

The Relevance of Educational Qualifications to Job Performance among Academic Administrators at a University

Yaseen Stoffberg¹, Naas Ferreira² & Michael Twum-Darko¹

¹ Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

² Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Correspondence: Yaseen Stoffberg, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa. E-mail: yaseenstoffberg@gmail.com

Received: November 1, 2022

Accepted: February 13, 2023

Online Published: February 20, 2023

doi:10.5430/ijhe.v12n1p70

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v12n1p70>

Abstract

Education has long been considered a key predictor of job performance. However, the relevance of educational qualifications to the job performance of academic administrative staff in a university in the Western Cape province of South Africa is not understood by the administrative managers of the university. This study aimed to determine the relationship between educational qualifications and job performance among university staff in academic administrative positions and to make recommendations to improve the current situation. It utilized the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ), which is a 47-item instrument developed to measure work performance at the individual level. After defining job performance into four-dimensional behavior patterns (Contextual Performance Behavior, Adaptive Performance Behavior, Task Performance Behavior, and Counterproductive Work Behavior), the results indicated no significant correlations between job performance and the level of qualifications (as measured against the National Qualifications Framework) held by employees. Spearman's Rho tests were then used to determine the relationship between respondents' National Qualifications Framework level of qualifications and their performance ratings. A moderately significant positive correlation ($p=0.056$) between the National Qualifications Framework level and job performance ratings that 'exceed the requirements' of the job was observed. The research helps to determine the preferred educational levels for academic administrative positions of varying complexity and provides the University with additional guidelines to recruit staff who are most likely to impact organizational objectives positively.

Keywords: academic administrators, educational qualifications, job performance, job performance measurement, vocational success

1. Introduction

Education has long been seen as an important predictor of the performance of people at work. For many years, university graduates with bachelor's or master's degrees have been in high demand in the employment market.

A literature review demonstrates conflicting conclusions about the connection between educational attainment and job performance.

Aris and Timmins (1989) claim that the kind and degree of education acquired by non-technical employees has no bearing on their level of performance (Ng and Feldman, 2009). In a review of Berg's well-known research, Cvanagh (1970) reported that there was no evidence to support the idea that higher levels of education resulted in improved job performance.

Other research suggests that higher levels of education positively influence the performance of core tasks, creativity and constructive behavior in employees (Ng & Feldman, 2009).

A study of 51 diverse employers found that employers required only basic academic skills in Mathematics and English for entry-level positions and that workers who had completed only high school did not have these essential skills. In cases where basic academic skills in Mathematics and English were not required for entry-level jobs, employees would require these skills if they wanted to progress to higher-level jobs in their organizations (Rosenbaum & Binder, 1997).

The hiring of graduates nonetheless remains a crucial source of new employees and forms a core recruitment strategy for many organizations (Cabellero et al., 2011).

The relevance of educational qualifications on the job performance of academic administrative staff at a university in the Western Cape province of South Africa (referred to in this study as “the University”) is not understood by managers of the University’s academic administration units. As a result, the University currently sets different educational qualifications for administrative positions that have been graded at the same payclass (or pay grade).

These positions (at the same payclass) are (i) equal in the level of responsibility required for the post, and (ii) require tasks that have an equal level of complexity. Despite being equal in this regard, different minimum educational qualifications are required when vacancies for these positions are advertised. An inconsistency, therefore, exists in the minimum educational qualifications for academic administrative positions of equal payclass (grade).

If a clear and shared understanding of the relevance of educational qualifications to job performance is not agreed upon within an organisation, then the consistent application of minimum educational requirements for jobs of similar type and complexity will be difficult to achieve.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The State of Education in South Africa

Formal education in South Africa began in the late 1600s with the church's establishment of mission schools. Small rural schools with one or two teachers, district schools that supplied primary education to multiple towns in an area, and a few secondary schools in larger cities arose by the late 1800s. Some of the most prestigious private schools today were founded during this time.

By the turn of the century, almost all provinces had eliminated the enrolment of black African children in government schools, leaving them dependent on mission schools with little official assistance.

