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Academic Staffs' Perceptions of Performance Rewards in Ugandan Public and Private Universities

Grace Kansiime, Ndejje University, Uganda, gkansiime@ndejjeuniversity.ac.ug, OCHID: 0009-0009-6561-8550

Abstract

World over higher education institutions use rewards in successful performance management (PM) of their academic staff. The historical background of PM of the academic staffs in Ugandan universities is centered on the political turmoil, which occurred in the country in the 1970s up to 1986. Eventually the turmoil lead to economic crisis that hindered efficient reward of the academic staffs' performance. Therefore, this research investigated the effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research in Ugandan public and private universities. The research method was primarily quantitative, and a structured questionnaire was used in data collection. Non-probability convenience sampling methods were used to select 405 academics from selected Ugandan universities based on their accessibility and readiness. The findings showed that the academic staffs' managers in the surveyed institutions did not use a variety of rewards to composite for their efforts at work. Consequently, rewards did not improve the academic staffs' teaching and research skills at Ugandan universities. The study recommended that the academic staffs' managers should increase financial and non-financial rewards to motivate the staff to enhance their performance in teaching and research.

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Introduction and Background

Rewarding performance is a core component of PM since it encourages employees to attain organizational goals and improve productivity. Rewards influence employees' job satisfaction, and commitment to their work (Khan et al., 2021). Additionally, rewards enhance employees' motivation that leads to higher effort and increased performance (Khan et al., 2021). Gerhart and Rynes (2003) noted that rewards enable employees to meet both economic and psychological needs eventually motivating them to perform efficiently on the job. Katushabe (2024) carried out a study on financial reward practices and performance of academic staff at Mbarara university of science and technology and found that rewards had a moderate effect on the academic staffs' performance. Rwothomio et al. (2020) made an analysis of the importance of the financial rewards in enhancing academic staffs' performance in Ugandan public universities. The just mentioned scholar puts emphasis on only financial rewards in Ugandan public universities and did not further examine the impact of other rewards on the academic staffs' performance in the surveyed institutions. Despite the study, there are still challenges in rewards systems of the academic staff in Ugandan universities (Rwothomio el., 2020). Ziryawulawo (2023) observed that Ugandan universities operate without a proper detailed reward system to efficiently reward the performance of the academic staff. The study concluded that university management should involve the academic staff to come up with a well-structured and detailed recognition program that is transparent, measurable, achievable, and it should be in line with the most preferred needs of the individual staff and the institutions, to build a culture of open communication, continuous training, improvement and performance (Ziryawulawo, 2023). Nonetheless, this study examines the forms and effectiveness of rewards in improving academic staffs' performance in Uganda public and private universities.

The history of the political and economic developments in Uganda since the 1970s was the origin of the decline in the proper utilization of performance management system (PMS) to reward academic staffs' performance (Injikuru et al., 2024). As a result, the new policies regarding higher education were affected and not given much attention to developing an effective reward system of staff in universities (Injikuru et al., 2024). Uganda experienced numerous wars that lasted for thirty-six years from 1979- 2006. According to Kjær and Muwanga (2019) a civil war was against Amin Dada who was the president besides being a dictator was fought in 19679. Then, followed the guerrilla war from 1980-1986 which was launched by His Excellence Yoweri Kaguta Museveni against the Government of Milton Obote. This was proceeded by an attack on Museveni's government by Josehy Kony between 1986 to 2006. The war lasted for more than 20 years, affecting the government's budget which mainly focused on security where as other sectors including education barely had no allocated funds (Kjær & Muwanga, 2019). Kibuuka (2025) argued that the economic and political crisis in Uganda destroyed the education system and most especially higher education. Kibuuka (2025) further explained that the war led to the drop of public funding on higher education and weakened the development and implementation of an effective reward system causing poor pay of the academic staffs (Amutuhaire, 2022). Inflation in the country was at its peak, during the regime of Milton Obete 1980-1986, which impacted the pay of the academic staffs in universities.

