

DIGITAL OUTCAST AND TEACHERS COMMITMENT IN GOVERNMENT-OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study determined the relationship between digital outcast and teacher's commitment in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria. The explanatory cross sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted twenty-four thousand, seven hundred and ninety (24790) teaching staff across twenty-two (22) government-owned universities across the six (6) South-South States in Nigeria. After the application of Taro Yamene formula, the sample size of the study was three hundred and ninety-four (394) teaching staff across twenty-two (22) government-owned universities across the six (6) South-South States in Nigeria. After validation by the supervisors and two other experts in the Department of Office and Information Management, Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument. A total of three hundred and ninety-four (394) copies of the questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researcher with the help of two research assistants and 352 copies were retrieved. The univariate analysis was carried out using mean and standard deviation, while the bivariate analysis was done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation in SPSS version 27.0. The Partial Correlation was used to run the multivariate analysis. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used in testing the hypotheses one to nine, while hypothesis ten was tested using Partial Correlations. The findings revealed that a significant positive relationship exists between dimensions of digital fluency, such as digital natives, digital immigrants, and digital outcasts and measures of teaching staff performance in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria, such as teaching effectiveness, research output/publications, and teaching commitment. The study concluded that sustained investment in digital infrastructure, continuous staff technological development, and inclusive digital transformation policies are essential for enhancing teaching staff performance and advancing the global competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability of government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria. Hence, it was recommended amongst others that the management of universities in South-South, Nigeria should establish advanced digital innovation hubs within faculties to encourage digitally fluent lecturers to develop technology-driven teaching models, virtual research collaborations, and multimedia instructional resources that can further enhance teaching effectiveness and research productivity.

Keywords: Digital Outcast, Teachers Commitment, Government -owned University, Digital Infrastructure

Introduction

Addressing these challenges requires strengthening digital fluency, which refers to lecturers' ability to confidently and creatively use digital tools for teaching, research, and administration (Fulgence, 2020). It encompasses digital natives, who are naturally skilled with technology; digital immigrants, who adapt with moderate competence; and digital outcasts, who struggle to keep up. Lecturers with higher digital fluency can design more interactive learning environments, engage students effectively, and manage academic tasks efficiently (Karimu & Ishola, 2024). For instance, they can use learning management systems to streamline grading, online databases to enhance research output, and virtual platforms to strengthen academic collaboration (Wordu et al., 2021). Chigbata and Etudor-Eyo (2025) further noted that developing digital research skills enhances academic productivity and global visibility. Therefore, the persistent issues of poor teaching effectiveness, low research productivity, and weak commitment among teaching staff in the South-South region may

be linked to limited digital fluency. This calls for an empirical investigation into how digital fluency (examining digital natives, digital immigrants, and digital outcasts) relates with teaching staff performance in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Also, it seems there is a noticeable paucity of empirical research on how digital fluency relates with teaching staff performance of lecturers in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria. Although some studies have examined related areas, the specific relationship between digital fluency and staff performance remains underexplored. For instance, Opara and Onyeri (2023) studied digital citizenship behaviour and job effectiveness of lecturers in South-South Nigeria, showing that responsible use of digital tools enhances job efficiency but did not extend to research output or teaching commitment. Similarly, Karimu and Ishola (2024) investigated digital transformation and effective teaching in South-West Nigerian universities, finding that technology improves teaching delivery, yet their focus was limited to pedagogical transformation. Chigbata and Etudor-Eyo (2025) examined digital research skills and job performance of academics, emphasizing the value of digital proficiency for research productivity but not for teaching efficiency. Likewise, Wordu et al. (2021) explored digital literacy and teachers' job performance in Rivers State, revealing low digital competence as a barrier to effective instruction, though their study did not approach digital fluency holistically. Finally, Fulgence (2020) highlighted the need to develop digital fluency among teacher educators in Tanzania but did not address its contextual relevance to Nigeria's university system.

It is evident that while the above studies share conceptual alignment with the present research, none has specifically examined the relationship between digital fluency, conceptualized through digital natives, digital immigrants, and digital outcasts, and teaching staff performance in terms of teaching effectiveness, research output/publications, and teaching commitment within government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria. The gap lies in the absence of empirical evidence linking the distinct levels of digital fluency among lecturers to measurable indicators of performance in this unique educational context. Moreover, prior studies have largely emphasized digital literacy, ICT adoption, or digital transformation without considering the generational and behavioural nuances of digital fluency as a multidimensional construct (Edo & Egwurugwu, 2023; Amaewhule & Nwadike, 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this empirical void by systematically investigating how varying degrees of digital fluency influence teaching staff performance in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria, an inquiry that promises to provide fresh insights into the evolving digital demands of higher education in the 21st century.