“In 1948, English became the official language of instruction in schools. Eight departments of education were formed under the apartheid policy. These used various curricula and established educational standards for blacks, colored (multi-ethnic) people, and Indians, in addition to a department for independent schools and provincial departments for whites. In addition, certain Bantustans (areas governed by black Africans) had their own education ministries” (Amnesty International, 2020).

In the 1950s, state policies continued to enforce these discriminatory practices. For example, the 1953 Bantu Education Act mandated racially segregated educational facilities, and the 1959 Extension of University Education Act prohibited universities from accepting black students unless special permission was obtained from a cabinet minister.

During the 1970s, government expenditure on black education was a fraction of what was spent on white education. Consequently, black schools lacked the infrastructure, personnel, and texts that white schools had. Even though black people constituted 70% of the population, black students enrolled in universities accounted for only 20% of the total university student population.

Today, the Bill of Rights ensures the right to primary education for all South Africans, and the government is responsible for “making education available and accessible through reasonable measures to all people” (National Planning Commission: The Presidency, 2012).

A 2020 report by Amnesty International, South Africa: “Broken and unequal: The state of education in South Africa”, however, reflects that the current democratically elected administration has failed to rectify the old apartheid regime's design and implementation of educational inequities. From affluent private schools built during the colonial period on the emergence of religious organizations to schools established under apartheid regulations, South Africa’s history continues to affect the current education system (Amnesty International, 2020).

This spatial divide negatively affects the quality of school education, limiting the life opportunities of many people (National Planning Commission: The Presidency, 2012). The school system in South Africa is one of the world's most inequitable, with the most significant difference between the top 20% of schools and the remainder visible in their test results. Students in the top 200 schools get more distinctions in mathematics than the following 6,600 schools combined. Out of every 100 pupils who enter school, 50-60 students will make it to Grade 12, 40-50 students will pass Grade 12, and just 14 students will attend university. The government's international human rights obligations are breached, and even its “Minimum Norms and Standards for Educational Institutions” are neglected (Amnesty International, 2020).

In response to the state's inability to provide sufficient education, the private education sector in the country currently accounts for 4-5 per cent of total provision and is growing. New corporate educational providers have emerged, backed by multinational corporations, equity funds, local firms, and private investors. One of the country's largest private education groups was established in 1978 and operates in both the school and higher education arenas. For the period 2019 to 2020, it reported revenue of nearly R5,5bn - an increase of 8% from the previous year. Revenue from its school operations increased by 4%, while revenue from its university operations increased by 9% (ADvTECH, 2020). The country has 88 registered and 27 provisionally registered private institutions registered with the Department of Higher Education to confer specific degrees and diplomas (Moloi et al., 2014).

The National Development Plan (NDP) envisions a society free of poverty and inequality by 2030 in which "opportunity is determined not by birth, but by ability, education and hard work" (National Planning Commission: The Presidency, 2012).

2.2 Institutions of Higher Learning

The higher education landscape in South Africa includes 28 universities, referred to as institutions of higher learning (South African Government, 2020). These universities play a critical role in developing effective academic systems and enabling the country to compete in complex knowledge economies (Altbach, 2020).

While the state funds universities, each university is independent, reporting to its council rather than the government.

Numerous universities in South Africa are world-class academic institutions at the leading edge of research in various fields. The University of the Witwatersrand was ranked first in Africa in the 2020 Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and placed in the 200-300 band globally. There are approximately 25 000 universities worldwide (University of the Witwatersrand, 2020). The University of Cape Town has been ranked 226th in the world by the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings in 2022, placing it among the top 18% of universities worldwide and is tied with Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn (Germany), the University of Sussex (United Kingdom) and the University of Virginia (United States) (University of Cape Town, 2022).

Much has been done in South African higher education to address the disparities left over from the Apartheid period. According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE), "South Africa's public higher education institutions enrolled 892 936 students (726 882 undergraduates and 138 610 postgraduates) in 2010. However, student engagement, or the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds engaged in postsecondary education, is a paltry 16%. Equity is a work in progress: more than 58.5 per cent of whites and around 51 per cent of Indians attend college. Colored people account for 14.3 per cent of the population, whereas black people account for barely 12 per cent".

