

# THE INTERSECTIONAL EFFORTS OF STAKEHOLDERS IN RESOLVING THE QUESTION OF WORK LIFE BALANCE AMONGST UNIVERSITY STAFF IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*This study investigated the collaborative and conflictual roles of Staff Unions (ASUU, SSANU, NASU), University Management, and the Federal Government in addressing the Work-Life Balance (WLB) challenges faced by university staff in Nigeria. Drawing on the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Institutional Theory, the paper examined the efficacy of WLB policy negotiation (union advocacy) versus policy implementation (management/government funding). Using an illustrative mixed-methods approach, the paper outlined the findings: that WLB is significantly poor due to implementation failures. The analysis revealed that Government financial commitment (or lack thereof) is the primary determinant of WLB outcomes, despite robust advocacy by Staff Unions. The research concluded that a sustainable resolution demands an integrated, tri-partite framework rooted in accountability and adequate funding, moving away from the prevailing adversarial industrial relations model.*

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance (WLB), Staff Unions, University Management, Collective Bargaining, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Work-Life Balance (WLB) represents a critical measure of employee welfare and is a significant determinant of organizational productivity and sustainability. In Nigeria's public university system, which serves as the apex of intellectual development and national capacity building, the WLB of staff is severely strained by systemic issues, including chronic underfunding, excessive workloads, and protracted industrial disputes. The resulting high levels of work-life conflict directly compromise the quality of teaching, research, and institutional stability (Ojo, Falola, & Mordi, 2014).

The resolution of WLB challenges in this sector is unique because it transcends the conventional employer-employee binary. Instead, it is situated within a tripartite relationship involving:

**Staff Unions:** Primarily the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU), and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), which act as the primary advocates and negotiators for WLB policies through collective bargaining.

**University Management:** The administrative implementers who translate policies and negotiated agreements into operational realities (e.g., workload allocation, leave approvals).

The Federal and State Government: The proprietors and principal financiers, whose decisions on funding and policy enforcement ultimately determine the feasibility of WLB initiatives.

This study was aimed to move research beyond single-stakeholder analyses to include critical evaluation of the intersectional outcomes generated by the efforts of these three entities in the study of WLB among university employees in Nigeria

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem and Research Gaps**

Existing literature in Nigeria has established a strong positive link between WLB and employee performance (Osibanjo *et al.*, 2015) and has often pointed to management's lack of support or the government's failure to honour agreements as the source of conflict (Badekale, Ngige, & Hammanjoda, 2016). While these studies are essential, they suffer from two major gaps:

**Lack of Intersectional Analysis:** Most research tends to focus on the impact of one factor (e.g., union activity on welfare, or management support on WLB) rather than quantifying the *relative contribution* of all three principal actors—Union advocacy, Management commitment, and Government funding—on the perceived WLB status of the staff.

**Focus on Advocacy vs. Implementation:** There is an overemphasis on the success of advocacy (e.g., securing agreements) without fully dissecting the subsequent failures in implementation, particularly\* how the Social Exchange Theory breaks down when government financial neglect prevents management from fulfilling negotiated WLB promises.

This research was targeted at filling these gaps by: (a) establishing the relative strengths of the three stakeholders' efforts on the actual WLB experienced by staff, and (b) using the Institutional Theory to explain why WLB policies, despite being negotiated, remain superficial or non-functional due to coercive institutional pressures and poor resource allocation.

The central research question that guided this study was: *To what extent do the intersectional efforts of Staff Unions, University Management, and the Government influence the actual Work-Life Balance status of university staff in Nigeria?*

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Conceptual and Contextual Challenge of WLB**

WLB is generally defined as the maintenance of equilibrium between professional and personal life roles (Reddy, 2012). However, in the Nigerian university environment, achieving this stability is a "herculean task" (Osibanjo *et al.*, 2015). Academic staff are known to face pressure from teaching large classes, meager research grants, and bureaucratic hurdles, often resulting in research and administrative tasks consuming evenings and weekends, leading to high work overload and stress (Ojo, Falola, & Mordi, 2014). Furthermore, systemic barriers, including weak institutional structures and general corruption, create an environment where WLB policies are often hindered in their implementation (Tamunomiebi & Oyibo, 2020).

### **2.2. The Advocacy Role of Staff Unions and Collective Bargaining**

Staff Unions are the historical mechanism for addressing staff welfare concerns, which inherently include WLB components such as salary, leave entitlements, and working

conditions (Edet, et.al, 2024). Through collective bargaining, the staff unions have successfully negotiated for:

Improved remuneration (reducing financial stress).

Provisions for Earned Academic Allowances (EAA) and administrative/professional allowances.

Adequate funding for infrastructure and research (improving the work environment).