Research Hypothesis

The null hypothesis will be tested at 0.05 level of significance in the course of the study.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between digital outcasts and teacher's commitment in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Digital Outcasts

Digital outcasts refer to individuals who, for various reasons, are excluded from or struggle to access the benefits of digital technologies. In the context of government-owned universities, digital outcasts are often students, faculty, and staff who face challenges in fully participating in the digital age. This exclusion may be due to factors such as limited access to the internet, outdated technological infrastructure, digital illiteracy, socio-economic constraints, or a lack of support in adapting to digital tools. As a result, digital outcasts are unable to engage with the digital resources, communication platforms, and educational tools that are increasingly central to academic success in today's higher education environment. The term "digital outcast" is used to describe people who have been left behind in the digital divide, a concept first introduced by digital scholars to reflect the growing disparity between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. According to Prensky (2001), the digital divide refers to the gap between individuals who can effectively use

digital tools and those who cannot. Digital outcasts, as a result of this divide, are at a disadvantage in navigating the increasingly digital landscape of education. They are often unable to access online resources, participate in e-learning platforms, or collaborate effectively with their peers in digital environments.

Bennet et al. (2008) extend this definition, noting that digital outcasts are often individuals who may have access to digital technologies but are unable to use them effectively due to a lack of digital skills or familiarity. This lack of competence leads to their exclusion from key aspects of modern education, such as online research, communication, and participation in digital classrooms. Their exclusion from digital spaces makes it difficult for them to compete on an equal footing with their peers, who are typically more comfortable and adept at using technology in their learning. The digital outcast phenomenon is also closely tied to socio-economic factors. Tapscott (2009) emphasizes that the ability to access digital technologies is often determined by financial means, which means that individuals in lower-income households or those attending underfunded institutions may face barriers to digital inclusion. In Nigerian government-owned universities, where funding for digital infrastructure is often limited, many students struggle to afford personal devices such as laptops, smartphones, or tablets, and may have difficulty accessing high-speed internet. This lack of access to necessary technology creates a situation where students become digital outcasts, unable to benefit from the technological advancements that are increasingly integral to the academic experience. A key aspect of digital outcasts in Nigerian universities is the lack of digital literacy. According to Jones and Shao (2011), digital literacy refers to the skills necessary to use digital tools effectively and critically. For many students and staff in government-owned universities in the South-South region, there is a significant gap in digital literacy, which limits their ability to engage with modern educational resources, tools, and platforms. This gap is particularly problematic for students who are expected to use online learning management systems (LMS), conduct research using digital databases, and engage in digital collaboration for assignments and group projects.

Bennett and Maton (2010) highlight that digital outcasts are often excluded not just from access to technology, but from the knowledge and cultural capital associated with being able to effectively navigate the digital world. In universities, this exclusion has significant consequences, as digital technologies become a primary means of communication between students, instructors, and administrative staff. For those unable to access or use these tools, their academic experience is significantly diminished, and they may miss out on essential information, announcements, and academic opportunities that are shared digitally. A crucial characteristic of digital outcasts is their inability to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change. According to Selwyn (2009), digital outcasts tend to be individuals who are resistant to or overwhelmed by the constant influx of new digital tools and technologies. In the fast-evolving digital world, staying up to date with the latest tools, platforms, and online resources can be a challenge, particularly for individuals who were not introduced to these technologies early on. In Nigerian universities, where digital resources and tools are continuously introduced but where training is often insufficient, this becomes a major issue for those left behind. Another factor contributing to the digital outcast phenomenon is the underdeveloped digital infrastructure in many Nigerian universities. According to Adeniran and Olatunji (2020), many universities in the South-South region struggle with inadequate access to high-speed internet, outdated hardware, and insufficient technical support. These infrastructural limitations prevent many students and faculty members from fully engaging with digital platforms and tools, reinforcing their status as digital outcasts. This lack of infrastructure also limits the scope for digital engagement and innovation in the classroom, as both students and educators may struggle to use digital tools effectively.