New problems in South Africa's higher education system are emerging due to the new and daunting demands for competitiveness engendered by globalization, internationalization, and technological advancements, as well as the requirement to address the socioeconomic, cultural, and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society. Among the difficulties confronting the industry is a discontinuity in knowledge gaps between secondary and higher education and between higher education and the labor market (Moloi et al., 2014).

"The NDP envisages that by 2030, all South Africans should have access to a post-school education system that meets the current and future needs of society and the economy" (South African Government, 2020).

2.3 Qualification Types in South Africa

The National Qualifications Framework (National Qualifications Framework) is an integrated system for classifying quality-assured national qualifications in South Africa.

As indicated in the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Act No 67 of 2008), the National Qualifications Framework aims to:

- (1) Facilitate access to mobility and progression within education and training paths
- (2) Enhance the quality of education and training
- (3) Accelerate the redress of past discrimination in education opportunities

The National Qualifications Framework comprises three qualifications sub-frameworks:

- (1) General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
- (2) Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)
- (3) Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework

These frameworks cover all the qualification types available in South Africa, from general and elementary certificates to doctoral degrees.

2.4 The Importance of Education to Individuals and Society

A defining feature of the previous century has been the enormous worldwide spread of university education. In 1900, nearly one-hundredth of the world's population was enrolled in universities. Over the twentieth century, this proportion climbed to one in five persons.

In a study of 15 000 universities across 78 countries between 1950 and 2010, Valero and Van Reenen (2019) argue that the number of universities in a country is positively correlated with future increases in the country's GDP per capita. For example, a 10 per cent increase in the number of universities per capita resulted in a 0.4 per cent higher future growth of GDP per capita.

Their findings support earlier research by Walters (2004), which showed that the period between 1950 and 1970 saw the rapid development of education as policy decisions were guided by research that showed a positive correlation between education and economic growth.

The presence of historical universities in a country is also associated with deeper pro-democratic attitudes among its people as beliefs that higher education is essential for economic and social progress become more widespread over time (Valero and van Reenen, 2019).

In addition to the benefits education brings to the economy and society, the benefits of education to individuals have also been well-documented. For instance, education serves as an indicator of an individual's abilities and accumulated knowledge. An additional year of education yielded a net increase of 11.5 per cent in an individual's annual earnings (Ng and Feldman, 2009).

Compared to the number of workers who completed only secondary education, the number of workers with higher education qualifications in the South African workforce has risen rapidly over the past ten years.

However, the number of workers with higher education qualifications in the South African workforce remains lower than in countries with economic development levels comparable to that of South Africa. The country has a quantitative shortage in higher education level skills of approximately 25 per cent (Foko and Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 2015), despite the various benefits of education to society and individuals.

2.5 Employability

Various terms have been used in previous research to define the concept of employability. These terms include 'job preparedness', 'job readiness', 'graduate employability' and 'graduateness', all of which refer to the same skills and attributes.

Employability has been linked to acquiring skills and attributes that prepare graduates for success later in life. These include communication skills, numeracy, information technology, problem-solving and teamwork, all of which will be useful in various job positions (Cole and Tibby, 2013). In addition, Sanders and De Grip (2004) add that learning capacity is considered part of an employee's employability.

On the other hand, employability should focus on training graduates to succeed in the labor market and preparing them to contribute to society. It includes "a set of knowledge and personal traits that make graduates more likely to contribute positively to the economy" (Carol and Mashigo, 2014).

Knight and Yorke (2003) suggested a widely accepted and commonly referenced definition for employability: "A set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." The extent to which graduates possess these skills and attributes contributes to their employability (Carol and Mashigo, 2014).

2.6 Job Performance

Job performance is defined as the entire value contributed to an organisation by an individual's behavior patterns over a specific period (Motowidlo, 2003). It indicates how well employees do their jobs, take initiative and demonstrate resourcefulness (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Job performance refers to the measurable activities, behaviors, and results that workers participate in or achieve that are related to and contribute to the organization's objectives (Hafidz et al., 2012). It is considered critical to organizational success (Barros et al., 2014).

