

Cognitive Overload, Emotional Exhaustion, and Psychological Disengagement among Political Science Lecturers in Nigerian Universities

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ABSTRACT : Psychological disengagement among university lecturers, encompassing absenteeism and reduced mental engagement, poses a serious threat to teaching quality and institutional effectiveness. This study examined cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion as predictors of psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities, while considering differences across university ownership. A quantitative correlational survey design was employed, involving a population of 4,500 lecturers, with 400 selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using adapted versions of the NASA Task Load Index, the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey, and work withdrawal behaviour measures. Validity was confirmed through expert review and exploratory factor analysis, and reliability was established with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.89. Analysis using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, and simple linear regression at the 0.05 significance level revealed that psychological disengagement did not differ across university ownership. Cognitive overload was not a significant predictor, indicating that high mental demands alone do not drive disengagement. In contrast, emotional exhaustion significantly predicted psychological disengagement and accounted for a substantial portion of its variance, with lecturers experiencing higher emotional exhaustion more likely to withdraw from their duties. These findings highlight emotional exhaustion as the principal psychological driver of disengagement among Political Science lecturers. Universities are encouraged to implement structured counseling services, stress management programs, peer support systems, and balanced workload allocation. Additionally, initiatives promoting recovery and well-being, such as regular breaks and flexible scheduling, can sustain lecturers’ engagement, reduce psychological disengagement, and enhance instructional quality. Prioritizing staff well-being is therefore essential for improving academic delivery and overall institutional effectiveness in Nigerian universities.

Key words: Psychological disengagement, Emotional exhaustion, Cognitive overload, University lecturers, Job demands, Nigerian higher education, Work withdrawal, Institutional context

INTRODUCTION

Psychological disengagement among academic staff in higher education—whether expressed through physical absence, such as frequent absenteeism and chronic lateness, or through mental withdrawal, such as reduced cognitive and emotional presence during teaching—has become an increasing concern within

university systems worldwide. Although earlier research on absenteeism and disengagement focused largely on students, recent studies indicate that similar patterns among lecturers significantly affect instructional quality, weaken student engagement, and undermine institutional effectiveness (Cao et al., 2025). Evidence from higher education contexts further links lecturer burnout and work-related stress to diminished commitment to academic responsibilities, demonstrating that withdrawal behaviours among faculty have direct consequences for educational outcomes (Cao et al., 2025). Sustained exposure to work strain contributes to declining professional presence and engagement, increasing the likelihood that lecturers will become physically or psychologically absent from their duties (Cao et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings position lecturer disengagement as a global issue with serious implications for teaching quality, institutional performance, and student success.

In this study, psychological disengagement refers to lecturers' psychological and behavioural withdrawal from instructional responsibilities, including reduced enthusiasm, minimal engagement, and absenteeism tendencies.

Within the Nigerian university system, concerns about lecturer presence and engagement have become more pronounced. Patterns of missed lectures, irregular scheduling, and reliance on substitute instructors instead of sustained classroom interaction are increasingly reported. For example, students at Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) protested after lecturers failed to attend scheduled classes, highlighting how lecturer absence disrupts curricular continuity and weakens students' learning experiences (Ajilore Chukwuemeka, 2025). Similarly, prolonged strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have left many campuses largely deserted, with academic activities suspended and lecture halls empty (BusinessDay NG, 2025). These challenges are further intensified by reports from Nigeria's House of Representatives indicating that many lecturers are leaving public universities due to poor working conditions, resulting in staff shortages, increased workloads for remaining staff, and greater dependence on temporary teaching arrangements (Okhifo, 2025). While such trends are often framed as issues of indiscipline or professional disengagement, they may instead reflect deeper occupational and psychological pressures shaping lecturers' behaviour. Narrow interpretations of this nature overlook the roles of cognitive strain, emotional exhaustion, and institutional context in driving disengagement among academic staff in Nigerian universities.

One key psychological factor that offers insight into this problem is cognitive overload. Cognitive overload occurs when the mental demands placed on an individual exceed available cognitive capacity, leading to reduced effectiveness and increased

psychological strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Galvez Bayugo, 2025). In university settings, lecturers often carry overlapping responsibilities, including teaching large classes, supervising students' research, completing administrative duties, integrating digital teaching tools, and meeting research productivity expectations. These roles demand sustained attention, rapid decision-making, and the ability to manage diverse information streams simultaneously. Over time, such conditions can lead to mental fatigue and cognitive strain. Empirical studies show that when job demands remain high without sufficient resources, cognitive and emotional capacities are gradually depleted, increasing the risk of burnout, reduced engagement, and impaired performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Galvez Bayugo, 2025).

