

DISCIPLINARY MEASURES AND IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A FOCUS ON THE NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of disciplinary measures on employee performance, with a focus on the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study systematically explored the relationship between key disciplinary actions, written reprimand, job transfer, and staff suspension on or employee performance. The study population consisted of 558 staff members categorized into academic, senior non-academic, and junior non-academic roles, ensuring diverse representation. A sample size of 233 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, maintaining a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews, and analyzed using multiple linear regression via IBM SPSS. Findings revealed a strong positive correlation between disciplinary measures and employee performance, with an R value of 0.956 and an R^2 of 0.914, indicating that 91.4% of the variation in performance was explained by the independent variables. The ANOVA results confirmed the statistical significance of the model ($F = 793.158, p < 0.001$). Among the measures, written reprimand had the most significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.485$), followed by job transfer ($\beta = 0.313$) and staff suspension ($\beta = 0.187$). The study concludes that disciplinary actions, particularly when applied constructively, enhance organizational performance. Recommendations include prioritizing written reprimands for corrective feedback, using job transfers strategically for skill alignment, and applying suspensions cautiously to avoid employee demoralization.

Keywords: Disciplinary Measures, employee Performance, Written Reprimand, Job Transfer, Staff Suspension

INTRODUCTON

Organizations employ various corrective actions to address misconduct. These range from verbal/written warnings, fines to demotions and terminations, depending on the severity and recurrence of the offense (Ngulube, 2002; Iheanacho & Egwuogu, 2015). While punitive actions can deter indiscipline, they may also negatively impact employee morale and organizational performance if perceived as unfair (Joe, Richard & Sanford, 2011). Progressive measures, on the other hand, focus on guiding employees toward improvement, fostering a culture of accountability and development. Effective administration hinges on human elements and the interplay of discipline, skills, and organizational objectives (Patrick, 2015). Organizations are structured groups working towards predetermined goals, requiring collaboration and adherence to ethical standards (Knight & Ukpere, 2014). However, individual values and morals can conflict with organizational aims and objectives, necessitating personnel management strategies to improve performance. Discipline is crucial in managing employees' behavior and ensuring alignment with organizational goals. Mismanagement of disciplinary measures, such as retributive punishment, often leads to fear and reduced morale (Shin, 2014).

Instead, discipline should focus on positive reinforcement, emphasizing self-improvement, teamwork, and adherence to organizational standards. A disciplined employee demonstrates strong ethical values, compliance with rules, and commitment to organizational success. To maintain discipline, organizations must implement structured processes, including communication/consultation, warnings, defense opportunities, and fair resolutions. An equitable disciplinary management system enhances organizational performance by fostering ethical behavior, covert resistance to job/task, reducing absenteeism, and improving productivity. Discipline is a multifaceted concept critical to organizational success. While corrective actions are necessary to address misconduct, they should aim to develop employees and enhance performance. Grounded in theories like Progressive Discipline, effective management of employee's behavior requires clear communication, consistency, and alignment with organizational objectives. By fostering a disciplined workforce, organizations can create a harmonious and efficient work environment conducive to achieving their goals.

Written reprimand is a formal notice given to employees for minor misconduct or performance issues, serving as early corrective measures to encourage behavioral change and compliance with organizational standards. Job Transfers involves relocating an employee, often to a less favorable role or location, as a disciplinary action intended to address persistent misconduct or underperformance. Staff suspension is a disciplinary action where an employee is temporarily removed from duty without pay due to serious violations; it aims to correct behavior but may negatively affect morale and productivity.

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), like many higher education institutions, grapples with significant challenges of staff indiscipline. According to Chukwuma (2017), manifestations of indiscipline such as overt and covert resistance to task, absenteeism, theft, workplace misconduct, and frequent violations of established rules and regulations have become pervasive in organisations. These issues do not only erode organizational integrity but also disrupt the smooth functioning of the institution, adversely affecting its operational and academic performance. Absenteeism, for instance, results in unmet responsibilities, delayed service delivery, and the inability of the university to meet its targets efficiently. Similarly, acts of theft drain the institution's resources, undermining its capacity to invest in critical areas like academic development, infrastructure, and research. Workplace misconduct, ranging from disrespect for authority to interpersonal conflicts, damages morale and fosters a toxic work environment. Furthermore, frequent violations of institutional rules create a culture of non-compliance, further weakening administrative and operational structures.