In industrial psychology, job performance is a critical concept. Personnel selection is predicated on the notion that people are picked from a pool of candidates more likely to perform effectively in the job. Individuals that do well are

promoted, recognized, and honored. Individuals who do well have far more career prospects than those who achieve moderately or poorly. Many training programmers are meant to help employees perform better on the job. Employee performance data is used in performance appraisal, feedback, and merit pay systems. In a nutshell, job performance is a concept that underpins much of work psychology (Ng and Feldman, 2009).

The turbulent context of today's world forces organizations to focus on the job performance of their employees (Carlos & Rodrigues, 2016). This is particularly relevant for higher education institutions such as the universities, given the turbulent environment in which they have been forced to operate, which includes challenges such as declining state subsidies, rising student fee debt, under-preparedness of school-leavers and the transition to emergency remote online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.6.1 Measuring Job Performance

The measurement of job performance is an essential activity for organizations as many important decisions are taken based on job performance (Sonnetag, Volmer and Spsychala, 2000).

Job performance is, however, referred to as a latent construct that cannot be measured by observation, and psychologists have given considerable attention to performance within work contexts (Arvey & Murphy, 1998).

Two properties are implied by the term latent concept. First, job performance cannot be defined by pointing to anything physical and concrete. Only the manifestations of this concept may be identified. Second, there are a variety of signs that could point to poor job performance.

As a consequence, although the particular manifestations may vary between jobs, the dimensions of the construct may remain similar between employment (Viswesvaran and Ones, 2000). Various proxies have therefore been used for measuring job performance (Zikmund et al., 2013). These include awards received, letters of commendation, peer nomination and performance evaluation scores, supervisor rating scales, job knowledge assessments, hands-on job samples, and archival data such as sales figures and production records. Performance ratings, such as peer and supervisor evaluations, are the most common technique for gauging job performance among these alternatives (Sonnetag, Volmer and Spsychala, 2000).

2.6.2 Job Performance Dimensions

Performance is viewed as a multi-dimensional notion by researchers. However, the behavioral and result aspects of performance can be distinguished on the most basic level.

The behavioral aspect pertains to what people do at work, such as teaching a statistics course to undergraduate students. On the other hand, the outcome aspect relates to the results of an individual's actions, such as a student's statistical knowledge after attending the course.

Other determinants impact the outcome, in addition to the behavioral aspect. Using the previous example, a teacher who delivers a great statistics session that meets all of the learning objectives (behavioral aspect) may not be able to supply students with knowledge (outcome aspect) if the students lack the desire to learn or the cognitive ability (Ahadzie, Proverbs and Olomolaiye, 2008).

Task dimensions refer to an employee's performance in tasks related to the key performance areas listed in their job description (Sonnetag, Volmer and Spsychala, 2000). They are directly or indirectly related to the technical function, often vary amongst professions within the same company, and are role-prescribed duties that incumbents must execute on time to be remunerated. Variances in task behavior result from human characteristics such as understanding of a subject, the expertise required to perform a task and other abilities (Ahadzie, Proverbs and Olomolaiye, 2008).

It is contended that simply carrying out the core tasks of a job, however, does not constitute a high level of performance and that work is needed outside of core tasks.

Contextual dimensions refer to those tasks that do not directly contribute to core job functions but contribute to overall organizational goals (Sonnetag, Volmer and Spsychala, 2000). Contextual performance benefits a technical function. It is frequent in most jobs, is not role-specific, and is usually not part of an employee's formal responsibilities and obligations to the company. Predisposition, rather than proficiency, is the primary source of diversity in the contextual performance of staff.

It encompasses discretionary work-related behaviors such as diligence and a helpful attitude that contribute indirectly to an organization's performance but are not recognized as job requirements. When analyzing job performance, it is

critical to remember that employees contribute to organizational success in ways that extend beyond the primary work for which they are contracted.

According to previous research, contextual performance may account for around 30% of the difference in management performance across managers. Individual variations in cognitive capacity, work knowledge, task competence, and job experience are the strongest predictors of task performance, but individual differences in job devotion and interpersonal facilitation are the best predictors of contextual performance (Ahadzie, Proverbs and Olomolaiye, 2008).

