined to exit given the opportunity.

The research revealed how institutional staff policies influence the administrative employees' job satisfaction in the selected private institutions of higher learning. The physical work environment significantly contributes to the employees' job satisfaction. It manifests the way administrative staff performs their duties and conduct themselves amongst fellow staff. Even if the staff is happy with the compensation offered, when the work environment is unpleasant, the staff may fail to be satisfied with the employment. This illustrates how important the work environment is to the employees.

Universities that may not provide a desirable work environment for their employees may fail to induce staff happiness. Provision of a good physical work environment, social and good management practices is the responsibility of the employer; employees are the beneficiaries of such an arrangement. This is more than the policy, but having a human face and dignity for humanity, a hostile environment is no place to stay for any living thing, as it poses a risk of stress, brain torture, diseases, sickness, injury, and even death.

It is not the availability of a policy in place that matters, but the willingness of the leaders to provide reasonable standards of physical and social work situations for the employees. Workers feel a sense of equality if their plights are shared, and the reason for not performing the tasks as stipulated would not be defensible if the work conditions under which the task is executed were desirable and conducive. The best staff may not achieve results when the minimum required facilities, like the office, are poor, the tools and equipment necessary for work are missing, and continuous harassment. Aggrieved employees spend a lot of time charting in cliques, complaining of poor treatment. While their time and energy could be used to do productive work for the institutions, others resort to long phone conversations with peers, disregarding working hours and the code of conduct.

The findings in the selected universities showed inadequate facilities, inadequate provisions for people with disabilities (ramps, lifts), poor compound design,

unpaved walkways without shades, and staff sharing small offices. Some top administrators operate in expanded, self-contained offices. Setting up a conducive work environment could be due to limited resources, but also mainly due to a lack of support, ability, and willingness to set priorities for the universities in a manner that benefits the workers and everyone. Raziq and Maulabakhsh, (2015) assert the same views, citing a work environment with supportive leadership styles and interpersonal relationships as the most desired components at the workplace that motivate employees to render their service with much attention and devotion. This is not any different from the findings of the current study.

The relevance of workplace atmosphere cannot be underestimated in the view of this study, as most of the previous scholars (Manu and Sinosh, 2016; Massoudi and Hamdi, 2017; Mathews and Khann, 2016) all pointed out the significance of the workplace environment in the service of a staff that cannot be undermined, just like a war-torn area cannot be good for any business operation is the work environment to employee concentration. Notably, (Shahzad et al., 2018) opine the same opinions, they held that workplace atmosphere themes the level of performance, productivity, job satisfaction, and quality of lives employees experience and portray in an organization., feminine attributes (Hockett, 2021; Dahir et al., 2019; Parmer, 2021), this is worse in leadership positions, men dominate most of the positions in leaderships especially in Africa due to stereotypes (Lopez and Rugan, 2018; Kusuya and Edabu, 2021).

Contrary to the current study findings, Abdul Basit et al. (2018) presented internal motivation as more important in causing good performance at the workplace than the working environment. Abdul Basit et al. (2018) and Adam and Nurdin (2019) held that personal characteristics are the major influencers for employee productivity and are supported by the nature of the work setting created by the employer. Leadership emanates from leaders and striving institutions, depending on the stature of leaders it has, and their leadership styles have a bearing on the employees' moods at work. The current research findings are associated with Barasa and Kariuki's (2020) discoveries, where they alluded to the same that leaders' character influences employees' behaviors at work, well-behaved and supportive leaders motivate the staff to be happy and perform as expected.

Several studies have been conducted in the same area, and notably, the findings of Batugal and Tindowen (2019), Chandrasekara (2019), Kafui (2017), and Kheir-Faddul and Dănăiață (2019) agree with the current study's findings on the relevance of good leadership and staff job pleasure. Leaders are advised not to be harsh and to act appropriately when exercising power and authority when managing staff. Scholars attest that poor management of affairs at work causes undesired feelings that translate to poor staff performance and productivity.

