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Social loafing among learner support staff for open and distance education programmes in south-western Nigeria: the imperative for counselling intervention

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ABSTRACT

A descriptive survey design was adopted to investigate the relationship that exists amongst locus of control, work engagement, organisational reward system, job satisfaction and social loafing among the staff of distance learning programme in South-western Nigeria. Four hundred and forty-seven (males = 184; females = 263) learners support staff with an age range of 22 to 55 years were randomly drawn from open and distance learning universities located in South-western Nigeria. They responded to five standardised self-report questionnaires. The results show that the majority (67.6%) of the respondents reported different forms of social loafing. There was a significant gender difference in the social loafing behaviour scores of male and female [$t(445) = 0.773, p < 0.01$]. Male respondents reported more social loafing behaviour ($x = 40.95$) than their female counterparts ($x = 25.48$). There was a positive relationship between locus of control and social loafing though not significant. The relationship among job satisfaction, work engagements as well as reward system and social loafing were inverse. It concluded that personal and organisational factors predispose workers to social loafing. It is recommended that ODL management should also put in place better systems of reward practice and recognition. Counselling intervention is also required to reorient learner support staff who are loafers at OD institutions.

KEYWORDS

Open and distance education; social loafing; learner support; Nigeria

Introduction

In order to overcome the problem of access to and equity in higher education in Nigeria coupled with the need to satisfy the yearning of disadvantaged groups, such as those living in rural areas, working-class citizens whose work conditions will not permit them to take on a full-time course, women in purdah and other individuals such as disabled persons who wish to develop their potential or acquire knowledge through studies in various fields, open and distance education (ODE) was embraced in its entirety in Nigeria. Open education is sometimes used interchangeably with other terms such as distributed learning, e-learning, online learning and distance education, among others. Unlike at conventional universities, the distance programme is aimed at the education of learners

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who may not always be physically present at a school (Jegade, 2016; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). Traditionally this involved correspondence courses, whereby the learner corresponded with the institution by post, however, today it involves instructional delivery via the internet. Courses are either hybrid, also known as blended programmes (Norman, 2010; Tabor, 2007), or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). Hybrid learning is a type of learning that combines elements of traditional and online learning modes, while MOOCs are online courses aimed at unlimited participation and open access via the internet for different categories of learners.

Distance education has different modes of delivery, namely; single, mixed-mode, hybrid and blended learning models (Hofmann & Miner, 2008).

The National Open University of Nigeria, popularly referred to as NOUN, is the first single mode Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Nigeria and the largest in the West African sub-region. NOUN's mode of instruction was patterned along that of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in New Delhi, India. In addition to NOUN, there are currently six universities in Nigeria which use the bi-modal model to harmoniously combine information communication technology (ICT) with traditional educational activities. The universities are University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, University of Abuja, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Maiduguri and the Federal University of Technology in Yola. Irrespective of the nomenclature, the distinguishing feature of ODL is the physical separation of teachers from students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016).

It is well documented that one major factor that affects distance learners' success in ODE is the level of learning interactions and interactivity made available to them by the institution and, most importantly, by the learner support unit (Dzakiria, Kasim, & Mohammed, 2013; Okopi & Pindar, 2014). Learner support services comprise both human and non-human resources used for guiding and facilitating the learning process in ODL institutions. They are said to be the most vital component of any ODL programme and include a wide range of academic and other related activities. Broadly speaking, learner support in ODL includes multimedia, print, audio, video, radio, TV, teleconferencing and counselling services. In this study, learner support is conceptualised as all personnel who provide any form of support service to learners.

Learner support services are particularly important in ODL because many distance learners are faced with new learning challenges due to their diversity in age, economic status, work experience and educational and experiential backgrounds, as well as the impact of other socio-cultural factors (Afolayan, 2015; Di & Jaggars, 2014; Jegede, 2016). Of all the factors which contribute to the attrition rate at ODL institutions, it was reported that an unsatisfactory level of services provided by the learner support unit constitutes the most significant (Okopi & Pindar, 2014). It is documented that when learner support staff fail to do their fair share of the workload due to what is known as 'social loafing' it will negatively affect those categories of learners who value interactions in an online community (Yih-Chearng, Chao-Min, & Chen-Chi, 2010).