2.6.3 Job Performance Behavior Patterns

Recent years have seen an expansion of the idea of work performance to encompass core task behavior patterns, citizenship behavior patterns, and counter-productive behavior patterns (Ng & Feldman, 2009; Sackett, 2002).

(1) Core Task Behavior Patterns

Core task behavior patterns refer to the performance of the basic required duties of a particular job.

(2) Citizenship Behavior Patterns

Citizenship behavior patterns refer to behavior patterns over and above the core task requirements, which promote the organization's effectiveness (Ng & Feldman, 2009). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to employees' actions that do not form part of their core task functions but contribute to the organization's overall success in achieving its goals. Literature on the topic describes OCB as positive behavior such as "co-operation, altruism, compliance, punctuality, housecleaning, protecting company property, following company rules, dependability, helping behavior, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue and self-development" (Hafidz et al., 2012).

(3) Counterproductive Work Behavior Patterns

The term "counterproductive workplace behavior patterns" refers to any purposeful behavior on the part of an organisation member that is considered adverse to the organization's legitimate objectives (Sackett, 2002; Ng & Feldman, 2009).

(4) Adaptive Work Behavior Patterns

The changing nature of work environments has resulted in employees becoming more flexible. Adaptive work behavior has been reported along eight dimensions:

- 1) Handling emergencies or crises
- 2) Handling work stress
- 3) Solving problems creatively
- 4) Dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations
- 5) Learning work tasks, technologies and procedures
- 6) Demonstrating interpersonal adaptability
- 7) Demonstrating cultural adaptability
- 8) Demonstrating physically oriented adaptability

2.7 Factors Influencing Job Performance

2.7.1 Educational Background

Educational variables, including admissions test scores (such as SAT scores), subject majors, grade point average (GPA), type of higher education institution attended, length of academic career, teaching area (field/discipline) and qualification, have long been used to describe academic background (Allen, 1990). In addition, most organizations use education as a proxy for a person's skill set or productivity (Ng & Feldman, 2009).

While academic background has been used as a predictor of job performance in many settings, it has recorded varied outcomes. For example, Beatty (1999) used academic background characteristics such as university quality, academic performance and level of education to demonstrate that these characteristics did not significantly impact the performance of recent engineering graduates. Ng & Feldman (2009), however, argue that education level positively influences core task performance and improves creativity and citizenship behavior in employees.

2.7.2 Cognitive Ability

Strong correlations have been recorded between job performance and cognitive ability test scores (Richardson & Norgate, 2015). Moreover, a moderate to strong correlation exists between cognitive ability and educational achievement, resulting in cognitive ability tests being frequently used as selection tools for educational programmers and occupational selection (Deary et al., 2006).

2.7.3 Personality Traits

A review of the literature indicates that industrial psychologists have long studied the relationship between personality traits and job performance. The Five-Factor Model of Personality, often referred to as The Big Five, is used to classify personality into five dimensions. These dimensions are “neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness” (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003).

Of these dimensions, (low levels of) neuroticism (emotional instability), extraversion, and openness to experience have been shown to contribute positively to job performance (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003).

2.7.4 Leadership Style

Leadership is crucial to achieving organizational objectives and improving employee performance. Where efforts to improve employees' job performance have been unsuccessful, earlier studies have linked the lack of improvement to unsatisfactory leadership (Mahdinezhad *et al.*, 2013).

Leadership style refers to a consistent pattern of behavior and attitudes exhibited by a leader. It has long been categorized into two broad categories: transactional and transformational.

A transactional leadership style is predicated on the leader doing particular actions, such as compensating staff for meeting goals.

On the other hand, the transformational leadership style involves the leader inspiring and motivating a team to work toward a desirable, shared vision of the future that motivates followers to sacrifice their self-interests and apply exceptional effort to the objectives advocated by the leader. More recently, new styles of leadership have been proposed. These include “ideological leadership, pragmatic leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, spiritual leadership, distributed leadership, and integrative public leadership” (Anderson and Sun, 2017).

3. Research Methodology

Job performance is a latent variable, meaning that it cannot be directly measured or observed. The study therefore sought to utilize a model that would indirectly measure these latent variables by employing a set of observable indicators that can be directly measured using a survey method (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004).