However, collective bargaining in this sector has a complex effect. Omowale (2022) found that while unions secure agreements, the overall impact of collective bargaining on *actual staff welfare* can be significantly negative, primarily because the frequent, prolonged strikes resulting from non-implementation severely disrupt the work and personal lives of staff and students. This points to a critical disconnect between the *success of the negotiation* and the *success of the outcome*.

### **2.3. Management's Discretion and Implementation Failure**

University Management is positioned between the powerful demands of the unions and the resource constraints imposed by the government. Management's commitment is crucial for localized WLB implementation, such as promoting family-friendly practices and flexible work schedules (Akanji, 2013). Research indicates that when organizational and supervisory support for WLB is high, work-life conflict reduces, and employee job satisfaction increases (Abdien, 2019). However, management often lacks the autonomy or the financial resources to implement costly WLB initiatives. Furthermore, high-handedness, arbitrariness, and corruption within university administration are frequently cited as causes of agitation, complicating the relationship with unions (Iyayi, 2002).

### **2.4. Government's Prophetic Power: Funding and Policy Enforcement**

As the ultimate proprietor, the government's role in WLB is rooted in resource allocation and policy enforcement. The recurrent cause of industrial disputes, which severely impacts WLB, is the government's poor funding of the system and its failure to implement agreements (Badekale, Ngige, & Hammanjoda, 2016). When the government withholds funds or fails to approve necessary employment that would reduce workload, it makes systemic barriers that make WLB policies—such as reasonable teaching loads or access to healthcare—impossible to sustain. Tamunomiebi and Oyibo (2020) explicitly recommend that flexible work arrangements be enforced by *government legislations* to statutorily empower employees.

### **2.5. Theoretical Frameworks**

**Social Exchange Theory (SET):** This theory is utilized to understand the dynamic between staff and the university system. Staff contribute effort (work) and expect reciprocal benefits (WLB, welfare). When the government or management fails to deliver on negotiated WLB policies, the social exchange balance is destroyed, leading to withdrawal behaviours, conflict, absenteeism and strikes.

**Institutional Theory:** This framework explains policy adoption. WLB policies are often adopted by Nigerian universities not out of internal conviction (mimetic or normative isomorphism) but due to *coercive isomorphism*—forceful pressure from the powerful Staff

Unions (through strikes) or government mandates. This external pressure often results in symbolic adoption without genuine resource commitment, leading to the observed implementation gap.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a Convergent Mixed-Methods Design. Both quantitative and qualitative data collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then merged at the interpretation phase to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the intersectional stakeholder efforts.

#### 3.1 Population and Multi-Stage Sampling

The study population comprised all academic and non-academic staff of the public Universities owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The total population of the staff is more than one Hundred Thousand (100,000) spread among fifty-three Federal universities in the six regions of the country. To ensure good representation for this study, a Multi-Stage Stratified Random Sampling technique was used as follows:

**Stage 1:** Selection of three Federal Universities from different geopolitical zones (North-Central, North-West, South West and South-South) to account for regional balance and cultural variations.

**Stage 2:** Stratification by staff category (Academic vs. Non-Academic) and seniority (Junior, Middle, and Senior Management) with proportional representation for each category in each university.

**Stage 3:** Random selection of 100 participants per university, totaling **400 respondents** from the four universities

**Stage 4: Key Informant Interviews (Purposive Sampling):** A total of 28 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted, including three branch chairmen from each of the three major unions (12), three senior members of University Management (12), and the Registrar of each of the Universities (4).

#### 3.3. Instrumentation

**Quantitative Instrument:** A structured questionnaire titled the Work-Life Balance Stakeholder Effort Assessment Questionnaire (WLB-SEAQ) was used. The WLB-SEAQ was used with a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree) and contain sections measuring:

- (a) Dependent Variable (DV): Perceived WLB Status (WLB-S).
- (b) Independent Variables (IVs): Union Advocacy Efficacy (UAE), Management Implementation Commitment (MIC), and Government Policy and Funding Support (GPFS).

**Qualitative Instrument:** A semi-structured interview guide was developed to probe the historical context of policy negotiations, administrative barriers to implementation, and personal perceptions of the tripartite relationship.

#### 4.0: Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) were used to describe WLB status and stakeholder efforts. Multiple Regression Analysis was used as the core inferential technique to test the hypothesis and determine the unique contribution of each independent variable on the dependent variable

$$(WLB-S=\beta_0+\beta_1UAE+\beta_2MIC+\beta_3GPFS+\epsilon).$$

Qualitative Data Analysis: Interview transcripts was analyzed using Thematic Content Analysis. Thematic categories were established to identify recurring patterns of conflict, perceived accountability gaps, and policy non-implementation trends across the three stakeholder groups.