Similarly, Amutuhaire (2022) and Nachonga et al. (2022) emphasized that the academic staff in Ugandan universities were remunerated salaries that were not corresponding with the cost of living ultimately affecting their performance on the job. Although changes were later made in the salary structures of the academic staff in both Government and private universities, most scholars such as Rwothumio et al. (2021), and Nachonga, et al. (2022) demonstrate evidence that academic staffs' performance continue to be affected by under payment. Due to underpayment, there were gaps in the PM of the academic staffs' performance, low morale and lack of job satisfaction to effectively perform their duties (Mugizi et al., 2021). With the poor pay the academic staff in Ugandan universities in efficiently perform their work activities, they are forced to teach in various universities and hold multiple jobs to enhance their income (Injukuru et al., 204). Ssemugenyi (2021) confirmed that various senior academic staffs in Ugandan private universities taught in more than one university confirming that the staff held numerous employments. Mugizi et al. (2021) observed that Ugandan universities are recently trying to embrace PMS in managing the academic staffs' remuneration and performance. On the contrary, the academic staffs' pay and motivation have remained low (Mugizi et al., 2021). Therefore, this study was justified to examine the relationship between PM rewards and academic staffs' performance in teaching and research.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the efforts by the Government and management of private universities to improve reward systems for the academic staffs over time, their salaries and other categories of rewards promotions inclusive are still inadequate to sufficiently support the academic staffs' performance (Amutuhaire, 2022). The Government enhanced the salary scales of the academic staff (Ministry of Public Service, 2025). Subsequently, private universities have structured their salaries basing on the Government salary scales. Nonetheless, the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research has not improved (Kansiime & Singh, 2023; Mugizi et al., 2021). Injikuru et al. (2024) argued that many universities have not developed an all-inclusive and equitable reward systems that sufficiently motivate academic staff in teaching, research, and community engagement. Besides, Ziryawulawo (2023) in his study of motivation and performance of staff in Ugandan universities confirmed that Ugandan universities did not have a detailed and fair reward system that encourages financial and non-financial rewards to remunerate the staffs' efforts on the job. Besides, the basis for promoting the academic staffs in Ugandan universities are stipulated in their human resource manuals (Makerere University, 2009 (as amended in 2022); Ndejje University, 2025), but in most case not implemented. According to Semugenyi (2021) if the situation of poor reward criteria is not improved, the academic staffs' morale, job commitment and effectiveness will as well not improve, hence having enormous impact on the quality of services offered to their customers the students. In Opio's (2025) view insufficient rewards go on to hinder the academic staffs' retention in the teaching profession. Hence, this research ascertained the kind of rewards that the academic staffs in Ugandan public and private universities receive for attaining the set goals and how such rewards affect their performance in teaching and research.

The main focus of the study was to establish the effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research in Ugandan public and private universities.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

i. To analyze academic staffs' perceptions of the extent to which performance rewards are utilized in Ugandan public and private universities.
ii. To assess the effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in Ugandan public and private universities

The study was guided by the following research questions:

i. What are academic staffs' perceptions of the extent to which performance rewards are utilized in Ugandan public and private universities?
ii. How effective are rewards on the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research in Ugandan public and private universities in Uganda?

Additionally, the following research hypotheses guided the study:
Null hypothesis: H_{01}: Rewards do not have a positive effect on the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research skills in Ugandan public and private universities.
Alternative hypothesis: H_{a1}: Rewards have a positive effect on the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research skills in Ugandan public and private universities.

Literature review

A reward is a compensation given for employees' efforts for attainment of set goals or displaying the desired behavior at work. Organizations always reward their employees with financial and non-financial rewards which consist among others of a salary, bonuses, profit sharing, promotion and recognition (Rwothumio et al., 2020). Employees' efforts are rewarded to enhance their performance on the job and that of the entire organization (Rwothumio et al., 2020). Besides, rewards enable managers to allocate resources in an organization appropriately by rewarding outstanding performance and compelling poor performers to improve on their performance to attain the set rewards.

Various theories explain the kind of rewards that inspire employees to perform efficiently on the job and how such rewards should be distributed to employees to attain the set goals. Abraham Maslows' needs and Adam's equity theories underscore both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards such as a promotion and salary (Agyare et al., 2016). According to Ssemugenyi (2021) money is used to meet life basic needs which Maslow categorized as physiological, psychological and self fulfilment needs. Employees with outstanding performance may receive a bonus which is not part of the monthly salary rather a surprise reward to motivate such staff to enhance their performance (Ssemugenyi, 2021). Then esteem needs which concerns respect and support include recognitions, incentives inform of career growth opportunities, promotion for higher achievers and job security (Khan et al., 2020; Ndungu, 2017). Nonetheless, basing on Maslows' needs, in higher education institutions (HEIs) the needs of the academic staffs go beyond physiological or basic needs which are mostly met by financial rewards. Moreover, the work of the academic staff is not limited to teaching and research productivity but as well involves administration work and community service. Therefore, the relationship between financial rewards and these various activities that the academic staff perform is more than implied. Some monetary rewards such as bonuses may not be sufficient in motivating the academic staffs' performance since the staff are also motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Thus, psychological and self fulfilment needs among others such as professional development, autonomy at work, participation in conferences, recognition, promotion all contribute to academic staffs' performance. Yet Ugandan universities have various challenges such as lack of a consistent PMS with inadequate funding and promotion criteria, workload allocation, and funding, which may affect the value of rewards in motivating academic staffs' performance.

In addition, if organizations are to improve their performance, the rewards given to the employees should be of value. In Arinaitwe's et al. (2024) view there is a need to balance the heavy input of the academic staff in teaching and research with tangible rewards for the effort put in these activities. Additionally, the expectancy theory illustrates that the rewards give should be of value to the employee to impact on their work output and perform to peak (Chiat & Panatik, 2019). Consequently, the employees' decision to perform the job highly depends on the envisaged rewards of their efforts, once the rewards is worth then they will equally put more effort in performing the job (Osafo et al., 2021). Nonetheless, pushing for adequate rewards only does not demonstrate how various reward systems impact these different aspects of academic staffs' performance. In HEIs the expectancy theory alone cannot adequately explain the challenges in the academic staffs' motivation and performance since the academic staff are satisfactorily motivated by intrinsic factors such as work autonomy.