A review of the literature confirmed the necessity to evaluate participants according to the four dimensions of job performance, i.e. task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behavior, to account for its multidimensional nature.

Rather than develop a questionnaire from scratch, the study utilized the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ). The IWPQ was developed by researchers at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Utrecht University in The Netherlands as a 47-item generic questionnaire to measure work performance at the individual level.

Regarding the reliability of the IWPQ as a framework, Koopmans et al. (2012) reported that “the reliability of the framework was tested as follows: (i) factor analysis was used to determine whether the four-dimensional conceptual framework could be confirmed among a sample of 1 181 Dutch workers, (ii) Rasch analysis was used to examine the functioning of the items and (iii) the framework was examined to determine whether generic scales could be constructed”. The results established the feasibility of using a generic questionnaire to assess individual job performance across occupational sectors (Koopmans et al., 2012).

The IWPQ measures job performance across multiple dimensions, namely: contextual performance behavior (CPB), adaptive work behavior (APB), task performance behavior (TPB), and counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

In the case of this study, the total population included all staff in academic administration positions across the University's six faculties: Commerce, Engineering and the Built Environment, Health Sciences, Humanities, Law, and Science. The total population comprised 77 individuals. This is a relatively small total population that could be engaged easily. No population sampling was therefore required.

4. Findings

The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using the IBM SPSS software application using T-test analysis and ANOVA tests. In addition, Spearman’s Rho Calculator (Correlation Coefficient) was used to measure the strength of association between variables.

An analysis of the data collected in the study indicated that 72.16% of respondents demonstrated contextual performance behavior (CPB), 83.17% of respondents demonstrated adaptive work behavior (APB), 56.82% of respondents demonstrated task performance behavior (TBP), and 15.05% of respondents demonstrated counterproductive work behavior (CWB).

Table 1. Job Performance Dimensions (Scales)

Job Performance Dimension	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CPB_perc	53	7.14	100.00	70.9344	18.99810
APB_perc	52	50.00	100.00	83.1731	12.25485
TBP_perc	55	27.27	86.36	57.1074	15.76446
CWB_perc	52	.00	57.50	15.0481	11.42420
Valid N (listwise)	52				