Negiş (2020) attests that enabling leadership, supervision, behaviors, and interpersonal association of staff with their leaders lead to the desired performance of both staff and learners. This assertion is supported by Cansoy (2019), who agrees that the job satisfaction of employees is linked to the conduct of leaders towards their subjects. Regarding female leadership gaps, an adequate number of females in the work setup continue to be low compared to their male counterparts due to various obstacles that range from cultural and feminine attributes (Dahir et al., 2019; Parmer, 2021). This disparity is worse in leadership positions, where men dominate most positions, especially in Africa, due to stereotypes (Hockett, 2022; Lopez and Rukan, 2018; Dahir et al., 2019; Kusuya and Edabu, 2021). This phenomenon was evidenced in studies conducted in primary schools found in Samburu and Garissa Counties, Kenya.

Equally, in all five sampled private universities, no female staff was found in top leadership positions as Vice Chancellors. This study agrees with Hughes (2021), who attested to the importance of leadership in creating appealing work conditions where staff feel comfortable working and align their tasks and goals with the institutional goals and objectives. This finding is also supported by Barasa and Kariuki (2020) and Mustafa et al. (2016), who emphasized the importance of leaders' interest in the affairs of staff, as also highlighted by Batugal and Tindowen (2019). The study's findings consolidate those of Barasa and Kariuki (2020) and Mustafa et al. (2016), who evidenced the importance of good leadership to employee job satisfaction. Their results are linked to Batugal and Tindowen's (2019) findings, where they associated employees' job gratification with well-exercised leadership, characterized by delegation, respect for juniors, involvement in key decision-making practices, and more. Notably, in some universities, permission to conduct studies or collect data from employees is reserved for top authority, while in others; department heads may decide whether to clear the researcher. Employees tend to perform their duties freely and happily when they feel no ramifications. The findings of Ogola et al. (2017) and this current study are in tandem, emphasizing leadership's central role in every source of happiness for employees at their workstations. Without good leadership, motivational factors and ingredients will not be put in place, as leaders control general operations, management, staff welfare, and are accountable for good or bad acts in the institutions they lead.

This study's finding disagrees with Masa'deh (2016), who presented hierarchy and Herzberg's theory as instrumental in addressing employees' needs and influencing employee job satisfaction linked to leadership, as fronted by other scholars. Leadership is crucial in assembling the energies of workers towards achieving institutional goals. Leaders are groomed and presented as a torch to shed light and give focus to the rest of the team members on the direction the institution is planning

to take. The findings revealed that a significant percentage of employees, particularly security personnel, work under harsh conditions during both sunny and rainy seasons, as most entrance/exit gates lack rooftops or coverings. Only one university among the sampled universities had decent entrance gate top coverings. Security guards are required to conduct security checks before opening or letting in students, visitors, and the general public. However, most security guards were found working without security uniforms, rain jackets, safety boots, and long-sleeved clothing, exposing them to mosquitoes and malaria infections. Most private universities have only sentry boxes at the gates, posing a high risk of attack since few have full-time armed security personnel.

Furthermore, the study observed that most walkways, buildings, and offices in the selected private universities lack ramps or lifts to aid people with disabilities in accessing raised-level floors. No physically incapacitated respondents were encountered in any office during the study, suggesting potential recruitment biases. Additional observations revealed that middle and lower administrative staff often share office spaces, causing congestion, and some lack good furniture, including recommended chairs for those who sit for long hours, leading to back and waist pain. Other issues included poor lighting in offices, damaged roof ceilings, bad floor finishing, limited number of lavatories, and poor maintenance and cleanliness of available facilities. Moreover, washing rooms were often poorly positioned and labeled, causing discomfort and clashes between males and females, especially during rush hours.

Employee productivity is the main reason they are hired, and output is highly linked to an attractive work environment that spurs commitment and job satisfaction. This is attributed to both physical and emotional arrangements available at the workplace. This assertion agrees with Akinwale (2019), who revealed that employees feel more valued when their workstations are appealing, safe, and befitting. Employees attach much importance to the nature of office space, surroundings, and general cleanliness of the working environment. These findings are in line with Ambrosius (2016), who emphasized the significance of good pay alongside the provision of a conducive working space, a view also supported by Mutiria et al. (2015).

The findings also agree with Ashton (2018) and Huang and Su (2016), who confirmed that employee turnover is largely due to the absence of job satisfaction. Mehrez and Bakri (2019) opined that retaining workers for an extended period depends on factors such as workplace environment, salary, employee culture, and relationships with coworkers. This current study's findings concur with Abro et al.'s (2018) discoveries, which linked employee turnover to stress, poor work conditions, promotions, and reward systems. This view is also supported by Hermansen and Midtsundstad (2018) and Qaisar et al. (2019), who advised managers to implement robust employee health systems and balanced working periods

to encourage older staff to work or continue working with ease, potentially up to retirement age.