Basing on the equity theory the researcher is of the view that the managers of the academic staffs in Ugandan universities need to balance efforts and rewards to enhance their performance on the job. Once balance is lacking, the academic staff will automatically reduce their input to align with the low rewards. Eventually, when the academic envisage that reward of their output is worth the cost, they will increase their efforts in performing the job. Nonetheless, Adams' equity theory criticizes the idea of fairness in academic staffs' reward system. The theory does not analyze the constraints in rewarding the staff in universities with for example fixed salary scales such as the government salary scales, limited finances, delays in promotions as a result of limited funds. The just mentioned challenges hinder the managers' ability to adequately reward academic staffs' performance in their major activities of teaching, research and service, thus negatively affecting the contribution of rewards in enhancing academic staffs' performance. Additionally, Herzberg's (1956) two factor theory explains the hygiene and motivational factors that enhance employees' performance. According to Mitsakis and Galanakis (2022) motivational factors relate to intrinsic factors such as promotion, recognition, responsibility, achievement and advancement. Then extrinsic factors include bonuses, job security, better working conditions, and interpersonal relationships which can satisfy an employee on the job (Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022). Herzberg's theory demonstrates that motivators which stimulate the academic staff to work efficiently are intrinsic. Such motivators are more appreciated by the academic staff, they include recognition for their achievement from their managers with rewards such as certificates (Wakabi & Balikuddembe, 2024). Then promotion from one ladder to another such as from a lecturer to an associate professor, addition of more responsibility such as a head of department, advancement by enrollment in higher degrees for Masters and PhD programs and attainment of such qualifications. Hezberg's theory is in line with the findings of various scholars such as Mitsakis and Galanakis (2022) who identified promotion, recognition, career advancement and added responsibility as significant motivators for academic staff. However, Herzberg's theory assumes that intrinsic motivators affect performance more than extrinsic rewards. In Ugandan HEIs where the academic staffs' remuneration of salaries is inadequate to cater for their basic needs, and is never paid on time, research funds are limited then financial rewards are still core in determining academic staffs' performance. In summary the literature establishes a theoretical relationship between rewards and academic staffs' performance but demonstrates limited empirical evidence on how various rewards affect the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research skills in Ugandan public and private universities establishing an important knowledge gap that this study seeks to fill.

Academic staffs' performance rewards in universities

In HEIs, rewards play a critical role in motivating academic staff to excel in teaching, research, and community service. The academic staffs engage in teaching, research and community service, hence should be rewarded for their performance in such activities. The academic staffs may receive non-financial rewards which are intrinsic rewards comprising of a study leave, promotion and recognition in form of luncheon and public awards (Ishaka et al., 2025). Intrinsic rewards comprise of job security, praise, achievement, job autonomy, positive feedback, professional training and development opportunities, participation and involvement in decision making for the staff to feel that their views are valued (Ishaka et al., 2025). Mentorship that provides psychological support, regular and timely promotion, appreciation, praise and verbal recognition, public recognition with special awards and certificates of excellence, communal cerebrations, exposure through professional networks all enhance the academic staffs job commitment and performance. The extrinsic rewards for the academic staff include financial rewards like pay rise, bonuses, and fringe benefits in form of paid: study, maternity and paternity leave, sick and adoption leave, vacation, paid holiday, and medical insurance. Then an academic staff may be rewarded with incentives such as extra pay for extra hours taught or research: published, grants and projects won and managed to completion.

Further financial rewards for the academic staff may include housing allowance, retirement benefits that include pension and gratuity based on monthly income or a 13th or 14th months which is a bonus, which is a full extra month's salary (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice [EC/EACEA/Eurydice], 2023). The allowances for: school fees for a number of biological children, transport and holiday allowances. Then incentives for working under hardship such as teaching in remote, hard to reach and war ravaged areas, specialized subjects, or living in high-cost urban centers or cash for carrying out experiments or using certain digital equipment (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023). In addition, financial rewards may be awarded for obtaining additional qualifications such as a master's degree and a PhD. Then bonuses could be given for outstanding performance in research and being given extra responsibilities as heads of departments, coordinators of programs, coming up with some innovations. However, the literature provides several financial and non-financial rewards for academic staff but does not provide empirical evidence on how such rewards enhances teaching and research activities of the academic staff most especially its relevance to Ugandan universities, thus the need to investigate the effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research in Ugandan public and private universities.