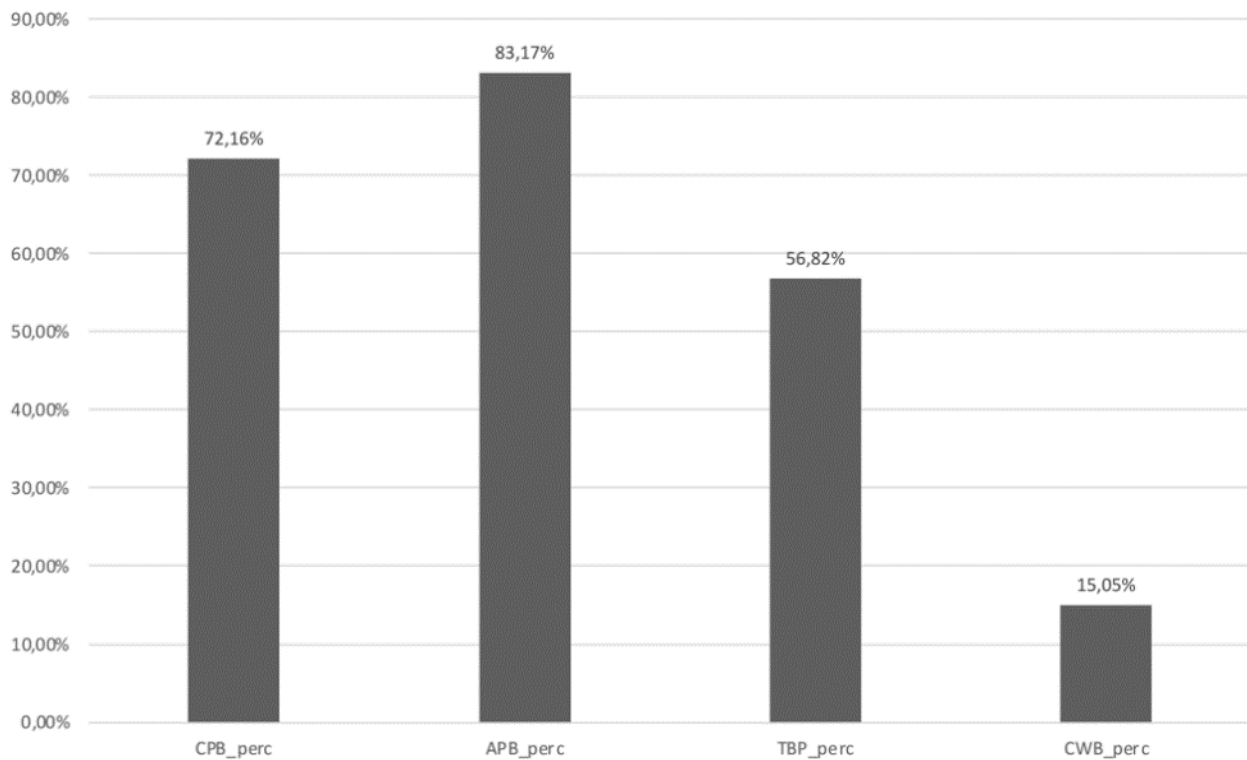


Figure 1. Job Performance Dimensions (Scales)

Spearman's Rho is a non-parametric test for determining the strength of a relationship between two variables, with $r = 1$ indicating a perfect positive correlation and $r = -1$ indicating a perfect negative correlation.

A sig value of >0.05 indicates an insignificant correlation, while a sig value of <0.05 represents a significant correlation.

This test demonstrated an insignificant positive correlation between CPB and National Qualifications Framework level qualification: $R_s(35) = .13, p = .435$.

There was an insignificant positive correlation between APB and National Qualifications Framework level qualification: $R_s(35) = .07, p = .645$, as well as an insignificant positive correlation between CWB and National Qualifications Framework level qualification: $R_s(35) = .15, p = .358$.

There was also an insignificant negative correlation between TBP and National Qualifications Framework level qualification: $R_s(35) = -.07, p = .675$.

Table 2. Correlation between job performance dimensions and National Qualifications Framework level (Spearman's Rho)

Job Performance Dimension	Correlation with National Qualifications Framework Level
	.132
CPB_perc	.435
	.37
	.078
APB_perc	.645
	.37
	-.070
TBP_perc	.675
	.38
	.156
CWB_perc	.358
	.37

5. Discussions and Conclusions

After defining job performance into four dimensions (Contextual Performance Behavior, Adaptive Performance Behavior, Task Performance Behavior, and Counterproductive Work Behavior), the data collected indicated that no significant correlations exist between the preceding dimensions of job performance and the level of National Qualifications Framework qualifications held by staff members in academic administrative positions.

5.1 What is the Relationship between the Level of Educational Qualifications and the Job Performance of Academic Administrative Staff at the University?

An analysis of the data collected in the study did not show any correlation between the National Qualifications Framework level of qualifications held by respondents and their job performance as defined by the dimensions of job performance (TPB, CPB, APB and CWB).

Task Performance Behavior (TPB) is demonstrated when an individual completes tasks relevant to the key performance areas stated in his or her job description (Sonntag, Volmer and Sychala, 2000). They are role-prescribed tasks that incumbents must complete on time to be compensated. The results of this study showed that the attainment of higher levels of academic qualifications had no impact on the ability of academic administrators to perform the core tasks related to their jobs.

This study showed that academic administrative staff at all levels in the organisation (ranging from receptionists to managers) were able to meet the minimum core task requirements of their jobs equally well irrespective of their level of academic qualifications.

Contextual Performance Behavior (CPB) refers to job-related discretionary actions such as working hard and assisting others, which contribute informally to organizational success but are not technically recognized as part of the job. This study showed that academic administrative staff applied themselves to their work, supported team members and acted in the best interest of the University, and that the level of their educational qualifications had no significant influence on their behavior in this regard.