Social loafing

People have different approaches to how their work is organised. Some prefer working by themselves while others enjoy collaborating. Nonetheless, there are benefits and

disadvantages to both approaches and this sometimes depends on the task in hand. Sanyal and Hisam (2018) opined that when individuals work alone it enables them to succeed in tasks that require high concentration and focus. They highlight that group work can cause a lot of unnecessary interruptions. In addition, researchers believe that to be in what is known as the 'zone' (where a person is fully immersed in an activity with focus), a person would need to work individually. Secondly, it is argued that when learning a new skill, it is better to do so alone. On the other hand, teamwork is not an entirely new phenomenon because social groups are a basic part of human life. Teamwork is said to be vital for brainstorming sessions because different people have different experiences and backgrounds. When working as a team more ideas will be generated, and productivity will also increase due to the motivation that is provided by the team members. Moreover, the best ideas can be selected after a brainstorming session in a team. Teamwork is also linked with increased communication between team members, which culminates in solving problems and increased creativity (Eduardo, Cooke, & Rosen, 2008). The major disadvantage of working in teams is social loafing, which results in a reduction in motivation or efficiency by an individual when working collectively compared to when working individually (Druskat & Wolff, 2007; Novliadi & Eliana, 2017; Rich, Owens, Johnson, Mines, & Capote, 2014).

In social psychology, social loafing is a phenomenon whereby a person exerts less effort to achieve a goal when they work in a group than when they work alone (Piezon & Ferree, 2008). Social loafing takes different forms such as the use of the internet – otherwise known as cyber-loafing – making personal phone calls, sending text messages, chatting and 'socialising' with colleagues during work hours (Coker, 2013; Lim & Chen, 2012). Ringelmann (cited in Kravitz & Martin, 1986) pioneered research on social loafing when he examined the effects of working collectively on a rope-pulling task. The results of the study provided evidence to suggest that people expend less effort when working collectively on a task than they would individually (social loafing). Though social loafing has recently been argued to help employees recharge their concentration and to improve satisfaction towards their jobs (Coker, 2013; Lim & Chen, 2012), it is reported to be on the increase, with more negative impacts. For example, Gouveia (2014) highlighted the extent of loafing in a survey where 89% of 750 American employees admitted to loafing on a daily basis, with 78% of them self-reporting their loafing as over 30 minutes a day, and 4% loafing for at least half of the working day on average. Differences have been reported in social loafing based on the type of job. For instance, employees in the finance and banking industry were said to be the biggest 'loafers', followed by those working in the arts, media and entertainment businesses in that same survey. There is a scarcity of data on the prevalence of social loafing among workers in ODL institutions in Nigeria; however, the attitude of Nigerian workers has been described by Orok (2013) as nonchalant and has been the subject of general criticisms. Recently, Ezeh, Etodike, and Chukwura (2018) reported a high prevalence of cyber-loafing among federal civil service employees in Anambra state, Nigeria using a sample of 329 respondents. The overall impact of loafing on companies' bottom lines is estimated to be as much as 1 billion USD per annum (Lieberman, Seidman, McKenna, & Buffardi, 2011; Lim & Chen, 2012). Social loafing amongst personnel in institutions of learning has been reported to be one of the factors that can prevent distance learners from having satisfactory interactions with their institutions, resulting in poor academic performance and, subsequently, a higher attrition rate

(Seltzer, 2016). It is therefore safe to conclude that an educational establishment without the participation and collective action of the entire learner support staff will not be beneficial to its learners.

Theoretical framework

Several theories have been put forward to explain why some individuals have a tendency to put in less effort when they are part of a group. Some of these theories include deindividuation (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979), motivation (Forsyth, 2009) and aversion theory (Thompson, 2003). This study is anchored in Forsyth's motivation theory (2009) because it links social loafing to both internal and external events. According to this theory, motivated workers are more likely to engage in social facilitations (which enable an individual to increase their efforts in a group task), whereas those who are less motivated are more likely to engage in social loafing (Forsyth, 2009). The theorist identified two factors that can influence social loafing, namely the workers' expectations about attaining their goal and the perceived value of the goal. These two factors also have the capacity to determine their level of motivation as well as their behaviours while working in a team. Karau and Williams (2001) stated that motivation to stay engaged on the job was highest when the individual believed that the goal was easily attainable and very valuable. On the other hand, motivation was lowest when the goal seemed impossible and not at all valuable (Forsyth, 2009). There is a dearth of literature regarding what precipitates social loafing amongst learner support staff for distance learning programmes. As a result of this identified gap, it becomes expedient to examine the connections between locus of control, work engagement, job satisfaction, reward systems and social loafing among staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The study is premised on expanding existing knowledge on social loafing with a view to providing evidenced-based information that will guide intervention.