Rewards and academic staffs' performance in universities

Effective rewards system balances financial, and non-financial rewards when compensating employees on the job to increase their performance and that of the entire organization (Khan et al., 2021). Thus an effective reward system that concurrently utilized both financial and non-financial rewards motivates the academic staffs to perform effectively on their job. Lourenço (2016) suggested that feedback and praise are more effective when combined with monetary rewards with appropriate benefits such as health insurance, job security and increased salary. Ndugu (2017) found that increased financial rewards supported with intrinsic rewards such as recognition, praise and appreciation improved work motivation and job performance of the academic staff in a Kenyan public university. Turk and Killumets (2014) asserted that the academic staffs in Estonian universities had a view that universities should take on a variety of non-financial rewards. The academic staffs believed that their performance would be enhanced when there was an integration between PMS and the promotion system which the institution lacked. Basing on the views of the just mentioned scholars the researcher is of the view that the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research was increased when the managers used both financial and non-financial rewards to compensate the academic staffs' efforts on their job. The contributions of rewards to organizations is analyzed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Contribution Made by a Reward System

1	Recognizes and appreciates employees for displaying the desired performance behavior
2	Managers express appreciation to employees for attaining the set goals
3	Employees learn that their managers value their efforts and contribution to the organization
4	Attracts and retains employees with the right training, skills and competences. High pay leads to stability on one job, low pay is a source of burnout and facilities intentions to leave an organization
5	Financial pressure leads employees to hold more than one job, eventually perform tasks with a divided focus
6	Maintains the employee's enthusiasm and task commitment at work to attain the set rewards
7	Intrinsic rewards are psychological, they lead to positive work behavior, an employee is more focused on task completion, keen, less stressed and destructive and engages in extra work activities on the job.
8	Linking pay to qualifications encourages employees to develop their skills and embrace use of new pedagogies and technology

Source: Reviewed Literature 2026

Table 1 demonstrates that when efforts are efficiently rewarded with intrinsic and extrinsic rewards the employees are more committed to their work activities in the organization. Organizations use rewards to recognize employees with outstanding performance, attract, motivate and retain the best performing staff on the job. Additionally, Isyaka et al. (2025) in their study of non-financial motivational factors as determinants of academic staffs' performance of Nigerian states universities, found that recognition supported a sense of enhanced self-esteem besides having a positive relationship with the academic staffs' performance. That when the academic staff are not recognized for their efforts in their core activities of teaching and research they come to be less dedicated on their job and produce low quality services to the students as well as the entire institution (Isyaka et al., 2025). The study recommended that universities should put in place a formal and clear recognition programs to reward the efforts of the academic staff, enhance their morale, and loyalty on the job (Isyaka et al., 2025, p. 298). Nevertheless, Ziryawulawo (2023) and Isyaka et al. (2025) observed that recognition positively influences academic staffs' performance but did not analyze how recognition interrelates with other PM practices like compensation of performance leaving a gap to establish how recognition influences academic staffs' performance in teaching and research in Ugandan universities.

Methodology

This study utilised a quantitative approach to collect quantitative data and a cross-sectional survey research design in collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. A survey was conducted by administering an online structured questionnaire to collect quantitative data on the level of utilization of rewards in Ugandan public and private universities. Data was collected from 405 full time and part time academic staff from seven public and private universities across the four regions of Uganda namely, the Northern, Eastern, Central and Western region. A survey research design supported collection and analysis of statistical data from a large population of the sample of the academic staffs in Ugandan public and private universities. The staff included professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and assistant lecturers who engage in both teaching and research. Purposive sampling method was used to select the universities for this study and non-probability convenience sampling was based to sample the academic staff on their availability. Hence, quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The analyzed data was descriptive in which a summary of results was presented using the averages, mean, median, standard divination for each objective (Kivunja, 2017). To establish the degree of correlation between academic staffs' rewards and their performance in teaching and research, a Pearson product-moment correlation was determined. Ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdrawal from the study were observed throughout the study. The researcher acquired permission from the university secretaries of the surveyed institutions and the consent of the participants to participate in this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Then, the researcher gave the participants adequate information regarding the study and gave them the opportunity to decide to participate or not to participate in the study by accepting to sign the consent letter. In order to ensure anonymity, participants were not required to state either the names, and personal details or those of their institutions, and faculties where they are designated, anywhere on the questionnaire. And the process of analysing, interpreting and presenting the information did not publicise the name of the institutions and participants' responses.

Findings and analysis

The study assessed the effectiveness of performance rewards of the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research in Ugandan public and private universities. Twelve questions relevant to performance rewards were asked to establish the effectiveness of rewards of the academic staffs in teaching and research in Ugandan HEIs. To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to analyze the academic staffs' perception of their rewards in teaching and research in Ugandan HEIs. Then hypotheses testing was used to assess the effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in the Ugandan universities. The questions were formulated around financial and non-financial rewards.

