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Task and Skill Variety as Determinants of Quality Service Delivery in Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract
This study examined the relationship between task variety and skill variety as determinants of quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State. A correlational research design was adopted, and a total of 370 academic and non-academic staff were selected through a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire validated by experts, with reliability confirmed via Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.87$). Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis was used to answer the research questions, while hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between task variety and quality service delivery ($r = .786$, $p < .05$), and a moderate positive and significant relationship between skill variety and quality service delivery ($r = .586$, $p < .05$). The study concluded that task and skill variety positively influence the quality-of-service delivery in public universities and recommended that university management implement job designs that promote diverse tasks and provide continuous skill development opportunities for staff.

Keywords: Task Variety, Skill Variety, Quality Service Delivery, Public Universities, Bayelsa State.

Introduction

The contemporary world of work has witnessed sustained interest in how job design influences organizational outcomes, particularly service quality. Within higher education institutions, increasing demands for accountability, responsiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction have intensified scrutiny of internal work structures and their implications for service delivery. Public universities in Nigeria are under mounting pressure to deliver quality administrative, academic, and support services despite constraints in funding, infrastructure, and human resources. In this context, task and skill variety, as core dimensions of job design, have emerged as potentially critical determinants of quality service delivery. The Job Characteristics Model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976) posits that task variety and skill variety enhance employees' experienced meaningfulness of work, thereby improving motivation and performance outcomes. However, the extent to which these assumptions hold within public universities in Bayelsa State requires critical empirical interrogation.

Task variety refers to the degree to which a job requires employees to perform different activities and engage in diverse tasks, while skill variety reflects the range of skills and competencies utilized in executing those tasks (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2017). Theoretically, greater variety reduces monotony, stimulates engagement, and fosters adaptability, which may translate into improved service quality. Empirical studies in organizational behaviour suggest that enriched job designs are associated with higher employee satisfaction, commitment, and productivity (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Nevertheless, some scholars argue that excessive task variety, particularly in resource constrained environments, may result in role overload, stress, and diminished performance (Adebayo & Oladipo 2020; Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2017).

Thus, while task and skill variety are often portrayed as inherently beneficial, their actual influence may depend on contextual and structural factors within specific institutions.

Quality service delivery in universities encompasses timely administrative processes, effective academic support, transparent communication, and responsiveness to students and other stakeholders. In service organizations, employee competence and engagement are widely recognized as central to service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 2018). However, the discourse

on service quality in Nigerian public universities has largely focused on infrastructural deficits, funding inadequacies, and governance challenges, with comparatively limited attention to micro level job design variables. This imbalance suggests a conceptual gap, as organizational performance cannot be fully understood without examining how work is structured and experienced by employees.

In many Nigerian public universities, including those in Bayelsa State, staff often perform multiple roles due to staffing shortages and administrative demands. While this may increase task variety, it does not automatically guarantee skill development or enhanced service quality. Without deliberate professional development opportunities, expanded task responsibilities may lead to burnout rather than improved performance. Studies on employee development emphasize that skill acquisition and continuous learning are critical for sustaining service excellence in dynamic institutional environments (Noe, 2017). Consequently, skill variety must be supported by structured development opportunities to translate into measurable improvements in service delivery.

Furthermore, higher education institutions operate within complex socio political and economic contexts that shape employee motivation and organizational culture. Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory underscores that intrinsic factors such as meaningful work and achievement contribute significantly to performance outcomes (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2017). Task and skill variety, when effectively implemented, can function as intrinsic motivators. Yet, if poorly managed or unsupported by adequate resources, they may exacerbate dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is insufficient to assume a linear relationship between job variety and service quality without context specific evidence.

In Bayelsa State, public universities are expected to meet national quality benchmarks while navigating financial limitations and administrative restructuring. Despite reforms aimed at improving institutional effectiveness, concerns persist regarding delays in service provision, inefficiencies in administrative processes, and stakeholder dissatisfaction. While macro level policy interventions are frequently proposed, less attention has been directed toward

examining how internal job structures influence service outcomes. This oversight creates a knowledge gap regarding the role of task and skill variety as determinants of quality service delivery in the state's public universities.

Globally, organizational research continues to affirm that strategic job design enhances performance and service standards when aligned with institutional goals (Grant & Parker, 2009). However, contextual realities in developing educational systems may alter expected outcomes. There is therefore a compelling need to critically assess whether task variety and skill variety function as enabling factors or as additional pressures within public universities in Bayelsa State. Such analysis is essential for informing evidence based human resource policies and ensuring that job design strategies contribute meaningfully to improved quality service delivery rather than inadvertently undermining it.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate task and skill variety as determinants of quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

1. Determine the extent to which task variety influences quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.
2. Determine the extent to which skill variety influences quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

In view of the objectives of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What is the relationship between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State?
2. What is the relationship between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State?

Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the following null hypotheses were suitably formulated for statistical testing:

H01: There is no significant relationship between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

Research Method

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine task and skill variety as determinants of quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State. Charles-Owaba (2019) submits that correlational design is appropriate for determining the degree and direction of relationship between variables and for establishing whether one variable significantly relates to or predicts another within a defined population. In this study, task variety and skill variety constituted the independent variables, while quality service delivery was treated as the dependent variable.

The population of the study comprised academic and non-academic staff of public universities in Bayelsa State. A total sample of 370 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. First, the public universities in Bayelsa State were stratified based on faculties and administrative units to ensure adequate representation of both academic and administrative staff. Thereafter, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select participants within each stratum. Finally, proportionate sampling was used to ensure fair representation of respondents across departments and units.