Closely related to cognitive overload is emotional exhaustion, another key psychological process explaining withdrawal behaviour in work settings. Emotional exhaustion represents the emotional core of burnout, reflecting a gradual depletion of emotional and psychological energy due to prolonged job demands. Individuals experiencing emotional exhaustion feel emotionally drained and overextended, making it increasingly difficult to engage meaningfully with work tasks or interpersonal interactions (Maslach & Jackson, as cited in Md. Pakdee et al., 2025). In higher education, lecturers are not only exposed to heavy cognitive demands but also to sustained emotional labour. They continually manage their emotions, respond to students' academic and personal needs, and maintain professional composure despite ongoing stressors. Research among university teachers shows that heavy workloads and long working hours are significantly associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion, indicating that continuous teaching and administrative pressures gradually drain emotional energy and motivation (Md. Pakdee et al., 2025). Emotional depletion often manifests as reduced enthusiasm, emotional detachment, and a growing sense of being unable to meet the emotional demands of the job, all core indicators of burnout (Yingying, 2025).

Cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion do not function as isolated stressors; rather, they operate as interconnected psychological processes that can cumulatively lead to psychological disengagement. When lecturers face multiple competing demands—such as large class sizes, administrative multitasking, research pressures, and service obligations—their cognitive resources become stretched, increasing the likelihood of mental fatigue, errors, and reduced engagement in core teaching activities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Persistent cognitive strain gradually drains emotional energy, resulting in emotional exhaustion, which serves as the central component of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Empirical evidence suggests that emotional exhaustion develops in response to sustained overload, leading to reduced

motivation and increasing detachment from professional responsibilities (Nnah & George, 2025). Emotional exhaustion functions as a psychological bridge between prolonged demands and psychological disengagement, as individuals experiencing high levels of exhaustion are more likely to disengage or withdraw as a coping response to stressors that exceed their capacity (Krischer et al., 2010).

For Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities, these dynamics are particularly salient. They often teach large and diverse classes, engage with content demanding sustained intellectual and emotional investment, and carry institutional responsibilities that extend beyond the classroom. Despite strong theoretical and empirical support for the relationships among cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and withdrawal behaviour, these processes have not been sufficiently examined together in the Nigerian higher education context. This gap limits understanding of how psychological strain translates into disengagement outcomes among this population.

Furthermore, the impact of these psychological stressors is shaped by the institutional environment. Evidence indicates that working conditions differ significantly among Federal, State, and private universities, influencing job satisfaction, engagement, and vulnerability to disengagement. Studies conducted in Nigeria and internationally show that lecturers in federal and state universities often contend with heavier administrative workloads, bureaucratic constraints, and limited resources, whereas those in private institutions typically operate in more supportive or flexible environments (Aguwa, 2024; Fatima et al., 2024; Pepple et al., 2025). These differences suggest that university ownership may moderate the effects of cognitive and emotional demands on psychological disengagement. However, this moderating role remains underexplored among Political Science lecturers, who manage large enrolments, high civic and ideological engagement, and complex administrative responsibilities.

Observations and institutional reports suggest that lecturer absenteeism and disengagement are rising across Nigerian universities, particularly within Political Science departments, where many lecturers exhibit reduced instructional presence, arrive late, or fail to engage fully during lectures. These patterns limit students' opportunities for interactive learning, hinder critical discussion, and compromise the effective delivery of curricula. While existing studies on disengagement have primarily focused on students, attention to lecturer attendance and engagement remains limited. Administrative narratives often frame disengagement as a matter of indiscipline, emphasizing sanctions, monitoring, and compliance, without exploring the psychological and work-related factors that drive withdrawal behaviours. In Nigeria, empirical research on lecturer disengagement is scarce, and studies specifically focusing

on Political Science lecturers are almost nonexistent. There is a notable lack of predictive models examining how cognitive and emotional factors influence lecturer engagement, and few studies consider how institutional contexts, such as university ownership, shape these patterns.

This study therefore seeks to examine cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion as predictors of psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities, providing evidence to inform more effective, psychologically grounded interventions and policies.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework visually represents the relationships among cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and psychological disengagement, with university ownership (federal, state, private) as a moderating factor:

Cognitive Overload —▶ Emotional Exhaustion —▶ Psychological Disengagement



(moderating effect on the relationships)

- Cognitive overload: initiating job demand arising from multiple and competing professional responsibilities.
- Emotional exhaustion: strain response reflecting depleted emotional and psychological resources.
- Psychological disengagement: outcome, including reduced enthusiasm, minimal engagement, and absenteeism tendencies.
- University ownership: contextual factor that moderates the strength of the relationships.