The academic staffs' perception on the level of utilization of performance rewards in Ugandan public and private universities

Results from descriptive analysis of the academic staffs' perception of the level of utilization of the rewards are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Academic staffs' performance rewards

Item	Public				Private			
	No		Yes		No		Yes	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Performance-related pay	163	66.5%	82	33.5%	98	61.2%	62	38.8%
Salary increment	140	57.1%	105	42.9%	106	66.2%	54	33.8%
Additional pay to the basic salary increases	164	66.9%	81	33.1%	103	64.4%	57	35.6%
Bonuses	193	78.8%	52	21.2%	116	72.5%	44	27.5%
Leave entitlement	153	62.4%	92	37.6%	93	58.1%	67	41.9%
Conference leave	163	66.5%	82	33.5%	106	66.2%	54	33.8%
Conference travel	151	61.6%	94	38.4%	100	62.5%	60	37.5%
Promotion leading to the higher pay increase	113	46.1%	132	53.9%	81	50.6%	79	49.4%
Appropriate recognition for my contribution	141	57.6%	104	42.4%	90	56.2%	70	43.8%

Informal praise (well done, thank you)	75	30.6%	170	69.4%	41	25.6%	119	74.4%
Formal praise (certificate)	178	72.7%	67	27.3%	92	57.5%	68	42.5%
New responsibility	112	45.7%	133	54.3%	68	42.5%	92	57.5%

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Regarding the question of the financial rewards the academic staffs in public universities, majority (66.5%) indicated that they did not receive performance related pay, whereas a few numbers (33.5%) showed that they received performance related pay. In comparison, a significant number (61.2%) of the academic staffs from private universities indicated that they did not receive performance related pay, while a few (38.8%) indicated that they received performance related pay. The results of the study implied that majority of the academic staffs in both public and private universities did not receive performance related pay rewards.

On the issue of salary increment, a reasonable number (57.1%) of the academic staffs in public universities did not receive a salary increment, whereas a few (42.9%) of the academic staffs received a salary increment. However, 66.2% of the academic staffs in private universities did not receive a salary increment compared to majority (33.8%) who received a salary increment. These findings showed that majority of the academic staffs from both public and private universities did not receive a salary increment. In addition, a significant number (66.9%) of the academic staffs in public universities never received additional pay to the basic salary increase, whereas 33.1% received the pay. A significant number (64.4%) of the academic staffs in private universities did not receive an additional pay, while 35.6% received the pay. Although more academic staffs in private universities indicated that they did not receive any additional pay to the basic salary increase, both universities show a few academic staffs receiving additional pay to the basic salary increase. Similarly, a large number (78.8%) of the academic staffs in public universities were not given any bonuses, while a small number (21.2%) received bonuses. The same applies to the academic staffs in private universities where majority (72.5%) did not receive any bonuses, whereas 27.5% got bonuses. The results of the study indicate that more academic staffs in public universities never received any extra bonuses compared to their counter parts in private universities. The findings of the study suggested that the majority of the academic staffs in both private and public institutions never received any additional bonus pay to the basic salary. Nonetheless, as a result of being assigned a new responsibility the academic staffs earned an extra pay on their salary. On the contrary, the academic staffs did not receive performance related pay rewards, a bonus and salary increment.

On the questions of leave entitlement, a large number (62.4%) of the academic staffs in public universities never received a leave entitlement, while a few (37.6%) of the academic staffs received a leave entitlement. In comparison with a significant number (58.1%) of the academic staffs in private universities did not receive leave entitlement, whereas many academic staffs (41.9%) received a leave entitlement. The findings of the study implied that a reasonable number of the academic staffs in both public and private universities received a leave entitlement. Regarding conference leave, a significant number (66.5%) of the academic staffs in public universities were not considered for conference leave, while a few (33.5%) received conference leave. Nearly the same number in private universities (66.2%) did not get any conference leave, while 33.8% received conference leave. Although majority of the academic staffs in both public and private institutions never received conference leave, a reasonable number indicated that they did receive the conference leave. When it comes to conference travel, still majority of the academic staffs in public universities (61.6%) were not considered for conference travel while, a small number (38.4%) indicated that they received a conference travel. Whereas, a significant number (62.5%) of the academic staffs in private universities never received the conference leave compared to a few (37.5%) who received a conference travel. The findings of the study therefore showed that a few of the academic staffs in both public and private institutions received a conference travel.

On the issue of promotion, a reasonable number (46.1%) of the academic staffs in public universities never received promotion that led to higher pay increase, whereas a large number (53.9%) of the academic staffs were promoted to have their pay increased. It is then indicated that a half (50.6%) of the academic staffs in private universities did not gain promotion, while 49.4% got promotion. The results of the study suggested that a significant number of the academic staffs were promoted on the job, and the promotion for instance from the status of a lecturer to a senior lecturer, associate professor to a professor, led to increased pay on their salary.

