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# Work Ethics and Quality Research Output amongst Academic Staff in Delta State University (DELSU), Delta State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study looks at the link between work ethics and research output of academic staff of the Delta State University (DELSU), Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. The major objectives were to find out how dedication to work positively impacts on number of research outputs by staff, to determine the extent to which staff desire to improve increases the quality of research output by staff and to examine the extent to which innovative thinking improves on breakthrough researches by academic staff in the university. To achieve these objectives, the study relied on a sample of 257 respondents drawn from a population of 701 academic staff in the university using the Taro Yamane formula. The respondents were selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques and data were elicited from them using the questionnaire instrument designed by the researcher. Data collected were analyzed using frequency and percentages and presented in tables as well as excel enabled charts. Based on the analysis of the data, the study found among others that dedication to work, desire to improve and innovative thinking as key measures of work ethics have a huge relationship with number, quality and breakthrough in terms of research outputs of academic staff in the university. However, the study concludes that despite the knowledge level amongst academic staff concerning the positive impact of work ethics on their research outputs, a good number of the respondents still fall below expectation with regard to quantity and quality as well as breakthrough researches. Based on this, the study recommends among others that the university management should begin to operate a hierarchical administrative work structure that has academic supervisors and team leaders just as we have in most private sectors. This will enable supervisors and team leaders to be the ones designing job descriptions that are aimed at pushing academic staff to be productive.

**Keywords:** Work Ethics, Research output, Researches, Academic staff, University, DELSU.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are several conditions ranging from the environment, social relationships, leadership style, remuneration and other affiliate benefits that have significant effect on the way employees behave at work. All of these conditions are known to have huge impacts on the motivation of employees in an organization and by extension the performance or to a large extent the productivity of organizations. The renewed focus on the role of ethicism (Altham, 2002) in organizational growth has provided the research latitude for scholars to begin to delve into the link between different areas of organizational ethics and performance.

The reason for the renewed focus on the ethical side of organization is founded on the need to understand how institutionalized values influence the behaviour of workers on the one hand, and that of organizations on the other hand with the intention of digging deep into the overall relationship between ethics and output. However, the emphasis has been more on the work ethics dimension. Work ethics refer largely to the overall belief that employees or their organizations have concerning the value of work. As one scholar puts it, work ethics is the “set of beliefs and attitudes that underpin the basic values that are associated with the work that one does” (Mariac, Woehr & Banister, 2010, p. 1).

Given the definition of work ethics above, it is important to note that the overall value of an organization is a typical reflection of the social environment in which the organization operates. For instance, Ikechukwu and Onyekenwa (2006) has argued that no organization can leave above the system in which it functions with the understanding that ethical behaviour is largely a product of the collective conscience of the large society. This is perhaps why workers’ or employees’ behaviours across different counties presents some variations that altogether reflects the values that their society hold about work. In the words of Ingrid (2017), we hear of the “American Dream” rooted in the values of integrity and equal opportunities. This clearly shapes the views and focus of the American people in all spheres of social endeavours including the world of work. This cannot be said of several African countries and particularly Nigeria where traditionally held values eroded a long time ago with huge implications for institutionalized behaviour.

Nigeria as a country continues to present degrading credentials with regard to ethical behaviours in almost all of its social institutions. This is because of widespread corrupt and fraudulent practices that progressively undermine systemic values in the country with huge implications for individual behaviours. Nigeria is known to be amongst the most corrupt countries on earth with a ranking that places her at 154 out of 180 countries in the 2021 Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International, 2022). This says a lot about the work ethics in the public institutions or organizations in the country. Banister (2017) has noted that public institutions in Nigeria, including tertiary institutions of learning have a disturbingly high level of poor ethical behaviours with work ethics attracting a huge sense of concern. In the words of Ikechukwu and Onyekenwa (2006), no sector of the Nigerian economy has been spared of poor ethical behaviour because of corrupt practices which have crept into the academia.