This framework informs the study's research questions, hypotheses, and methodology, providing a coherent and testable model consistent with the JD–R and COR theoretical perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) and complemented by Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Together, these frameworks provide a coherent explanation of how sustained job demands

contribute to psychological strain and, ultimately, psychological disengagement in professional settings.

The JD–R model posits that all occupations involve specific job demands and job resources, and the balance between the two determines employee well-being and performance. Job demands are aspects of work that require sustained cognitive, emotional, or physical effort, and prolonged exposure to high demands can lead to psychological costs. When job demands exceed available resources, employees may enter a health-impairment process, potentially culminating in burnout, with emotional exhaustion as its core dimension (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017). Emotional exhaustion reflects a state of depleted emotional energy, reducing an individual’s capacity to remain engaged and increasing the likelihood of psychological disengagement—a reduction in cognitive and emotional involvement in one’s professional responsibilities (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

In the context of Nigerian universities, cognitive overload represents a salient job demand. Political Science lecturers often navigate multiple concurrent responsibilities, including large class sizes, curriculum preparation, research obligations, administrative duties, and student supervision. These tasks require sustained attention, multitasking, and complex decision-making. While cognitive demands are intrinsic to academic work, excessive cognitive load—particularly when unsupported by institutional resources—can generate significant psychological strain (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Crucially, the JD–R model emphasizes that job demands do not directly produce withdrawal behaviours. Rather, their effects typically operate through strain mechanisms, with emotional exhaustion serving as the proximal process. Lecturers may experience high cognitive load, but disengagement arises only when sustained demands deplete emotional and psychological resources.

COR theory complements this perspective by explaining why emotional exhaustion triggers disengagement. According to COR theory, individuals strive to protect and preserve valuable resources such as energy, time, and emotional stability. Stress arises when these resources are threatened or depleted. In academic settings, prolonged emotional exhaustion signals critical resource depletion. Lecturers may adopt psychological disengagement—reducing cognitive investment, emotional involvement, or the quality of instructional engagement—as a protective strategy to conserve remaining resources and prevent further loss (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001).

Integrating JD–R and COR theories provides a structured pathway: cognitive overload acts as the initiating job demand, emotional exhaustion emerges as the

strain mechanism, and psychological disengagement arises as a coping response to resource depletion. While cognitive overload may not directly predict disengagement, its influence is likely mediated through emotional exhaustion, consistent with the health-impairment process described in JD–R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

By framing psychological disengagement as an outcome of sustained occupational strain rather than personal deficiency, this theoretical integration explains why emotional exhaustion emerges as the primary predictor of disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. It highlights the critical role of emotional well-being in maintaining professional engagement and underscores the importance of institutional strategies to buffer lecturers from excessive strain.

Empirical Review

Cognitive Overload and Psychological Disengagement

Research on academic workload and cognitive strain consistently shows that heavy teaching and related duties negatively impact lecturers' well-being and work outcomes. In Nigeria, a qualitative study by Oderinde, Akintunde, and Ajala (2024) examined "A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Work Overload on Lecturers' Well-Being" among lecturers at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Although the study did not involve a statistical sample, it used document analysis of secondary sources to reveal that lecturers face high levels of work overload that have detrimental effects on their physical and mental health, including stress and diminished capacity to engage in teaching effectively. The authors concluded that excessive workload undermines lecturers' well-being, suggesting that cognitive demands inherent in academic roles are significant stress factors

Similarly, a correlational study of university lecturers in South East Nigeria by Ezeonwumelu et al (2024) investigated the relationship between lecturers' workload, burnout, and research procrastination. The population included 8,398 lecturers from Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, with a sample of 500 lecturers selected for analysis. Results from regression showed that workload significantly predicted work burnout ($R^2 = .627$) and lecturers' research procrastination ($R^2 = .664$), indicating that increased workload correlates with higher burnout and withdrawal from research engagement. This suggests cognitive and time demands contribute substantially to work strain outcomes among Nigerian lecturers.

In another Nigerian study addressing academic stress more broadly, Okoseimiema and Ekpenyong (2025) explored "Stress and Burnout among

Lecturers in the Universities in Rivers State, Nigeria” using 300 staff members from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University, and the University of Port Harcourt. Though not exclusively focused on cognitive overload, the findings showed that academic workload, student-related pressures, and administrative duties were major stressors significantly associated with burnout indicators. The study highlighted that heavy workload contributes to sustained psychological strain among lecturers, reinforcing the link between job demands and adverse work outcomes in Nigerian higher education.

Beyond the Nigerian context, international evidence also connects workload and cognitive strain to negative performance outcomes. Cao, Hassan, and Omar’s (2025) systematic review of burnout interventions across higher education documented that intense workloads and emotional demands are central contributors to burnout among university lecturers globally. The review of studies published between 2020 and 2024 highlighted that faculty workload consistently emerged as a significant challenge affecting psychological well-being and engagement at work.