Data were collected using a structured instrument titled *Task and Skill Variety and Quality Service Delivery Questionnaire (TSVQSDQ)*. The questionnaire was designed on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument consisted of two major parts. The first part elicited demographic information such as gender, years of experience, staff category, and educational qualification. The second part was divided into

three sections: Section A measured task variety; Section B assessed skill variety; and Section C evaluated quality service delivery in terms of timeliness, responsiveness, efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction.

To ensure validity, the instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. Their suggestions were incorporated to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment of the items with the objectives of the study.

A pilot study was conducted using 25 staff members from a public university in Delta State who were not part of the main study but shared similar characteristics with the target population. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

The researcher, assisted by trained research assistants, personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents. Participants were given clear instructions on how to complete the instrument, and confidentiality of responses was assured. The administration process resulted in a high retrieval rate.

For data analysis, inferential statistical techniques were employed. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to answer the research questions by determining the strength and direction of the relationships between task variety, skill variety, and quality service delivery. The hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance using multiple regression analysis to determine the extent to which task and skill variety significantly predict quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis on the relationship between the task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State

		Task Variety	Quality Service Delivery
Task Variety	Pearson Correlation	1	.786**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
Quality Service Delivery	Pearson Correlation	.786**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The data presented in Table 1 show that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State is .786. This indicates a strong positive relationship between the two variables. The positive value suggests that as the level of task variety increases among staff in public universities, the quality of service delivery also tends to improve. The associated significance value ($p = .000$) is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant. Furthermore, the square of the correlation coefficient ($r^2 = 0.618$) implies that task variety accounts for approximately 61.8% of the variation in quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis on the relationship between the skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State

		Skill Variety	Quality Service Delivery
Skill Variety	Pearson Correlation	1	.586**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	370	370
Quality Service Delivery	Pearson Correlation	.586**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	370	370

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The data presented in Table 2 show that the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State is .586. This indicates a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. The positive value suggests that as the level of skill variety among staff increases, the quality-of-service delivery in public universities also tends to improve. The associated significance value (p = .000) is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant. Furthermore, the square of the correlation coefficient (r^2 = 0.343) implies that skill variety accounts for approximately 34.3% of the variation in quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

The data presented in Table 1 indicated that, at an r-value of .786, the p-value is 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State is rejected. This implies that a significant relationship exists

between task variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

The data presented in Table 2 indicated that, at an r-value of .586, the p-value is 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State is rejected. This implies that a significant relationship exists between skill variety and quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State.

Discussion of Findings

The results from Research Question One revealed that task variety has a strong positive and significant relationship with quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State. The findings indicate that the degree to which staff engage in diverse tasks and responsibilities plays a crucial role in enhancing the efficiency, responsiveness, and overall quality of services provided by the universities. This suggests that as task variety increases, employees are more likely to experience meaningfulness in their work, improved motivation, and heightened engagement, which collectively translate into better service delivery. Conversely, limited task variety may lead to monotony, disengagement, and reduced effectiveness in service provision, highlighting the importance of well-structured and diversified job roles within higher education institutions.

The test of Hypothesis One further reinforced this observation, as the null hypothesis was rejected due to the statistically significant relationship observed. This result suggests that task variety is not merely a managerial consideration but a critical determinant of quality service delivery in public universities. The finding aligns with the propositions of Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2017) who emphasized that task variety enhances employees' experienced meaningfulness and

performance outcomes. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2019) assert that jobs with varied tasks increase employee satisfaction and productivity, ultimately improving organizational effectiveness. However, it is important to note that excessive task variety without adequate support or resources may induce stress and role overload (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), indicating that effective job design must balance diversity of tasks with staff capacity and institutional support mechanisms.

The results from Research Question Two revealed that skill variety has a moderate positive and significant relationship with quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State. The findings indicate that the extent to which staff are able to apply diverse skills in their roles significantly influences the efficiency, effectiveness, and overall quality of services provided by the universities. This suggests that employees with access to opportunities for utilizing and developing multiple skills tend to deliver more responsive, competent, and satisfactory services, whereas limited skill variety may constrain staff performance, reduce innovation, and negatively impact service delivery outcomes.

The test of Hypothesis Two further reinforced this observation, as the null hypothesis was rejected due to the statistically significant relationship observed. This result implies that skill variety is a critical determinant of quality service delivery in public universities, consistent with the propositions of Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2017) who argued that the use of multiple skills enhances employees' experience of meaningful work and promotes higher performance. Similarly, Noe (2017) highlights that skill development and application are central to sustaining productivity and service excellence in organizational settings. However, it is important to recognize that skill variety alone may not guarantee improved service quality without complementary support systems, training, and resources, suggesting that institutional mechanisms must align with job design to maximize the benefits of skill diversity among staff.

Conclusion

This study has established that both task variety and skill variety are significant determinants of quality service delivery in public universities in Bayelsa State. The

findings indicate that diversified job responsibilities and the opportunity to apply a range of skills positively influence employees' engagement, motivation, and performance, which in turn enhance the efficiency, responsiveness, and overall effectiveness of services provided by the universities. These results underscore the importance of well-structured job designs that balance task diversity and skill development, highlighting that institutional strategies aimed at improving service delivery should prioritize creating opportunities for meaningful, challenging, and skill-enriched work for academic and administrative staff.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the conclusion drawn, and its educational implications, the following recommendations are made:

1. Public universities in Bayelsa State should implement job designs that incorporate greater task variety to enhance staff engagement and improve quality service delivery.
2. University management should provide continuous professional development and skill-enhancement opportunities to ensure staff can effectively apply diverse skills in their roles, thereby improving service outcomes.

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