Despite the huge academic fuse on work ethics, research concerns have focused more on understanding the impact of ethical behaviours on organizational performance (Banister, 2017; Akanade, 2019) and the emphasis has been more on how ethical behaviours of staff increases the performance profile of the organization (Osibanjo, et al., 2015; Banister, 2017; Grabowski, Chidzicka-Czupala & Stapor, 2021) and not the staff themselves. Interestingly this has been the same focus of scholarly works on the academic institution in Nigeria (Ikechukwu & Onyekenwa, 2006; Oyelade, 2017; Babatunde & Obadiora, 2020). What this means is that little is still known as to how work ethics affect staff directly and even worse, there is a knowledge desert on how this relates to the research output of academic staff in Nigerian universities. Against this backdrop, this study looks at the link between work ethics and research output among academic staff in Delta State University (DELSU), Delta State, Nigeria. Essentially, the study will provide answers to the following questions; does dedication to work have any positive impact on the number of researches conducted annually by academic staff of DELSU?, to what extent does the desire to improve increase the quality of research output of academic staff in DELSU?, to what extent does innovative thinking improve on breakthrough researches by academic staff in DELSU?

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. find out if dedication to work has any positive impact on the number of researches conducted annually by academic staff of DELSU
- ii. determine the extent to which staff desire to improve increases the quality of research output of academic staff in DELSU
- iii. examine the extent to which innovative thinking improves on breakthrough researches by academic staff in DELSU

## **Review of Related Literature**

The study of ethical behaviour has been approached from different perspectives with huge appeal to the disciplinary conviction of the different scholars who have engaged themselves with this area of research. Amongst these cluster of researchers that have made ethics the focus of their academic endeavour, philosophers and religious scholars continue to take the lead. Marginally, works from those in the social sciences, management sciences and education studies make incursion into the study of ethics. Babatunde and Obadiora (2020) are of the opinion that as crucial as ethics is to human society, religious scholars tend to be the major cluster of academics that study it more even though it is a branch of philosophy in itself. The reason for this according to them is because ethics shares a lot with religion given its concerns for morals and by extension its disposition to sieving out what is right from wrong. Given this definition of ethics, it is easy to understand why it is an integral part of all human endeavours because wherever humans converge in a social institution, a value system that is nested in the cultural belief system or laws of the people gradually emerges to define behaviours in line with what is right or wrong. Mazden (2021) notes that social institutions are in themselves a moral entity that most clearly outline modes of behaviour that reflects the ideals of the institution. In doing this, those aligned to the institution make conduct themselves within the confines of the code of conduct of the organization. That is perhaps why we hear of organizational culture or ethics (Bere, Neloaka, Djaha, 2019), business ethics (Fatoyin, 2021) and within the confines of this study, work ethics (Osibanjo, et al., 2015; Banister, 2017).

The focus of this study is on how work ethics relates to research outputs amongst academic staff. Interestingly, very few studies have focused on this link especially in Nigeria. This is not to say that work ethics as a subject matter has not occupied the minds of researchers in Nigeria. However, those that exist have rather focused more on the productivity or performance at the organization level and not at staff level (Osibanjo, et al., 2015; Bere, Neloaka & Djaha, 2019; Babatunde & Obadiora, 2020). All of these studies converge on the fact that work ethics have significant influence on the productivity and or performance of organizations. Drawing from the work of one of the greatest sociologists that ever lived, Max Weber, all of these scholars also share a consensus opinion that work ethics is akin to the protestant ethics that paved the way for capitalism to crystalize as at the time it did.