Locus of control and social loafing

One psychological construct that may be useful in accounting for social loafing among workers is locus of control. Locus of control is one of the four dimensions of core self-evaluation – that is, appraisals of oneself – along with neuroticism, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). The concept of locus of control refers to a person's attributive tendency regarding the cause or control of events in their lives, and the generalised expectancy that achievements are under personal control (Phares, 1976). It is a personality construct based on Rotter's (1954) social learning theory. People who are prototypical 'externals' are said to perceive an unreliable contingency between their behaviours and their outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These individuals generally believe that the rewards and punishments they incur vary with capricious, unstable forces such as fate, luck, chance, social constraints or instructions (Spector, 1988). On the other hand, individuals with a strong internal locus of control believe that events in their life are the result of their own actions and efforts. There is preliminary evidence that internals are more likely to have a positive attitude towards their work and are less likely than externals to be social loafers, due to positive mental health (Jain & Singh, 2015). Previous research has linked locus of control to some organisational outcomes, such as job satisfaction,

social commitment, employees' performance and other motivational factors (Griffin & Gore, 2017; Karimi & Alipour, 2011). However, the relationship between locus of control and social loafing is yet to be fully explored in research.

Work engagement and social loafing

There is preliminary evidence to suggest that social loafing is associated with work engagement. According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) work engagement is the positive behaviour or a positive state of mind at work that leads to positive work-related outcomes. Work engagement is an active, positive work-related state that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) opined that work engagement is positive when workers exert high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. Studies (Halbesleben, Harvey, & Bolino, 2009; van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012) found evidence for the positive effects of work engagement on organisational outcomes. For instance, workers with high levels of work engagement are said to work hard because they are passionate and enthusiastic about their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010).

Reward systems and social loafing

Literature suggests that reward systems could also be the key to explaining social loafing behaviour. A reward system is the compensation that an employee receives from an organisation in exchange for the services offered by the employee or in return for work done (Klotz & Buckley, 2012). According to Chepkwony (2014), reward systems concern the formulation and implementation of strategies and policies aimed at rewarding workers fairly and consistently in accordance with the values of the organisation. The rationale behind the use of rewards for employees is that motivated employees become satisfied in terms of fulfilling their wants, both financial and non-financial. Intrinsic reward systems are those that are inherent in the job, which the individual can enjoy as a result of successfully completing a task or attaining their goals. On the other hand, extrinsic rewards are tangible, like salary, work environment, conditions of work service, fringe benefits, promotions, incentives, bonus payments and job security (Badrinarayan & Tilekar, 2011).

Job satisfaction and social loafing

Employee dissatisfaction is a major concern for businesses and organisations. Employees can be unhappy for a number of reasons. Many may be dissatisfied with different components of the reward system or other work conditions. Job satisfaction is one of the most popular and widely researched topics in the field of social psychology, yet its relationship with social loafing is not fully understood. Job satisfaction refers to a collection of feelings – positive, negative or both – that an individual holds towards their job (Aziri, 2011; Singh & Jain, 2013). One of the most tasking aspects for an organisation is to achieve workers' job satisfaction in a dynamic, competitive and risky atmosphere (Bakotić, 2016). So, the organisation tries to create favourable conditions, where employees are satisfied, in order to strive to achieve their goals. There is

preliminary evidence to suggest that job satisfaction is linked with organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Kanchana, 2012; Swaminathan & Jawahar, 2013).

Statement of the problem

In Nigeria, the high attrition rate recorded amongst open and distance learners has been a major concern. One major inherent factor that may cause students on an ODL programme to terminate their studies is when learner support staff develop a casual attitude towards their assigned responsibilities by making a minimal contribution and thus, relying upon the efforts of other team members. Social loafing engenders negative consequences that affect both the group as a whole as well as the organisation and the individual. A review of literature shows that while the situational and contextual factors that influence social loafing are well documented, there is a paucity of literature on the role played by workers' personal factors and organisational variables on social loafing. It therefore becomes imperative to investigate the relationship between locus of control, work engagement, reward systems, job satisfaction and social loafing, and its impact on learner support staff at ODL institutions in south-western Nigeria.