The lack of robust and effective disciplinary measures exacerbates these challenges. Current mechanisms appear inadequate to address the root causes or deter recurring acts of indiscipline. This systemic failure not only emboldens further misconduct but also sends a negative signal to other employees, thereby perpetuating a cycle of unproductivity and organizational underperformance. Studies by Muslichah and Achmadi (2021) found no direct impact of job transfers on performance, questioning the strength of the independent variable, while purposive sampling limited generalizability. Srivastava and Haider (2021) overlooked contextual and psychological factors influencing disciplinary outcomes. Iheanacho et al. (2017) used a correlational design that restricts causal inference and failed to clearly distinguish between discipline and punishment, leading to potential measurement ambiguity. Collectively, these issues suggest the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive, and causally robust research on disciplinary measures and employee

performance. These issues have broader implications on the institution's reputation, the growing decline in operational success demands urgent attention. Instituting effective disciplinary frameworks are essential to restoring order, enhancing institutional goals/outcomes, and positioning NOUN as a model for academic and administrative excellence in Nigeria and beyond.

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

- i. What is the effect of written reprimand on staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria?
- ii. How does job transfer enhance staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria?
- iii. To what extent does staff suspension enhance staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria?

The broad objective for the study is to investigate disciplinary measures and impact on organizational performance: a focus on the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The specific objective is to:

- i. Examine the effect of written reprimand on staff performance at National Open University of Nigeria.
- ii. Analyze the influence of job transfer on staff performance at National Open University of Nigeria.
- iii. Investigate the relationship between staff suspension on staff performance at National Open University of Nigeria.

The following research hypotheses were based on the objectives

Ho₁: Written reprimand has no significant effect on staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria.

Ho₂: Job transfer has no significant influence on staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between staff suspension and staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Disciplinary Measure

Employee discipline is the mechanism through which organizations enforce compliance with established rules and regulations to ensure order and productivity. Indiscipline, conversely, encompasses actions such as absenteeism, tardiness, deceit, intoxication, and misconduct, all forms of resistance to task, which disrupt organizational harmony and performance (Sarwani, 2016; Grosset & Venter as cited in Ndung'u, 2017).

Discipline fosters a conducive work environment by shaping behaviour, improving performance, and maintaining stability. Definitions vary, but common themes include self-control, adherence to organizational norms, and corrective actions. While discipline often involves penalties, its ultimate goal should be developmental rather than purely punitive (Demo et al 2016). Indiscipline often stems from systemic issues such as ineffective leadership, poor communication, inequality, unfair treatments meted to staff, etc. These underlying causes highlight the complexity of managing human behaviour in organizations, as employees' actions are often influenced by unmet needs or dissatisfaction (Onah, 2014; Nwizu, 2002).

Written Reprimand on Staff Performance

Written reprimands serve as formal notices highlighting unacceptable behaviors and outlining expectations for improvement. They are typically employed when verbal warnings fail to elicit the desired behavioral

changes. According to the MBA Knowledge Base, a written reprimand details the misconduct, specifies corrective actions, and warns of potential future disciplinary measures, thereby serving as a crucial tool in performance management (Ajike, 2019).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the efficacy of written reprimands in enhancing employee performance. For instance, a study conducted within the Abia State Civil Service revealed that written reprimands significantly and positively influenced employee effectiveness across various ministries. This suggests that when appropriately administered, written reprimands can motivate employees to align with organizational standards and improve their performance.

Job Transfer on Staff Performance

Job transfers, when utilized as disciplinary measures, involve relocating employees to different roles or departments, often perceived as less desirable. While this can serve as a corrective action, its effectiveness largely depends on the intent and execution. Nwosu and Ugwuera (2015) emphasize that if a transfer is perceived as punitive rather than corrective, it may lead to decreased morale and productivity. Therefore, organizations must ensure that transferred employees are competent for their new roles and that the transfer is communicated as an opportunity for growth rather than punishment. Moreover, the perception of fairness in the transfer process plays a pivotal role. When employees view transfers as unjust or retaliatory, it can result in disengagement and reduced performance. Thus, transparent communication and support during the transition are essential to mitigate negative outcomes.