Within the academic system, Oyelade (2017) believes that work ethics jointly and unitarily improved on productivity. It was revealed in the study mentioned above that workers within the academic system who possess strong work ethics end up being more productive and by extension, the organization's productivity level also increases. This finding has been corroborated by Babatunde and Obadiora (2020) who also note that a sound organizational ethic contributes significantly to scaling up staff and organizational performance. The common submission of these two studies is that keeping to the ethics of work has a strong influence on motivation to deliver tasks in a timely manner. Hence, this invariably increases volume of work completed and by so doing, it improves on the overall productivity level of the organization. Although these scholars have improved understanding of the impact of work ethics on productivity which by all standards reflects output,

they have mostly stayed at the aggregate level and even worse, nothing has been said about academic research output. This is perhaps why our study is very important to close this identified gap.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts Max Weber's Social Action theory and as the name implies, it is related to the works of the German sociologists Max Weber. Often referred to as Weberian social action, the theory basically explains how people's actions in society are influenced by their level of rationality (Macionis, 2012). Hence, Weber espoused four types of social actions related to four types of rationality that have evolved over time. These are traditional action, affective action, value rational action and rational purposeful action. Without bothering ourselves with all the types of actions, the rational purposeful action also referred to in German language as Zweck rational action is adopted here as the framework that better explains the core objectives of this study.

Drawing from the writings of Weber, rational purposeful action is the highest level of rationality when measured on the sale of all four types of rationalities. Its basic assumption is that an action may be rationally expedient if it is based on logical or scientific grounds. What this means is that those who follow the laid down rules of engagement in any social setting operate in a rational manner since the rules are a reflection of the rationality of the organization. Within the domain of Zweck rational or rational purposeful action it is possible to compare the degrees of rationality that various individuals exhibit. In other words, those who pursue the laid down rules of an organization may justifiably be said that they conform to the code of conducts of the organization. In doing this, they are expected to be more productive than those who do not follow the laid down rules of the organization. According to Weber, action cannot be meaningful unless it is goal oriented. It is the action of the engineer who is building a bridge or the General who wants to win a victory. In all these cases Zweck rational action is distinguished by the fact that the actor conceives his goal clearly and combines means with a view to attaining it.

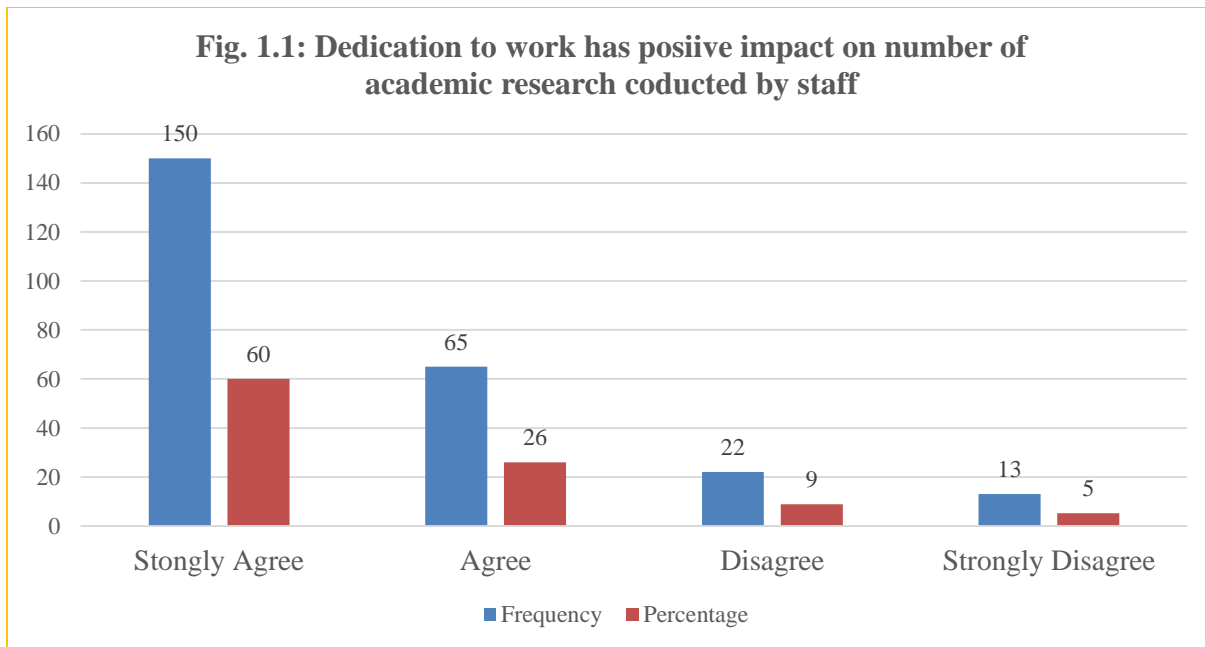
For the purpose of our study, rational purposeful action as laid down by Weber, allows us to understand how good work ethics can be interpreted as rational behaviour within the confines of organization culture or values and how this relates with performance or productivity. In this regard, academic staff who observe good work ethic become a reflection of the rationality of the university in which they find themselves.