Research question

In order to assess the prevalence of social loafing among learner support staff for ODL programmes in Nigeria, one research question was raised as follows:

- (1) What is the prevalence of social loafing among learner support staff in DE institutions in south-western Nigeria?

Statements of hypotheses

Five hypotheses raised for the study were tested at 0.5 levels of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the learner support staff's locus of control and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between work engagement and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between organisational reward systems and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between job satisfaction and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria.

Ho₅: There is no significant difference in social loafing among male and female learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria.

Methodology

Design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The targeted population for the study was the learner support staff of distance learning programmes in south-western Nigeria. A sample size of 447 learner support services staff (males = 184; females = 263) with an age range of 22–55 years and a mean age of 31.5 years was utilised for the study. A simple random sampling technique was adopted in two stages to draw in the respondents. In the first stage, three states (Osun, Lagos, Oyo states) out of the six states that make up south-western Nigeria were selected (Ekiti, Ogun and Ondo make up the rest of the six states). In the second stage, simple random sampling (ballot) was used to draw 630 staff from learner support units willing to participate in the study. Of the 630 questionnaires distributed, 447 were returned, making the return rate of 70.9% to be satisfactory.

Instrumentation

Five standardised instruments were used for data collection. Section A obtained information regarding the respondents' demographic characteristics while sections B–E were used to collect data on the variables of the study.

Social loafing scale

This study adopted the social loafing scale developed by George (1992) to assess the respondents' social loafing behaviours. The scale was originally designed to measure the social loafing tendency among healthcare professionals. It consists of nine self-report items with a response format structured as: SD – strongly disagree; D – disagree; U – undecided; A – agree; SA – strongly agree. Typical items on the scale read: 'defers responsibilities he or she should assume to others'; 'Puts forth less effort than other members of his or her work group'. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was reported to be 0.94. In order to ensure that the instrument is consistent and culturally relevant, it was pilot tested on randomly drawn staff at the NOUN Ibadan Study Centre, who were not part of this study. The reliability index obtained was $r = 0.78$ after test-retest within a one-week interval.

Locus of control scale

The scale developed by Spector (1988) was utilised to measure the locus of control among the respondents. This instrument is said to be preferable to the general locus of control scale when investigating the behaviour of workers in organisations (Blau, 1993; Spector, 1988). It is a 16-item self-report scale. Typical examples of the items in the sub-scale are: 'A job is what you make of it'; 'On most jobs, people can pretty much accomplish whatever they set out to accomplish'. The respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item using a six-point Likert-type scale. In order to be consistent with Rotter's (1966) general internal and external locus of control scale, the work locus of control scale also distinguished the two dimensions of the locus of control – externality and internality. High scores on the work locus of control scale indicate

externality, whereas low scores indicate internality. Spector (1988) reported that the scale had an internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of 0.75 to 0.85.

Work engagement

This was measured via the shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker (2002). The scale consists of nine items designed to assess three areas of engagement – vigour, dedication and absorption. Three items on the scale represent vigour (e.g. 'At my work, I feel bursting with energy'), three represent dedication (e.g. 'I am enthusiastic about my job') and three items represent absorption (e.g. 'I am immersed in my work'). The questionnaire has a response format structured as: 0 = Never; 1 = Almost never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Very often; 6 = Always. Cronbach's alpha of all nine items varies from 0.85 to 0.94 (median: 0.91) across nine national samples (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Reward practice

The respondents' reward system was assessed, adopting the reward practice questionnaire by Allen and Helms (2001). This scale consists of a 13-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess how workers value the reward practices of their organisation. Seven of the items represent intrinsic rewards (e.g. 'Non-monetary forms of recognition to acknowledge achievement of quality improvement goals such as merchandise, certificates, letters, complimentary tickets, etc') and the remaining six represent extrinsic rewards (e.g. 'Profit sharing wherein the organisation shares some portion of profits with employees', 'Employment security such as having a corporate policy or union contract designed to prevent layoffs'). Each item ranges from 1 (no employees covered by that type of reward) to 5 (all employees covered).