Staff Suspension

Suspension is a disciplinary action that temporarily removes an employee from their duties, often pending investigation or as a consequence of misconduct. In Nigeria, the legality and fairness of suspensions are governed by labor laws that emphasize the right to fair hearing and due process. The Patreli Partners highlight that suspensions must be justified, and employees should be informed of the allegations and given an opportunity to respond. The impact of suspension on staff performance is multifaceted. While it can serve as a deterrent against undesirable behaviors, improper or indefinite suspensions can lead to demoralization and decreased productivity. A study by Tantua (2019) found that disciplinary actions, including suspensions, negatively correlated with employee commitment in construction firms in Rivers State. This underscores the importance of implementing suspensions judiciously and ensuring they are proportionate and procedurally fair to maintain employee morale and performance.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a fundamental component of organizational success, reflecting the extent to which employees effectively contribute to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. It is often viewed as a multidimensional construct that encompasses various indicators such as productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, innovation, and employee engagement (Armstrong, 2014). High employee performance not only drives business outcomes but also enhances organizational competitiveness in a dynamic environment. According to Kaplan and Norton (1996), performance should be evaluated beyond traditional financial indicators to include customer perspectives, internal business processes, and learning and growth dimensions. This balanced approach ensures that organizations do not solely focus on short-term financial outcomes but also invest in sustainable capabilities such as employee development, innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction. Employee performance is also closely linked to job satisfaction and

organizational commitment. Locke (1976) posits that satisfied employees are more likely to be motivated and productive, which in turn contributes positively to organizational performance. Furthermore, effective leadership and a clear strategic direction are critical in fostering an environment conducive to high performance (Yukl, 2013). Leaders play a pivotal role in setting expectations, providing feedback, and aligning employee activities with strategic objectives.

Impact of Discipline on Organizational Performance

Discipline is integral to achieving organizational success. A disciplined workforce exhibits higher efficiency, commitment, and alignment with organizational goals (Singh & Kaur, 2009). Conversely, poorly implemented disciplinary actions can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced performance, and strained relationships between management and employees (Ngulube, 2002).

Effective discipline fosters a sense of responsibility, corrects undesirable behaviours, and promotes a stable and productive work environment (Simatupang & Putu, 2018). However, punitive measures must be balanced with developmental strategies to sustain long-term employer and employee's organizational efficiency

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Progressive Discipline Theory. The Progressive Discipline Theory, which evolved as part of modern human resource management and labor relations, is rooted in classical management theories, behavioral psychology, and industrial psychology. Classical management thinkers such as Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol laid the groundwork for structured approaches to improving organizational performance and managing personnel. Their ideas emphasized efficiency, order, and consistency, which influenced the development of discipline strategies in workplaces. Behavioral psychology, particularly the work of B.F. Skinner on reinforcement and behavior modification, also contributed significantly. Skinner's concepts of positive and negative reinforcement helped shape the theory's focus on rewarding desirable behaviors and discouraging undesirable ones. Industrial and organizational psychology further refined this approach by emphasizing fair and systematic methods to address employee behavior, fostering an environment of trust and equity. Brent's Progressive Discipline model (2010) clarifies these principles by proposing a tiered system of corrective actions. Employees first receive mild corrective measures (like verbal warnings) for minor infractions. If the behavior persists, more serious steps are taken, such as written warnings or suspension, with termination as a final resort. This method ensures that employees are given multiple chances to improve before facing severe consequences, promoting fairness and consistent treatment.

Empirical Review

Ukoette and Ukoette (2024) conducted a study to examine the impact of job transfer and motivation on employee performance within the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) in Abuja, Nigeria. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey research design and utilized a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants across various departments within the FCDA, ensuring that employees who had experienced job rotation were adequately represented. Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between job rotation, motivation, and employee performance. The findings revealed that job rotation, when applied as a developmental tool rather than a disciplinary action, significantly enhances employee performance. Participants reported that job rotation led to improved motivation, expanded skill

sets, and increased adaptability. Moreover, the study highlighted the necessity of transparent communication and employee participation in the rotation process to maximize its effectiveness. The authors concluded that well-structured job rotation programs could serve as strategic tools for performance improvement, provided they are implemented with clarity and in alignment with employees' professional development goals.