## **METHODS**

This study adopts a mixed method research design. In doing this, it combines both the quantitative and qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The research area is Delta State University (DELSU) Abraka located in Benin city in Delta State, Nigeria. The population of the academic state is put at 701. The sample size for this study is 257 determined using the Taro Yamane formula. The sampling techniques adopted are stratified random and simple random sampling techniques or the questionnaire respondents and purposive sampling for the interview sample. The questionnaire instrument was deployed as the primary means of data collection. The data generated were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

## **Results**

**RQ1:** Does dedication to work have any positive impact on the number of researches conducted annually by academic staff of DELSU?



Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Fig. 1.1 above provides data on whether dedication to work has positive impact on the number of academic research output in DELSU. The data presented in the chart shows that 15(6%) of the respondents strongly agree to this. On the other hand, 65(26%) of the respondents agree, 22(9%) of them disagree, while the remaining 13(5%) strongly disagree. It should be noted that the value of the question is just to know if the respondents who participated in the study have the knowledge that the work ethic related to dedication to work actually does promote conditions that enable staff to be more productive in the sense that they can have more number of academic research output if they are dedicated to their job. The table below shows the actual number of academic research outputs by staff per annum.

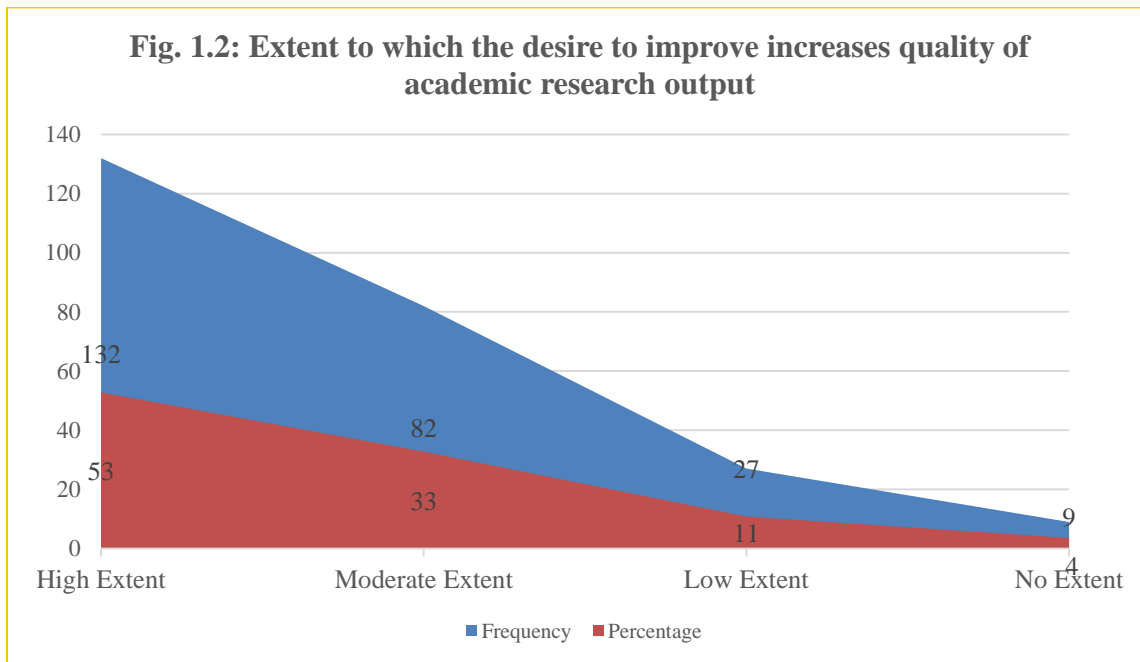
**Table 1: Number of Academic Research Outputs by Staff Measured by 4 Activities (Books, Chapter in Books, Conference Papers, Articles)**