On the question of the academic staffs' appropriate recognition for their contribution, 57.6% of the academic staffs in public universities were not recognized for their contribution, while a large number (42.4%) received recognition for their contribution. Most of the academic staffs (56.2%) in private universities never received appropriate recognition for their contribution, whereas 43.8% received recognition. The results indicate that a few of the academic staffs did receive some form of recognition for their contribution while many in both public and private institutions were not recognized. Only 30.6% of the academic staffs in public universities never received any informal praise such as a thank you, whereas a significant number (69.4%) only received a thank you. In contrast, a small number (25.6%) of the academic staffs in private universities never received any praise, while a large number (74.4%) received the informal praise. The results indicated that a large number of the academic staffs in both universities received a form of informal appraisal. Regarding the question of formal praise, a large number (72.7%) of the academic staffs in public universities never received formal praise while, a small number (27.3%) received a formal praise in form of a certificate. In contrast with a reasonable percentage (42.5%) of the academic staffs in private universities who never received a formal certificate in appreciation of their performance while, most of the academic staffs (57.5%) received the formal praise. The results of the study suggested that majority of the academic staffs in public universities never received formal recognition for their contribution compared to a good number of the academic staffs who received formal appreciation in private universities. Therefore, regarding the financial and non-financial rewards for the academic staffs in the selected Ugandan universities, majority of the staffs did not receive a financial reward such as a salary increment and a formal recognition for outstanding performance.

On the issue of new responsibility, a reasonable number (45.7%) of the academic staffs in public universities never received any new responsibility, while many of the academic staffs (54.3%) received new responsibility that was backed up with rewards for their performance. On the contrary, 42.5% of the academic staffs in private universities received new responsibility compared to (57.5%) that never received any new responsibility. Although a reasonable number of the academic staffs in both public and private universities indicated receiving new responsibility, there is still a significant number that never received any new responsibility.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the factors within performance rewards

Factor	No. of items	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
C6	12	41.56	41.67	29.65	0.00	100.00

Source: Primary data, 2023

Results from Table 3 show the mean value of the academic staffs' rewards. The mean value of performance rewards, was 41.56%, indicating that, on average, the academic staffs had received fewer than half of the listed performance rewards. The minimum was 0% which implied that some academic staffs had received none of the listed performance rewards. The descriptive statistics for the factors within rewards are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Factor scores in performance rewards

Factor	Low		Medium		High	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
C6	199	47.1	105	28.9	101	24.9

Source: Primary Data, 2023

Regarding the academic staffs' performance rewards, 47.1% of the academic staffs had received fewer than 33% of the available performance rewards, 28.9% received between 33% and 67% of the available rewards, whereas 24.9% had received more than 67% of the available rewards. The results of the study suggested that the academic staffs' performance rewards were low. This suggested that the academic staffs' managers in the surveyed institutions did not use a variety of performance rewards to compensate for the academic staffs' performance.

Effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in Ugandan public and private universities

The summary of the interpretation from the testing of the hypotheses on the effect of performance rewards on the academic staffs' performance at Ugandan public and private universities are presented in Table 5. On the issue of the effect of rewards in public and private universities, a Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between academic staffs' performance rewards and teaching skills at public universities. The results are presented in Table 5. However, the correlation was not statistically significant for public universities (r = 0.005, n = 245, p = 0.936), and for public universities (r = 0.037, n = 160, p = 0.642). The findings rejected the alternative hypothesis and accepted the null hypothesis that performance rewards did not positively affect the academic staffs' performance in teaching skills in both Ugandan public and private universities. Thus, rewards did not enhance teaching skills at Ugandan public and private universities.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between academic staffs' performance rewards and perceived teaching abilities at public and private universities. However, the correlation was not statistically significant for public universities (r = 0.087, n = 245, p = 0.176), and the correlation was statistically significant for public universities (r = 0.201, n = 160, p = 0.011). The findings rejected the alternative hypothesis and accepted the null hypothesis that performance rewards did not positively affect the academic staffs' performance in perceived teaching abilities in Ugandan public universities. Thus rewards did not increase academic staffs' teaching abilities in Ugandan public universities. Then the findings rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis that performance rewards positively affect the academic staffs' performance in perceived teaching abilities in Ugandan private universities. Thus, rewards improved academic staffs perceived teaching abilities at Ugandan private universities.

Table 5: Summary of the interpretation from the hypotheses testing

Performance Rewards	Teaching and Research	Institution	N	R	p-value	Effect size	Decision
Rewards	Teaching skills	Public	245	0.005	0.936	Not Applicable	No significant positive effect
		Private	160	0.037	0.642	Not Applicable	No significant positive effect
	Perceived teaching ability	Public	245	0.087	0.176	Not applicable	No Significant positive effect
		Private	160	0.201	0.011	Strong	Significant positive effect
	Research skills	Public	245	0.247	<0.001*	Not Applicable	No significant positive effect
		Private	160	0.169	0.032	Not Applicable	No significant positive effect

Source: Primary Data, 2023

A Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between academic staffs' performance rewards and research skills at public universities. There was a small, positive correlation between performance rewards and research skills, which was statistically significant for public universities (r = 0.247, n = 245, p < 0.001) and for private universities (r = 0.169, n = 160, p = 0.032). The findings accepted the null hypothesis and rejected the alternative hypothesis that performance rewards did not positively affect the academic staffs' performance in research skills in Ugandan public universities. Thus, the results indicated that rewards did not improve academic staffs' performance in research skills at Ugandan public and private universities.