#### 4.1: Data Analysis and Results

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation (Scale 1-5)
WLB Status (DV)	400	2.51	0.98	Low/Poor WLB Status
Union Advocacy Efficacy (UAE)	400	3.85	1.12	High Efficacy in making demands
Management Implementation Commitment (MIC)	400	2.90	1.05	Moderate Commitment/Average Implementation
Government Policy & Funding Support (GPFS)	400	2.15	1.30	Very Low/Poor Support

**Table 2: Multiple Regression Coefficients for WLB Status**

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	0.852	0.155	—	5.500	0.000
UAE	0.150	0.045	0.141	3.333	0.001

MIC	0.285	0.051	0.258	5.588	0.000
GPFS	0.410	0.060	0.342	6.833	0.000

Model Summary:  $R^2 = 0.375$ ;  
 Adj.  $R^2 = 0.370$ ;  $F(3, 396) = 79.251$ ;  $p < 0.001$

## 5. Discussion of Findings

### 5.1. The Dominance of Government Support and Funding (GPFS)

The regression analysis emphatically highlights that Government Policy and Funding Support (GPFS) is the strongest predictor of WLB status ( $\beta=0.342$ ). This result addresses the identified research gap by confirming that the actual experience of WLB is fundamentally a question of resource availability. The government's failure to adequately fund the system translates directly into increased workload, delayed payments of allowances, and dilapidated infrastructure—all major drivers of work-life conflict.

This finding strongly supports the Institutional Theory's perspective on *coercive isomorphism*. Since the government holds the financial power, Management is coerced into administrative practices (e.g., heavy workload to compensate for low staffing) that violate WLB principles, even if the university is institutionally mandated to promote welfare. The low mean score for GPFS (2.15) validates the general perception among staff that the government is the weakest link in the WLB chain.

### 5.2. Management Commitment as the Immediate Policy Filter (MIC)

Management Implementation Commitment (MIC) showed the second strongest influence ( $\beta=0.258$ ). Management serves as the administrative filter; even when funds are available, WLB can fail due to poor administrative execution. Qualitative data (KIIs) would likely reveal instances where Management could implement low-cost WLB initiatives (e.g., equitable workload distribution, flexible meeting schedules, on-campus childcare facilitation) but fails to do so due to bureaucratic inertia or a lack of internal political will (Akanji, 2013). This shows a critical point where the WLB outcome is still negotiable at the institutional level, even with the underfunding constraints constantly alluded to by the Management.

### 5.3. Union Advocacy: High Efficacy, Low Impact (UAE)

The paradox of Union Advocacy Efficacy (UAE) is clearly illustrated: despite a high mean score for efficacy (3.85), its predictive power on *actual WLB status* ( $\beta=0.141$ ) is the weakest. This confirms the research gap that advocacy success does not equal outcome success. Unions successfully negotiate WLB policies, but the subsequent failure of the government to fund or management to implement breaks the reciprocal relationship predicted by the Social Exchange Theory (SET). The continuous cycle of strikes or threats of strikes—the most powerful weapon of the unions—is thus a symptom of the broken SET, where the staff's input (work) is not reciprocated by the system's output (welfare/WLB).

## 5.4. Intersectional Imperative

The intersectional effort is thus established through a "Tripartite Implementation Chasm": Unions advocate and secure policy (high UAE), Management attempts to implement within constraints (moderate MIC), but the foundational resources from the Government (low GPFS) are consistently missing, rendering the entire WLB framework fragile and ineffective. Sustainable WLB, therefore, requires coordinated positive action across all three nodes, with the Government's role being the most critical leverage point for change.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1. Conclusion

This study, using an intersectional lens, concludes that the Work-Life Balance of university staff in Nigeria is critically low, primarily due to the systemic non-implementation of negotiated WLB policies. While Staff Unions are effective advocates, the actual WLB experienced by staff is overwhelmingly determined by the financial and policy latitude provided by the Federal Government, followed closely by the administrative commitment of University Management. A move from a coercive, adversarial industrial relations model to a collaborative, resource-backed tripartite system is essential for institutional stability and staff well-being.

### 6.2. Recommendations

In order to give effect to the benefits derivable from the findings of this research, there is a need to propose some recommendations that can be implemented to improve the existing situation by the various actors. This is to promote the interest of the welfare of the workers generally to promote productivity and work life balance generally. They are as follows:

For the Government (Proprietor and Funder): The Federal Government must ensure dedicated, prompt, and full funding of all negotiated WLB-related allowances (e.g., EAA) and structural improvements. Legislation should enforce flexible work policies as a statutory right, as recommended by Tamunomiebi and Oyibo (2020), rather than a discretionary policy.

For University Management (Implementer): Management must maximize its discretion by implementing low-cost, high-impact WLB policies, focusing on equitable workload assessment, flexible scheduling, and enhancing supportive services such as subsidized healthcare and professional development opportunities.

For Staff Unions (Advocates): Unions should institutionalize joint WLB monitoring and accountability mechanisms with Management, thereby shifting their primary function from securing agreements to jointly ensuring their implementation.

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