Job satisfaction

The scale adopted to measure the job satisfaction of the respondents was the 20-item Minnesota satisfaction scale developed by Weiss, Dawis, England, and Lofquist (1967). These items required respondents to indicate the extent of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with 20 job-related factors, e.g. variety, compensation, recognition, working conditions, supervision, etc., using a five-point Likert-type scale. The authors reported a reliability coefficient of 0.90. The data collected were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistics (mean, average and standard deviation), t-test for independent samples, Pearsons' product-moment correlation and multiple linear regression.

Research question 1: What is the prevalence of social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria? Table 1 is used to answer this research question.

Table 1 indicates that the majority (67.6%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they defer their responsibilities or assume that others will accomplish the task, while 45% of respondents disagreed with the statement that they do not skip work for others to do. In addition, 56.6% agreed that they spend less time helping students if other workers are present to serve them. The majority of the respondents (70.9%) claimed that they do not put forth less effort than other members of their work group. Moreover, 62.3% of the respondents disagreed that they avoid performing school-related tasks as much as possible, and 65.3% agreed

Table 1. The level of social loafing among respondents (N = 447).

S/N	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Defers responsibilities he or she should assume to other	74(16.6%)	50(11.2%)	25(5.6%)	204(46.6%)	94(21.0%)
2	Does not do his or her share of the work	91(20.4%)	110(24.6%)	77(17.2%)	77(17.2%)	92(20.6%)
3	Spends less time helping students if other workers are present to serve them	70 (15.6%)	77(17.2%)	56(12.5%)	173(38.7%)	71(15.9%)
4	Puts forth less effort than other members of his or her work group	75(16.8%)	233(54.1%)	32(7.2%)	69(15.4%)	38(8.5%)
5	Avoids performing organisational tasks as much as possible	175(39.1%)	104(23.2%)	38(8.5%)	71(15.9%)	59 (13.2%)
6	Leaves work for the next shift which he or she should really complete.	90(20.1%)	38(8.5%)	27(6.0%)	164(36.7%)	128(28.6%)
7	Is less likely to attend to a student if another worker is available to do this	29(6.5%)	54(12.0%)	33(7.4%)	99 (22.1%)	232(51.9%)
8	Takes it easy if other workers are around to do the work	32(7.6%)	27(6.0%)	10(2.2%)	272(60.9%)	106(23.7%)
9	Defers students service activities to other workers if they are present	32(7.2%)	141(31.5%)	44(9.8%)	160(35.8%)	70(15.7%)

Table 2. PPMC summary showing the relationship between locus of control and social loafing.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r	sig	P
Social loafing	447	47.29	14.45	446	.092	.000	<0.01
Locus of control	447	61.53	17.32				

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

Table 3. PPMC summary showing the relationship between work engagement and social loafing.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r	sig	P
Social loafing	447	47.29	14.45	446	-.429**	.000	<0.01
Work engagement	447	36.16	9.68				

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

that they leave work for the next shift, which they should really complete. Almost three quarters of the respondents (74%) agreed that they are less likely to attend to a student if another worker is available to do this. Similarly, 84.6% of the respondents agreed that they take it easy if other workers are around to do the work. Over half of the respondents (51.5%) said that they would defer learners' activities to other workers if they were present.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between locus of control and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria.

The result of this first hypothesis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between locus of control and social loafing [$r(446) = .092, p < 0.01$] hence the null hypothesis was rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.008464$) reveals that locus of control accounts for 84.6% of the variation in social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The implication of this finding is that locus of control is a crucial factor in behaviour. The result therefore suggests that individual differences in one's perceptions of expectancy and instrumentality may influence social loafing.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between work engagement and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The result of this hypothesis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 reveals that there is a significant negative relationship between work engagement and social loafing; [$r(446) = -.429^{**}, p < 0.01$]; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.184041$) reveals that work engagement accounts for 18.4% of the variation in social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The result suggests that loafing is less likely to occur when workers are engaged with their work. This is because such individuals value the experience of being part of a group as well as achieving results.