Discussion of results

The academic staffs' perception on the level of utilization of performance rewards in Ugandan public and private universities

Employees' levels of motivation and performance are likely to increase when they are recognized for their efforts in form of rewards. Nonetheless, in this study descriptive results suggested that the academic staffs' managers in the surveyed institutions did not use a variety of performance rewards to compensate for the academic staffs' performance. This suggests that the managers of the academic staffs in the selected Ugandan HEIs did not effectively use both financial and non-financial rewards to compensate the academic staffs' efforts and motivate them to increase their performance in teaching and research. For example, the average factor score showed that 49.1% of the academic staffs had received less than half of the listed performance rewards and some had received none.

In addition, the results of the study indicated that majority of the academic staffs in both public and private universities did not receive performance related pay rewards. In support of the performance for pay rewards He and Callahani (2017) revealed that in the universities of Florida in the USA when performance was linked to pay, it created a strong motivation for the managers as well as the academic staffs to work harder to improve on the institution's performance and their pay. The improved work motivation and productivity of the employees on their job due to increased pay as a result of being paid according to their performance (Khan et al., 2017). Therefore, in the surveyed institutions, the academic staffs' performance was never linked to pay, hence both work motivation, and productivity were likely to be low due to lack of a fair reward system that was based on performance.

On the issue of salary increment a significant number of the academic staff in both institutions public and private did not receive a salary increment, and any additional bonus pay to the basic salary. The academic staffs that received an additional payment to the basic salary were as a result of being assigned a new responsibility that earned them extra pay and increment on their salary. The findings support the study by Kampkötter and Marggraf (2015) who supported the argument that lack of monetary consequences makes performance assessment and feedback not to be taken seriously as they are not linked to pay.
Mbukwana and Ayandibu (2023) in the study of performance incentives on employees' performance in the university of KwaZulu Natal observed that employees at the university could not be inspired to work harder in the absence of monetary rewards for meeting the set targets. The results of the study implied that the absence of monetary rewards leads to low motivation of the academic staff to perform on their job efficiently.

Further, the results of the study showed that a significant number of the academic staffs never received promotion, for instance from the status of a lecturer to a senior lecturer, associate professor to a professor, thus not leading to increased pay on their salary. The findings confirmed Srimal and Radford (2013) who observed that since promotion was not as frequent as pay for performance it would bear a significant impact on employees' performance. The study further argued that promotion is appreciated by many employees because it added to their prestige most especially when accompanied by an increment in pay. Thus, promotion that led to a higher pay for the academic staffs in the selected institutions would enhance their performance on the job, unfortunately was not received by majority of the academic staff in the surveyed institutions.

Nonetheless, majority of the academic staffs did not receive a formal recognition for their effort such as a certificate. Musenze et al. (2013) confirmed that employees will increase their effort once rewarded with recognition such as certificates. Wakabi and Balikuddembe (2024) supported the idea of recognitions where they found that the academic staff in Ugandan universities increased their efforts and performance when their performance was recognized with certificates, awards and formal appreciation. The findings are consistent with Herzberg's theory which demonstrates that motivators which stimulate employees to work efficiently are intrinsic they include recognition for their achievement from their managers (Mitsakis &Galanakis, 2022). Intrinsic motivators such as certificates to recognize outstanding performance would attract the academic staffs in the selected institutions to increase their effort on the job (Wakabi & Balikuddembe, 2024). Again the study showed that a reasonable number of the academic staffs in both public and private universities never received a leave entitlement like a conference leave and travel. The findings are consistent with those of Akhter et al. (2016, p. 565) who emphasized that if an employee is doing good, then holidays, formal and informal recognition are their rights to improve their job satisfaction. Thus, the academic staffs in the surveyed institutions would derive job satisfaction from resting from their daily work activities if they were granted a leave.

Regarding the use of financial and non-financial rewards, majority of the academic staffs from the surveyed institutions did not receive a financial reward and any new responsibility for outstanding performance which would lead to an additional pay. Mohamed, Matan and Farah (2025) confirmed that organizations that use a blend of both monetary and non-monetary rewards reported higher organizational support and greater performance outcomes than those that used either of the two rewards. Locke and Latham (2002) observed that financial rewards mean more monetary gains and this creates more commitment to achieve the set goals. A fair wage alone which is not accompanied by other kinds of rewards cannot satisfy employees and improve work performance (Turk, 2016). Thus, non-monetary incentives are essential in bridging the inadequacies of monetary incentive in terms of fulfilling needs of feeling of self-esteem and worth and self-actualization such as feeling of achievement and autonomy. Thus in Ugandan universities, the use of both financial and non-financial rewards are paramount in influencing the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research.

The descriptive results from Table 3 showed that the average score of the use of performance rewards among the academic staff in the surveyed institutions was typically low with an average of 41.556%. The results indicated that, on average, the academic staffs had received fewer than half of the listed performance rewards. Then the minimum was 0% which implied that some academic staffs had received none of the listed performance rewards. The results imply that both public and private universities did not continuously apply a comprehensive reward system that combined both financial and non-financial rewards to recognize the performance of the academic staffs in teaching and research. Mohamed et al. (2025) asserted that organizations that use a combination of both monetary and non-monetary rewards registered better performance results than those that used either of the two rewards. Eventually, the low level of rewards is likely to have significantly impacted on the academic staffs' performance negatively.