Onubuleze (2023) examined the impact of staff sanctions, including suspension, on teachers' job performance in Enugu State's secondary schools. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 441 participants using a validated questionnaire. The findings revealed that both demotion and suspension significantly influenced teachers' job performance. The study recommended the implementation of disciplinary measures within the school system to rectify misconduct and enhance performance.

Muslichah and Achmadi (2021) investigated the impact of job transfers on employee performance, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of motivation and job satisfaction. The study was conducted using a quantitative research methodology and employed a structured questionnaire to gather data from employees across multiple organizations in Indonesia. The researchers adopted a purposive sampling technique to target employees who had experienced job transfers within the last two years. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data and test the hypothesized relationships among the variables. The findings revealed that job transfers did not have a direct effect on employee performance. However, job satisfaction emerged as a significant mediator between job transfers and employee performance, indicating that when employees perceive job transfers positively and feel satisfied with their new roles or environments, their performance improves. Motivation, while included in the model, showed a weaker mediating effect. The study concluded that organizations must handle job transfers with care and ensure that such moves are perceived as opportunities for growth and satisfaction, thereby enhancing overall performance. The research emphasizes aligning job transfers with employee expectations and providing adequate support to maximize positive outcomes.

Srivastava and Haider (2021) conducted a study in professional colleges located in Uttar Pradesh, India, to investigate the impact of reprimands on employee performance, specifically among faculty members. Employing a quantitative research design, the study used structured questionnaires to gather data from academic staff across various departments. Stratified sampling ensured a balanced representation of different academic roles. The research examined both verbal and written forms of reprimand and their influence on faculty performance. Findings revealed that written reprimands had a more significant negative impact than verbal ones, with harsh language and formal warnings receiving the highest mean scores. The study also identified gender-based differences in disciplinary experiences—male faculty members were more likely to receive written reprimands, while female staff faced more verbal corrections. Additionally, the context of reprimand, particularly public scolding, was found to have a stronger adverse effect on morale and productivity. The authors concluded that any form of reprimand affects employee performance and emphasized the need for managers to apply disciplinary measures carefully and privately. The study recommends adopting respectful and constructive disciplinary approaches to avoid undermining employee morale in educational institutions.

Iheanacho et al. (2017) explored the relationships among discipline, punishment (including suspension), and organizational performance as perceived by staff of federal ministries in Cross River State. Using a correlational design and a sample of 1,000 staff, the study found a strong positive correlation between

discipline measures and organizational performance. However, punishment indicators, such as suspension, showed an inverse relationship with performance, suggesting that punitive measures might negatively impact employee productivity. The study recommended the use of constructive discipline over punitive actions to enhance organizational performance.

Juma (2016) examined the influence of progressive disciplinary measures, including written reprimands, on employee performance at Mukurwe-ini Wakulima Dairy Ltd in Kenya. Using descriptive research design and inferential statistics, the study found that employee reprimands positively influenced performance. Specifically, the analysis showed a significant positive correlation between employee reprimands and performance, suggesting that when applied appropriately, written reprimands can lead to improved employee outcomes. The study recommended the implementation of effective reprimand systems as part of progressive discipline to enhance employee performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design, selected for its capacity to systematically describe various phenomena, situations, or populations. The research design adopted aim to provide a comprehensive understanding by capturing detailed information directly from the target population. The study's population comprised 558 staff members from the National Open University of Nigeria. Sample Size of 233 was achieved using Taro Yamane's formula, the sample size was calculated to ensure statistical accuracy with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The calculation is as follows: $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (558)

e = margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{558}{1 + 558(0.05)^2} = 233$$

The study's sample size was 233 staff, proportionally distributed as follows:

Academic staff: 75

Senior non-academic staff: 77

Junior non-academic staff: 81

This distribution ensured representation across all staff categories. The primary tools for data collection were questionnaires and interview.

Data was analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis with the aid of IBM SPSS.