	<i>Published Book</i>	<i>Published Book Chapter</i>	<i>Conference Papers Presented</i>	<i>Published Articles</i>
<i>Above Six</i>	-	-	-	4
<i>Five</i>	-	-	-	25
<i>Four</i>	-	-	-	67
<i>Three</i>	-	-	16	123
<i>Two</i>	-	197	89	31
<i>One</i>	13	49	145	-
<i>None</i>	237	4	-	-
<i>Total</i>	250	250	250	250

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Table 1 above shows the number of academic research output associated with respondents in one year and this is measured based on four key activities that inform the growth trajectory of academic staff in the university system. These are publications related to books, chapters in books, articles in journals and conference papers in book of readings. Following the data presented in the table, only 4 respondents are able to publish above six articles in journals annually, 25 of them said they publish five articles annually, 67 respondents said four articles annually, 16 and 123 said they attend three conferences and publish three articles respectively in an annual basis. However, 197 and 89 as well as 31 of the respondents respectively said the publish at least one book, one book chapter and one conference paper every year. Finally, 237 of the respondents do not publish any book year in year out, while only 4 of them publish at least 1 book annually. This result shows that although staff have the knowledge that dedication to work as a good work ethic helps to improve on the numbers of research output, their number of research output is still relatively low especially in the production of books.

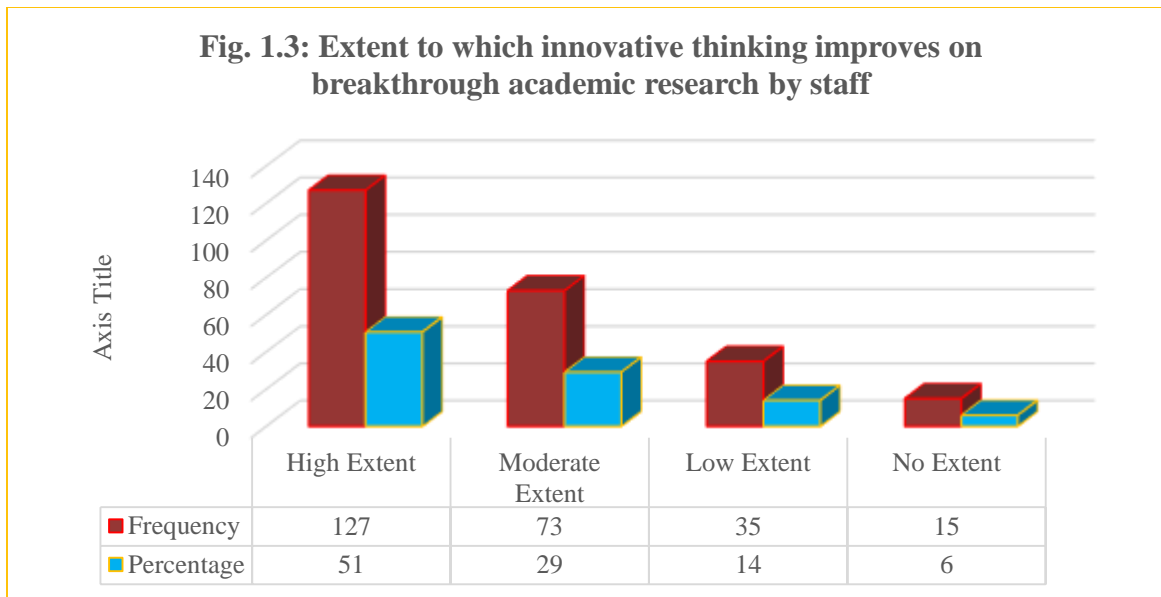
**RQ 2:** To what extent does the desire to improve increase the quality of research output of academic staff in DELSU?



Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

On the other hand, Fig 1.2 above shows data on the extent to which the desire to improve amongst staff leads to improvement in the quality of research output in the study area. Based on the data presented in the chart, the results reveal that 132(53%) of the respondents shared the belief that the desire to improve in terms of knowledge and skills among staff tends to increase the quality of research output to a high extent in the study area. 82(33%) of the respondents agree to this, 27(11%) of them disagree and 9(4%) of them strongly disagree. Again this finding is simply to find out the knowledge level of respondents concerning the link between staff improvement and quality of research output they can produce.

**RQ3:** to what extent does innovative thinking improve on breakthrough researches by academic staff in DELSU?



Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Fig. 1.3 above shows data on the extent to which innovative thinking improves the chances to engage in breakthrough academic researches by the staff in the study area. Drawing from the data in the chart, 127(51) accounting for slightly above half of the respondents believe strongly that the extent to which innovative thinking improves on research breakthroughs in the study area is quite high. On the other hand, 73(29%) of them said this happens to a moderate extent, 35(14%) of them said to a low extent, while 15(6) of the respondents did not report any extent at all. Just as we mentioned above, these results are a reflection of the opinion of respondents aimed solely at understanding their knowledge level concerning the extent to which innovative thinking is linked to breakthrough in research by staff.

**Table 2: Number of Respondents with innovative breakthrough research(es)**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Recognized Internationally</i>	245	98
<i>Based on Grant Attraction</i>	5	2
<i>Based on patent</i>	0	0
	250	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 above shows data on the number of innovative breakthrough researches that have been published by respondents in the study area. Drawing from the data, a significant number of the respondents (245/98%) said they have international publications that are considered as breakthrough researches in their various fields. However, only 5(2%) of the respondents have had to attract grants through their researches. The reason for asking the question on grant is to provide a balanced view since it was expected that a good number of respondents will surely see articles published in international journals as breakthrough researches.

## **FINDINGS**

The first finding in this study provided answer to research question one which is does dedication to work have any positive impact on the number of researches conducted annually by academic staff of DELSU?. The data supporting this question was presented in Fig. 1.1 above and the analysis that followed led to the finding that dedication to work actually does lead to increase in the number of research outputs by academic staff. However, the follow up data in Table 1 above revealed that the respondents may not have a sufficient level of commitment to their job as only very few of the respondents have what we can consider here as moderate productivity since only few of them are able to produce at least 4 articles annually. Interestingly, only 13 of the respondents are able to produce at least a book annually. This level of commitment or dedication to work by the staff will surely affect the quantity of research output by the staff and this clearly reduces the number of homemade educational materials available to the institution. This finding supports that of Babatunde and Obadiora (2020) who also found that poor dedication to work reduces the potentials of the staff to produce in a manner that meets the required output of the organization or of their specific jobs thereby reducing the productivity level of the organization. This clearly shows that staff rationality level is low and does not conform with the goals of the organization. Interestingly, this is in line with the assumption of the social action variant of Weber as reflected in the rational purposeful action which holds that when all logical or scientific processes (in this case work ethics) are followed by individuals they are more likely to achieve set goals with ease.