On the same note, Bulak and Turkyilmaz (2014) also agree with the current findings that a lovable working environment is paramount in raising worker productivity, in addition to employee capacity and ability, and support from supervisors. Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) also attest to the essential role played by the work environment in occasioning productivity and postulate that job satisfaction should not be undermined at the workplace, combined with good leadership styles and interpersonal relations.

The current study's findings agree with the views of Abdul Basit et al. (2018), Adam and Nurdin (2019), Blomberg and Welander (2019), and Shahzad et al. (2018), who held that a conducive workplace environment contributes to employees' positive attitude, which in turn enhances employee productivity in an organization. The findings further agree with Adegoke et al. (2015) and Edem et al. (2017), who supported the weight of good working conditions as an inducement to employee happiness and performance, stating that staff feels at home when at work due to a supportive work environment.

This study has established a significant impact of the work environment on employee job satisfaction in selected universities in Uganda. The findings are associated with Akinwale's (2019) assertion that a safe work environment is vital, as it is one of the tenets of human rights principles, and job satisfaction is derived from the enjoyment of a healthy workplace. The finding is also in line with Adegoke et al. (2015) and Edem et al. (2017), who underscored the influence of the workplace environment on staff job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The study established that work environment partially mediates the relationship between institutional staff policies' implementation and employee job satisfaction in selected private universities in Uganda. Additionally, institutional staff policies' implementation and work environment are significant predictors of employee job satisfaction in selected private universities in Uganda. Furthermore, institutional staff policies' implementation significantly predicts employee job satisfaction in selected private universities in Uganda. Thus, for Uganda's private universities to boost job satisfaction amongst their non-academic staff, they should focus on implementing institutional staff policies and creating a conducive work environment for every staff member to freely concentrate on their tasks.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research advances knowledge by demonstrating the mediating role of work environment in shaping employee

job satisfaction. It bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical HR applications by illustrating how well-structured staff policies and a conducive work environment can enhance employee engagement, reduce turnover, and improve institutional performance.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study provides actionable insights for both academia and policy development, offering innovative approaches to employee satisfaction and workforce management in universities. The study developed a model, the Sustainable Preferential Institutional Staff Policy (SPISP) Model. It recommends that Organizations adopt and implement the model to enhance staff job satisfaction in their institutions. In addition to outmoded policies in most of the universities, the study revealed that Human Resource policies were poorly implemented. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sports should work in conjunction with NCHE to encourage university administration to periodically review policies in a participative manner, provide reviewed/approved copies to all the staff, and justly implement the staff policies. The study showed that the working environment was not conducive enough and was the greater cause of employee job dissatisfaction. The study recommends that universities prioritize the improvement of the work environment. It further recommends that NCHE should continue to carry out inspections to enforce compliance and ensure that employees are provided with a decent working atmosphere.

The study provides actionable insights for both academia and policy development, offering innovative approaches to employee satisfaction and workforce management in universities. It developed the Sustainable Preferential Institutional Staff Policy (SPISP) Model, recommending that organizations adopt and implement it to enhance staff job satisfaction.

The study revealed that human resource policies were poorly implemented, often due to being outdated in most universities. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sports collaborate with the NCHE to encourage university administrations to periodically review policies in a participatory manner, provide reviewed and approved copies to all staff, and implement staff policies justly.

The study also found that the working environment was not conducive, significantly contributing to employee job dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is recommended that universities prioritize improving the work environment. Additionally, NCHE should continue conducting inspections to enforce compliance and ensure that employees are provided with a decent working atmosphere.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study focused on selected private universities in

Uganda, which may have introduced selection bias in the choice of universities included. Additionally, some private universities may possess unique characteristics that limit the generalizability of the findings to other universities. Further investigations could be conducted to establish the effect of institutional staff policies, development, review processes, and employee participation in private universities in Uganda.

Similar studies could be carried out to substantiate the findings, possibly among teaching staff in private universities in Uganda. Other studies could explore the relationship between institutional policy implementation and employee job satisfaction using different mediating variables beyond the work environment.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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