Table 4. PPMC summary showing the relationship between organisational reward system and social loafing.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r	sig	P
Social loafing	447	47.29	14.45	446	-.375**	.000	<0.01
organisational reward system	447	56.11	12.64				

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

Table 5. PPMC summary showing the relationship between job satisfaction social loafing.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r	sig	P
Social loafing	447	47.29	14.45	446	-.516**	.000	<0.01
Job Satisfaction	447	25.19	8.12				

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

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between organisational reward systems and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The result of the third hypothesis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 reveals that there is a significant negative relationship between organisational reward systems and social loafing [$r(446) = -.375^{**}$, $p < 0.01$]; hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.140625$) reveals that organisational reward systems account for 14.1% of the variation in social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. This implies that the perceived fairness of the reward, organisational procedures and interpersonal treatments (components of the reward system) are related to social loafing. The more the organisation adopts fairness in the distribution of its reward system, the less likely it is that the workers will engage in social loafing.

Hypothesis 4

There is no significant relationship between job satisfaction and social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The result of this hypothesis is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 reveals that there is a significant negative relationship between job satisfaction and social loafing; [$r(446) = -.516^{**}$, $p < 0.01$]. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.266256$) reveals that job satisfaction accounts for 26.6% of the variation in social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. This implies that when workers appraise their job or job experience and are satisfied with the outcome, they are less likely to be involved in social loafing. This outcome suggests that there is a motivational factor associated with social loafing.

Hypothesis 5

There is no significant difference in the social loafing of male and female learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The result is presented in Table 6.

Table 6 reveals that there is a significant difference in social loafing between male and female learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria [$t(446) = 0.77$,

Table 6. T-test summary showing a significant difference in the social loafing of male and female respondents.

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	T	Sig	P
Social loafing	Male	184	40.95	9.447	446	0.77	.000	<0.01
	Female	263	25.48	6.725				

P < .05]. Based on the result, the null hypothesis was rejected. Findings further reveal that men displayed higher social loafing mean scores (M = 40.95, SD = 9.447) compared to their female counterparts (M = 25.48, SD = 6.725). Therefore, this result suggests that male and female support staff differ in social loafing behaviour.

Discussion of findings

The research question for this study was designed to obtain information regarding the prevalence of social loafing among learner support staff at ODE institutions in south-western Nigeria. The results obtained as presented in Table 1 showed a high prevalence of social loafing among learner support staff for distance learning programmes in south-western Nigeria. In addition, the results revealed the different types of social loafing that they engage in. This gave credence to previous studies that social loafing does not have any single fundamental cause but stems from a complex combination of individual, psychological, value-related and organisational factors (Sanyal & Hisam, 2018). This finding corroborates those of Gouveia (2014) and Ezeh et al. (2018) who reported a high prevalence of social loafing among American employees and Nigerian federal civil servants, respectively. This result suggests that social loafing may be the cause of withdrawal behaviours (taking undeserved work breaks, spending time in idle conversations and neglecting aspects of the job) reported among Nigerian workers. This may be the reason why Hung, Chi, and Lu (2009) concluded that social loafing is an antecedent to counterproductive work behaviour.

The result of the first hypothesis, which proposed that there was no significant relationship between locus of control of the learner support staff and social loafing, was rejected. The result presented in Table 2 revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between locus of control and social loafing. This outcome suggests that locus of control is one of the predisposing factors of social loafing. It therefore becomes convenient to conclude that workers who believe that they have the ability to change a situation through their action will not involve in social loafing. This outcome corroborates the findings of Sprung and Jex (2012), who indicated that those with internal locus of control were less likely to react with counterproductive work behaviours than those with external locus of control, when faced with work stressors. Research by Storms and Spector (1987) found that an internal locus of control could inhibit the counterproductive effects that feelings of frustration may have on work behaviour. Singh and Dubey (2011) provided further evidence that workers with internal locus of control feel that they have choice in their lives, control over their circumstances, and thus will feel happier, freer, less stressed and more likely to contribute to group work than their counterparts with external locus of control, who are more susceptible to social loafing due to feelings of helplessness, shame, grief and anxiety (Khan, Saleem, & Shahid, 2012).

The second hypothesis found an inverse relationship between work engagement and social loafing. This result implies that the more workers are engaged, the less likely they are to take part in social loafing. This outcome is congruent with previous studies (Abesi & Samani, 2017; Macey & Schneider, 2008), which found that individuals who attach greater value to work engagement in general are less likely to engage in social loafing than individuals who attach relatively more value to tasks for which they are individually accountable than to group tasks, where they can hide in the crowd and rely on the efforts of others.