Teaching Commitment

Teaching commitment represents the level of dedication and passion faculty members demonstrate toward their teaching responsibilities. It encompasses the academic and emotional engagement of lecturers with their students and the wider academic community. According to Johnson (2021),

teaching commitment refers to the behaviors, attitudes, and actions exhibited by educators that reflect their dedication to effective teaching, student engagement, and continuous professional development. In Nigerian universities, particularly in the South-South region, where challenges such as inadequate resources and large class sizes prevail, teaching commitment plays a critical role in enhancing the quality of education and promoting student success. Teaching commitment is closely related to the level of engagement that faculty members show toward their professional responsibilities. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), commitment is characterized by faculty involvement in various aspects of teaching, including course planning, active student interaction, and professional growth. In Nigerian universities, the commitment of faculty members extends beyond simply delivering lectures; it includes mentoring students, engaging in research that improves teaching practices, and contributing to the academic community through peer collaboration. This broader conceptualization of teaching commitment ensures that students benefit not only from structured academic content but also from the mentorship and guidance needed for their personal and professional development. The importance of teaching commitment in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria cannot be overstated. First, it directly impacts student learning outcomes. According to a study by Hattie and Zierer (2018), teaching quality, driven by the commitment of faculty, is one of the most significant factors influencing student achievement. Faculty members who invest in developing engaging and relevant course content, create interactive learning experiences, and provide meaningful feedback enhance the chances of student success. In the South-South region, where many students face socio-economic challenges, teaching commitment provides the necessary academic support to help them overcome barriers and excel in their studies.

Moreover, teaching commitment is essential for fostering a culture of lifelong learning among students. According to Collinson (2017), when educators are committed to their teaching, they motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning, thus encouraging them to become active learners rather than passive recipients of information. In Nigerian universities, particularly those in the South-South region, teaching commitment promotes an academic environment that nurtures curiosity and critical thinking, both of which are necessary for students to succeed in a globalized knowledge economy. According to Mena and Okojie (2020), ongoing professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, and access to new teaching tools, enhance faculty commitment to teaching. However, many universities in the South-South region struggle to provide sufficient professional development programs due to inadequate funding and institutional constraints. This gap in professional development opportunities limits faculty members' ability to stay updated on the latest educational trends, which may, in turn, affect their teaching commitment.

According to Tinto (2017), the commitment of faculty members is strengthened when institutions offer adequate support in terms of resources, working conditions, and recognition. In government-owned universities in the South-South region, faculty often face challenges such as outdated teaching materials, large class sizes, and insufficient classroom space. These factors can negatively affect faculty members' commitment to teaching. By improving infrastructure, providing better teaching materials, and creating a more supportive academic environment, institutions can foster greater teaching commitment. According to Njoku et al. (2021), universities that emphasize a culture of research, student success, and faculty development tend to promote higher levels of teaching commitment. However, in many Nigerian universities, including those in the South-South region, faculty members often face competing demands on their time, such as administrative duties and the pressure to publish. These competing demands can detract from their ability to fully engage with their teaching roles. To mitigate this issue, universities in the region must create a more balanced workload for their faculty, allowing them to focus on teaching while also engaging in other academic activities. According to Astin (2018), when faculty members demonstrate a high level of commitment to teaching, students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the academic community, which in turn improves their motivation to persist in their studies. In

Nigerian universities, where drop-out rates can be high due to financial constraints and other personal challenges, the support and dedication shown by lecturers can make a significant difference in helping students stay on track and complete their education. The social and economic context of the South-South region, where issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure are prevalent, poses additional challenges to teaching commitment. Faculty members often work in challenging conditions that may affect their morale and engagement with students. According to Okebukola (2020), faculty in Nigerian universities are often underpaid and overburdened with administrative duties, which can detract from their commitment to teaching. While these challenges may be difficult to overcome, faculty members in the South-South region often demonstrate resilience and creativity by finding ways to maintain their teaching commitment despite these obstacles.