In addition, the descriptive statistics presented in Table 4 regarding factor scores of the academic staffs' performance rewards, 47.1% of the academic staffs had received fewer than 33% of the available performance rewards, 28.9% received between 33% and 67% of the available rewards, whereas 24.9% had received more than 67% of the available rewards. The results of the study suggested that the academic staffs' performance rewards were low. This suggested that the academic staffs' managers in the surveyed institutions did not use a variety of performance rewards to compensate for the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research.

Effectiveness of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in Ugandan public and private universities

Regarding the effect of rewards on the academic staffs' performance in public and private universities, results from correlations indicated that rewards did not significantly enhance teaching skills at Ugandan public and private universities. Therefore, the academic staffs teaching skills like lesson attendance, classroom management, use of variety of teaching methods and materials, the quality of tests, assignment and examinations were low. These findings suggest that insufficient and unreliable performance reward system was inadequate to motivate the academic staffs to improve their teaching skills. Most of the academic staff did not receive a large number of the performance-related pay such as salary increments and bonuses and appropriate recognition for their contributions. Therefore, rewards were not likely to serve as significant incentives for improving teaching skills.

Again, the findings indicated that rewards did not increase academic staffs' teaching abilities in Ugandan public universities such as course design skills, training in pedagogy, setting, administering and marking tests, assignments and examinations, making corrections after marking and adhering to the deadlines of administering tests and assignments. Nonetheless, performance rewards improved academic staffs perceived teaching abilities at Ugandan private universities. The results imply that private universities utilized more performance related rewards such as moderate financial incentives which positively impacted on their performance in teaching abilities.

In addition, the results indicated that rewards did not improve academic staffs' performance in research skills at Ugandan public universities. This finding implies that the absence of research-related incentives did not have a significant positive effect on academic staffs' research skills, such as publications, winning a research grant and managing research projects, presenting a paper in a conference and attending workshops, supervising and assessing colleagues and students' research. The results are consistent with the findings of Injikuru et al. (2024) and Rwothumio et al. (2020) who found that rewards had a weak positive relationship with academic staffs' performance in research output in Ugandan public universities. Therefore, the academic staffs were less motivated to devote more effort to research activities due to less rewards for research activities. Thus, the findings suggest that inadequate and unpredictable delivery of performance rewards by the academic staffs' managers in the surveyed institutions rendered rewards to be ineffective in improving the academic staffs' performance in teaching and research activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

Regarding the academic staffs' perception on the level of utilization of performance rewards in Ugandan public and private universities the descriptive results showed that the academic staffs' managers in the surveyed Ugandan HEIs did not use a variety of performance rewards to compensate for the staffs' performance. Most of the academic staffs did not receive half of the listed performance rewards. The study concluded that the managers of the academic staffs in the selected Ugandan HEIs did not effectively use both financial and non-financial rewards to compensate the staffs' efforts and motivate them to increase their performance in teaching and research.

The results of the study showed that rewards had a significant impact on the perceived teaching abilities of the academic staffs in private universities (p=0.011) not for public universities. Thus, the study suggested that the more rewards, the more academic staffs' teaching abilities in private universities improved. Therefore, the study concluded that for the academic staffs' reward system to effectively improve their performance in teaching skills, abilities and research skills, university managers should utilize a variety of financial and non-financial rewards. Therefore, the study recommended that the academic staffs' managers should put in place a comprehensive performance-based reward system that incorporate both financial and non-financial rewards and align rewards to quantifiable performance outcomes in the academic staffs' core activities of teaching, research, administration and community service to increase the staffs' performance. Better rewards are likely to motivate the academic staffs with poor performance to improve their performance to attain the set rewards, and those with outstanding performance are likely to maintain their performance to attain the set rewards.

Implications and applications of a reward system

In Ugandan HEIs, the academic staffs will seek to work in universities where both monetary and non-monetary rewards are well utilized to compensate their efforts. Rewards serve as a motivation to the academic staff to increase their efforts in their work activities of teaching and research. Compensating the academic staffs' efforts with rewards such as promotion and salary increment compels the staff to increase their performance as a result of motivation from an increased pay and wanting more increment in future. The academic staffs who miss out on the increment will work harder to earn the said pay. In this regard when management puts in place a clear structured rewarding system that is impartial in compensating the academic staffs' efforts, the staffs' job satisfaction is likely to be enhanced and consequently their performance increased. Moreover, a transparent reward system enables the managers of the academic staffs to make proper decisions on performance. Competitive rewards that are equivalent to the academic staffs' performance will entice the staff to stay longer on their job thus the universities will be able to retain the most talented staff, eventually enhancing the reputation and ranking of the institutions nationally and internationally.

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