Model Specification

In this study, the independent variable is disciplinary measures which was assessed using three indicators: written reprimand (WR), job transfer (JT), and staff suspension (SS). Conversely, the dependent variable is employee performance (Perf). Mathematically, employee performance (Perf) is expressed as a function of disciplinary measures (DM). $Y = f(X_i)$

Y = Dependent variable = employee performance (perf)

X= Independent variable = disciplinary measures (DM)

$$\text{Perf} = f(\text{DM})$$

Since DM = WR, JR, SS.

Therefore, PERF = f (WR, JR, SS).

$$Y = X_i$$

$$X_i = X_1, X_2, X_3$$

Where

Y = Employee performance (perf)

X = Disciplinary measures (DM)

The indicators of Disciplinary measures (X) are;

X₁ = written reprimand (WR)

X₂ = Job transfer (JT)

X₃= staff suspension (SS)

The simple regression equations for each hypothesis are as follows:

$$Y = a_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e_i$$

$$\text{PERF} = a_0 + \beta_1 \text{WR} + \beta_2 \text{JT} + \beta_3 \text{SS} + e_i \dots \dots \dots \text{Model I}$$

a₀= intercept on the Y axis

β_i = The rate of change in employee performance resulting from the adoption of disciplinary measures e_i = Error term

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The questionnaires were distributed online to academic and non-academic staff at National Open University of Nigeria. A total of 233 copies each of the questionnaire was administered and 227 valid copies were returned and used for the analysis of this study.

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.956 ^a	.914	.913	.249

a. Predictors: (Constant), SS, JT, WR

The model summary shows an R value of 0.956, indicating a strong positive correlation between the predictors and employee performance. The R Square value of 0.914 implies that approximately 91.4% of the variance in employee performance is explained by the three independent variables. The Adjusted R Square of 0.913 confirms the model's goodness-of-fit after adjusting for the number of predictors.

Table 2 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	147.265	3	49.088	793.158	.000 ^b
	Residual	13.801	223	.062		
	Total	161.066	226			

a. Dependent Variable: PER

b. Predictors: (Constant), SS, JT, WR

The ANOVA table reveals an F-statistic of 793.158 with a significance value (p-value) of 0.000, indicating that the overall regression model is statistically significant. This means that the combination of written reprimand, job transfer, and staff suspension significantly predicts employee performance.

Table 3 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.170	.092		12.731	.000
	WR	.360	.058	.485	6.215	.000
	JT	.287	.058	.313	4.956	.000
	SS	.109	.025	.187	4.341	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PER

Written Reprimand has the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.485$) and a significant t-value ($t = 6.215, p < 0.001$). This indicates that written reprimands positively and strongly affect performance. It suggests that when applied appropriately, this measure can serve as a corrective feedback mechanism that enhances staff accountability and productivity. This result refutes the null hypothesis which states that Written reprimand has no significant effect on staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria .The result aligns with the findings of Srivastava and Haider (2021) ; Juma (2016).

Job Transfer also has a significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.313, t = 4.956, p < 0.001$). This implies that reassigning staff to different roles or departments may improve performance by aligning their skills and interests better with organizational needs. This result rejects the null hypothesis which further states that Job

transfer has no significant influence on staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria. Similarly, the result is in consonance with findings of Muslichah & Achmadi (2021) and Ukoette and Ukoette (2024). Staff Suspension, while having the lowest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.187$), still significantly affects performance ($t = 4.341$, $p < 0.001$). This shows that suspensions can act as a deterrent, promoting discipline, but their lower impact suggests they may not be as effective as corrective strategies. The result is in variance with the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between staff suspension and staff performance at the National Open University of Nigeria. The result is in accordance with the findings of Onubuleze (2023) Iheanacho et al. (2017).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis concludes that disciplinary measures specifically written reprimands, job transfers, and staff suspensions have significant and positive effects on employee performance at the National Open University of Nigeria. Among these, written reprimands are the most impactful, followed by job transfers and then staff suspensions. This finding suggests that well-managed disciplinary policies can play a constructive role in enhancing workplace behavior and overall productivity.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Management should prioritize the use of written reprimands as a first line of correction. This method proves highly effective in improving employee performance while maintaining employee dignity.
- ii. Job transfers should be implemented not just as punitive measures but also as talent optimization strategies placing staff where they can perform best.
- iii. Since suspensions have a lower positive impact, they should be reserved for serious infractions. Overuse may demoralize employees rather than improve behavior or performance.

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