Person-Environment Fit Theory (Lewin and Edwards, 1962)

Lewin and Edwards' Person-Environment Fit Theory was popularized in 1962. This theory of psychological stress describes the interaction between the person and environment ($P \times E$) as the key to comprehending people's cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions such as stress as well as operational productivity level. The relevant assumptions of this theory as deemed fit for this work are as follows:

- i. A mismatch between a person and his work environment will lead to tension and uneasiness capable of hampering his level of productivity;
- ii. Worker's capabilities (skill sets) will determine the level of work pressure and how environmental press affects their output. This is the phase of the theory that strengthens the fact that the innovative ability of a lecturer will influence how stressful the work will be, as well as determine their ability to raise the competitive bar of the institution.

Implications of Person-Environment Fit Theory to the Present Study

The implication of Person-Environment Fit Theory for this study lies in explaining how alignment between lecturers' digital fluency and the technological demands of government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria shapes teaching staff performance. Drawing from Lewin's (1951) proposition that behaviour is a function of the interaction between the person and the environment, the theory suggests that optimal outcomes occur when individual competencies match environmental expectations. In increasingly digitalized universities, where learning management systems, online research databases, and virtual collaboration tools structure academic work, digitally fluent staff are more likely to demonstrate stronger teaching effectiveness, higher research output/publications, and greater teaching commitment because their skills align with institutional demands. Conversely, digital outcasts may experience reduced effectiveness due to misfit. Empirical evidence shows that congruence between employee abilities and job demands significantly predicts job performance and organizational commitment (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), while misalignment may generate strain and weaker outcomes (Edwards, 1996). Thus, Person-Environment Fit Theory offers a coherent framework for understanding how digital fluency interacts with the university environment to influence academic performance.

Research Design

The explanatory cross sectional survey research design will be adopted for this study. The population of the study will consist of twenty-four thousand, seven hundred and ninety (24790) teaching staff across twenty-two (22) government-owned universities across the six (6) South-South States in Nigeria. A number of stages of sampling with varying sampling levels was conducted in tandem with the population distribution. The sample size for this study was first determined using the Taro Yamene Formula. Taro Yamene Formula was selected because of its ability to select a convenient sample from a huge population. The study will make use of primary data. The collection of primary data will be done using a questionnaire designed by the researcher.

A properly designed three hundred and ninety-four (394) copies of the questionnaire was administered to the targeted audience, assisted by two independent research assistants. With the help of these research assistants, the researcher was able to retrieve substantial copies enough for the analyses. The presentation and analysis of data/results was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The data analysis was done using descriptive analysis (univariate analysis), bivariate analysis, and multivariate analysis. The univariate analysis was carried out using mean and standard deviation, while the bivariate analysis will be done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation in SPSS version 27.0. The Partial Correlation was used to run the multivariate analysis.

Digital Outcasts and Teaching Commitment

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between digital outcasts and teaching commitment in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlations between Digital Outcasts and Teaching Commitment

		Digital Outcasts	Teaching Commitment		
Digital Outcasts	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.532*	0.239**	0.526**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	352	352	352	352
	Correlation Coefficient	0.532**	1.000	0.526**	0.891**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	352	352	352	352
Pearson	Correlation Coefficient	0.239**	.	1.000	0.646**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	352	352	352	352
	Correlation Coefficient	0.526**	0.891*	0.646**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
	N	352	352	352	352

****.** Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

Table 1 above shows r value of 0.526 at a significance level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating digital outcasts and teaching commitment. Since the significance value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) which states that there is no significant relationship between digital outcasts and teaching commitment in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria, was rejected. This suggests

that there is a moderate positive relationship between digital outcasts and teaching commitment in government-owned universities in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study concludes that sustained investment in digital infrastructure, continuous staff technological development, and inclusive digital transformation policies are essential for enhancing teaching staff performance and advancing the global competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability of government-owned universities.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government-owned universities in South-South, Nigeria should implement compulsory foundational digital literacy programmes for lecturers with limited technological exposure in order to improve their capacity to participate effectively in digital teaching, online research, and academic communication systems.
2. Institutions should provide subsidized access to digital devices, internet facilities, and educational software for academically disadvantaged lecturers to reduce technological exclusion and improve their professional productivity.
3. University management should establish motivational reorientation programmes that sensitize technologically disengaged lecturers on the importance of digital competence for modern teaching effectiveness, research visibility, and career advancement within contemporary higher education systems.
4. Government and university authorities should prioritize large-scale investment in reliable digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet connectivity, smart classrooms, uninterrupted electricity supply, digital libraries, and modern ICT laboratories to enhance the effectiveness of digitally fluent lecturers.

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