Adaptive Performance Behavior (APB) refers to an individual's ability to handle emergencies, manage work stress, solve problems creatively, deal with uncertain and unpredictable work situations and to learn new work tasks, technologies and procedures. This study showed that the ability of academic administrators to demonstrate this type of behavior was not significantly affected their level of educational qualifications.

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB) is understood to be the opposite of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). While OCB contributes positively to job performance and organizational objectives, CWB contributes negatively. This study showed that academic administrative staff with higher levels of educational qualifications were no less likely to demonstrate negative behavior (such as, staying absent from work without good reason) than those with lower-level academic qualifications.

5.2 Do Academic Administrative Staff with Higher Educational Qualifications Achieve Higher Performance Ratings than Staff with Lower Educational Qualifications?

A Spearman's Rho test was conducted to determine the relationship between the National Qualifications Framework level of qualification(s) held by respondents and their annual performance ratings (i.e. actual performance ratings as agreed with line managers against the KPAs outlined in their job descriptions).

The results showed a moderately significant positive correlation ($p=0.056$) between the National Qualifications Framework level of qualification(s) and performance ratings that 'exceed the requirements' of the job.

While there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of educational qualifications held by academic staff and their job performance behavior (TPB, AWB, CPB and CWB), there is a moderately significant positive correlation between their level of educational qualifications and their ability to exceed the requirements of their jobs.

The findings are aligned with that of previous research in the discipline. For example, Aris and Timmins (1989) argued that the type and level of educational qualification held by staff in non-technical positions have no effect on their level of performance (Ng and Feldman, 2009), and Cvanagh (1970) reported that there was no evidence to support the idea that higher levels of education resulted in improved job performance.

Previous research has, however, also suggested that higher levels of education positively influence the performance of core tasks, creativity and constructive behavior in employees (Ng & Feldman, 2009). An analysis of the data collected in this study does not confirm this within the context of the academic administrative staff at the University.

6. Recommendations

The vast literature in this area demonstrates mixed relationships between educational qualifications and job performance across different industries and countries.

On the one hand, this study suggests that the recruitment of staff with higher levels of educational qualifications will not result in more staff meeting the minimum requirements of their jobs and that the attainment of higher levels of educational qualifications will have no significant impact in this regard.

On the other hand, it also suggests that academic administrative staff members with higher levels of educational qualifications may result in higher performing teams, on the grounds that staff with higher levels of educational qualifications are more likely to exceed the minimum requirements of their jobs.

Universities that strive for high levels of performance may be persuaded by this research study to require minimum educational qualifications (such as an undergraduate degree, for example) for all academic administrative positions.

7. Limitations and Direction for Future Research

The delineation of this study restricted it to the relationship between educational qualifications and job performance of staff members in academic administration positions.

Scope exists for this topic to be further researched. Additional studies in the future may consider the following:

7.1 Factors other than Educational Qualifications that may Affect Job Performance

Other factors may influence job performance in these positions in a more statistically significant manner than educational qualifications. These factors include (i) the staff member's cognitive ability, (ii) personality traits and (iii) the management approach to which staff members are subjected.

7.2 The Relevance of Educational Qualifications to the Job Performance of Academic Administrators at the Same Job Grade

This study discussed the relevance of educational qualifications to the job performance of academic administrators in varying positions and pay classes (grades) in the University. It included staff in various roles ranging from Secretaries to Managers. The study shows no significant correlation between staff performance indicators and their qualification levels.

Further studies may investigate whether a Senior Secretary with a matric (school-leaving qualification) only, for example, performs at an equal, lower, or better level to one with a master's degree.

While the findings of this study suggest that an employee should not be expected to perform in a more exemplary manner (in terms of the job performance dimensions cited in the literature) on account of higher educational qualifications, further research comparing job performance among employees at the same level may provide a more conclusive outcome.

7.3 The Utilization of Different Research Methods

It may also be useful to conduct similar studies using different research methods and to compare the outcomes with that of this study. The use of qualitative research methods, such as conducting interviews with academic administrative staff, may provide additional insights in this area of research.

Given that universities are intrinsically different to other organizations, scope exists in the area of job performance measurement methods to develop a framework that is specifically adapted to universities.

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