The next finding in this study relates to research question two which is to what extent does the desire to improve increase the quality of research output of academic staff in DELSU? The data in this regard was presented and analyzed in Fig. 1.2 above and the results that emanated from this led to the finding that the desire to improve by staff has a huge positive impact on the quality of academic research output in the study area. This means that when staff improve on their skills through conferences and workshops, they will also witness improvements in the quality of their researches. This finding supports that of Babatunde and Obadiora (2020) and Fotoyi (2021) who in separate studies have also established the fact that training and retraining of staff has the potential to increase the quality of their work and by extension the productivity level of the organization. Hence, the desire to improve by staff which is a huge part of work ethics is considered in this study as a major predictor of quality improvement. This also supports the social action theory of Max Weber especially because the desire to improve by staff is a rational calculation based on the measurement of the organization.

Lastly, the third finding in this study is related to research question which is to what extent does innovative thinking improve on breakthrough researches by academic staff in DELSU? The data related to this question were presented in Fig. 1.3 above and the analysis associated with it led to the finding that innovative thinking actually does lead to improvements in breakthrough researches by academic staff. This means that as staff engage in innovative thinking, they are more likely to produce research outputs that are equally innovative. However, while the result in Fig. 1.3 is just an opinion of the respondents, Table 2 took the response further by looking at the number of respondents that have had breakthrough researches. Based on the data, over 95% of the respondents said they have had breakthrough researches which they judged by the articles they have published in international journals. However, this response rate was expected so a follow up answer option relating to number of respondents that have accessed grants through their researches was asked. Apparently less than 5% of the respondents have had access to grants following their innovative researches. This clearly shows that breakthrough researches in the study area may be significantly low. This finding comes close to that of Babatunde and Adebayo (2020) who also found that most technical staff in Nigeria are unable to get patents for their products because such products are not innovative enough to attract grants and or patents.

## CONCLUSION

The study examined the link between work ethics and research output among academic staff of Delta State University in Delta State, Nigeria. Based on the findings in the study, it is safe to conclude that a significant number of the respondents have a good awareness level of the positive impact that a rational purposeful work ethics can have on their ability to produce quality research outputs reflected in the number and quality of academic articles, chapters in books, books and conference papers. However, it is also the submission of this paper that despite the widespread knowledge of the huge impact that a good work ethic can have on the number and quality of research outputs of academic staff, very few of the respondents actually have high productivity rate when measured based on the number of research products they can produce in a year and their accessibility to research grants as a fallout of the innovative researches. This shows that the staff in the study area do not sufficiently follow a rational purposeful work ethic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the findings and conclusion in this study, the following recommendations have been made to improve on good work ethics that can improve on the quality of academic staff researches in DELSU.

1. *Institutional Level:* The management of the university should design a work framework that is based on tasks and targets completion rate as a basis for promotion. Although there is a current conditions of service document guiding staff of the university, academic staff should be made to have tasks that encourage them to be dedicated to their works. This can be done by having a hierarchical administrative work structure that has academic supervisors and team leaders just as we have in most private sectors. The supervisors and team leaders should be saddled with the responsibility of designing job descriptions that task academic staff to be productive. The current approach that leaves academic administration at the departmental level solely in the hands of the Head of Department is largely unhealthy and unproductive.
2. *Institutional and Individual Level:* The university management should make it a priority that apart from the regular conferences that academic staff attend, there should be internal quality trainings aimed at improving the productivity skills of the staff. These trainings should target to improve staff capacity in the use of modern information communications technologies in conducting research and also how to disseminate their research outputs. In addition, such research focus should be tailored to address problems in their immediate environments. Also, individual academic staff should follow an improvement path by making efforts to grow their skills in order to be innovative and highly productive.
3. *Individual Level:* The academic staff at the individual level should cultivate the culture of seeking grants for their researches. However, this can only be achieved if they engage in highly innovative research endeavours.

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