Similarly, the result of the third hypothesis showed a significant negative relationship between reward systems and social loafing. The implication of this finding is that when workers perceived fairness in the institution's reward package, procedures and interpersonal treatments, they were less likely to engage in social loafing. This result is in support of numerous findings (Klotz & Buckley, 2012) reporting that an organisation's reward system is positively associated with the motivation of its workforce, which results in low social loafing. The rationale behind the use of rewards for employees is that motivated employees are said to be more satisfied in terms of fulfilling their wants, both financial and non-financial. Failure to provide the required reward has been documented to make employees engage in social loafing or leave the organisation (Klotz & Buckley, 2012). Some workers are reported to prefer receiving intrinsic rewards in terms of praise and recognition for certain work accomplishments, while other employees are happy to be offered extrinsic rewards in terms of salaries, bonuses and incentives (Badrinarayan & Tilekar, 2011; Chepkwony, 2014).

A negative relationship exists between job satisfaction and social loafing; therefore, the fourth hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that the more satisfied workers are with their work conditions, the less likely they are to engage in social loafing. This outcome is in tandem with previous studies (Kanchana, 2012; Swaminathan & Jawahar, 2013), which report that job satisfaction is linked to organisational citizenship behaviour, including non-engagement in social loafing. Research findings also suggest that employees who are discontented with their work environment tend to use low levels of energy in collective efforts (Gaus & Arianto, 2014; Griffin & Gore, 2017; Moqbel & Iftab, 2015). This observation was further supported by Galetta (2003), who stated that job dissatisfaction is likely to make employees feel detached from aspects of their jobs, thus substituting work tasks with loafing. Studies (Coker, 2013; Lim & Chen, 2012) assume that the association between job satisfaction and loafing activities in the workplace stem from the view that loafing activities give informal mental breaks, life balance (work, family, friends and leisure) and improve morale.

Hypothesis five, which proposed that there was no significant difference in social loafing between male and female workers, was rejected. The results presented in Table 6 showed that male and female workers differed in social loafing. The outcome further revealed that male workers displayed higher social loafing mean scores compared to their female counterparts. This result gave credence to previous findings (Etemadi, Darab, Khorasani, Moradi, & Vazirinasab, 2015; Simms & Nichols, 2014), which reported that gender plays a substantial role in social loafing. Simms and Nichols (2014) found that female workers tend to engage in social loafing less than their male colleagues because, in general, women are more oriented towards interpersonal and cooperative concerns. This makes teamwork more acceptable to them, unlike their male counterparts, who are

more oriented towards individualistic and competitive concerns. On the contrary, another study reported that female workers were more inclined to engage in social loafing than their male counterparts when the job required physical efforts (Etemadi et al., 2015). Some scholars argue that social, genetic and historical roles make men more individualistic and women more relational (Bandura, 1977; Tobin et al., 2010; Zosuls et al., 2009).

Conclusion

The outcome of this study confirms anecdotal reports and documented evidence of the enormity of social loafing among workers in Nigeria. It further reveals that there is a gender difference in social loafing as male workers were found to be more likely to engage in social loafing when compared with their female counterparts. The findings also supported the position of ecological theory that many individual, environmental and social factors work collectively to determine social loafing behaviours.

Recommendations

On the basis of the outcomes of this study, it is recommended that:

- (1) Operators of ODE institutions should develop good workplace policies to prevent social loafing.
- (2) ODL management should develop objective and transparent procedures, rules and standards in relation to the allocation of benefits and compensation to learner support staff.
- (3) Management of ODL should also put in place better systems of reward practice and recognition: individuals could be given micro-rewards which recognise performance, e.g. employee of the week/month awards; a points system in which recognition of excellence of contribution on a weekly or monthly basis can build up to gain a particular reward (e.g. extra time off; a social team event etc.); if workers work together in teams, the team could identify any individuals who deserve recognition for excellence; if learner support staff work in teams, management should ensure that team supervisors are given enough support to engage with those who are involved in social loafing, and how well worker performance is managed overall.
- (4) The distance learning programme management should continually emphasise the culture of participation and teamwork among all staff in the decision-making process.
- (5) There is a need for the management of ODL programmes to encourage as much face-to-face contact as possible with all employees in order to form strong social connections with staff, irrespective of position. The management should also employ the services of managerial and personnel psychology to organise conferences, seminars, symposiums and workshops geared towards changing the attitudes of workers in a positive way.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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