A broader quantitative review meta-analysis on job stress and burnout among higher education lecturers found a strong positive correlation between job stress and burnout across international samples, with increased cognitive and teaching demands significantly associated with burnout symptoms such as emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction. Although this study synthesizes primary research rather than sampling individual lecturers directly, it reinforces that high job demands including cognitive load from teaching, research, and administrative duties predict burnout outcomes that can be interpreted as precursors to withdrawal behaviours. (Yingying et al., 2025)

Taken together, these studies both within Nigeria and internationally indicate that workload and cognitive demands inherent in academic roles are linked to psychological strain, burnout, and diminished performance. While not all research uses the term “cognitive overload,” the consistent finding across these studies is that excessive workload and associated job demands converge to tax lecturers’ cognitive and emotional resources, contributing to outcomes like burnout and disengagement that are conceptually aligned with cognitive overload phenomena.

Emotional Exhaustion and Psychological Disengagement

Empirical research consistently identifies emotional exhaustion the central dimension of burnout as a key predictor of withdrawal-related work outcomes such as absenteeism, disengagement, and reduced organizational commitment, both internationally and in higher education contexts.

In Nigeria, a descriptive survey by Akeke, et.al (2020) examined the Effects of Emotional Exhaustion on Employee Performance among Academic Staff of Tertiary Institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The population comprised 2,609 academic staff, with a sample size of 1,214 respondents from multiple tertiary institutions. Using structured questionnaires and multiple regression analysis, the study found that emotional exhaustion was significantly related to reduced employee performance, with work pressure and physical ailments acting as negative influences on performance. The findings suggested that increased emotional exhaustion among lecturers correlates with poorer instructional and work outcomes, implicitly linking emotional strain to behavioural withdrawal and reduced effective engagement.

In an international context, Zhai et al. (2025) conducted a cross-sectional study titled *Emotional Labor and Empathic Concern as Predictors of Exhaustion and Disengagement in College Teachers*, involving 1,128 college teachers from private and public colleges in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI), the researchers measured emotional exhaustion and disengagement, finding that emotional labour significantly predicted both exhaustion and disengagement, with emotional exhaustion demonstrating a stronger effect. Crucially, exhaustion was linked to teachers' withdrawal from classroom engagement, while disengagement captured the psychological detachment aspect of burnout, illustrating how emotional demands in teaching roles translate into withdrawal behaviour.

Although not limited to university lecturers, a broader international study by Amer, et al (2022) titled *Occupational Burnout and Productivity Loss: A Cross-Sectional Study Among Academic University Staff* explored burnout dimensions, including emotional exhaustion, among 240 academic staff at a public Egyptian university. The study found that moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion were significantly associated with higher rates of absenteeism and presenteeism, indicating that lecturers experiencing greater emotional depletion were more likely to miss work or attend while unproductive. This underscores emotional exhaustion's predictive role in withdrawal behaviours at work.

Complementing this evidence is a large systematic literature review and meta-analysis by ying (2025), *Job Stress and Burnout among Lecturers: A Systematic Literature Review and Meta-Analysis*, which collated findings across multiple studies of academic staff. Although not reporting new sample sizes, the review established that job stress which feeds into emotional exhaustion is positively correlated with burnout indicators including exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, and negatively correlated with engagement and active

job involvement. These patterns are closely aligned with withdrawal outcomes such as absenteeism, disengagement, and diminished commitment among academic staff across diverse contexts

Finally, research beyond the university context helps illustrate emotional exhaustion's broader implications. Werang et al. (2025) investigated Emotional Exhaustion and Its Impact on Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment among 220 elementary school teachers in South Papua, Indonesia. Their findings revealed that higher levels of emotional exhaustion were significantly associated with decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment, outcomes closely tied to workplace withdrawal behaviours like absenteeism and disengagement. Though not specific to university lecturers, this study supports the general pattern that emotional exhaustion predicts withdrawal-related outcomes in educational settings.

Together, these studies provide robust evidence that emotional exhaustion driven by sustained job demands is a strong predictor of absenteeism, disengagement, and reduced organizational commitment. While research specifically targeting university lecturers remains limited, the existing evidence from academic staff and broader educational populations highlights emotional exhaustion's central role in contributing to workplace withdrawal behaviours that challenge instructional presence and engagement.

University Ownership and Psychological Disengagement

Institutional context, particularly ownership type, has been shown to influence lecturers' experiences of workload, job satisfaction, and engagement, which in turn shape withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism and disengagement. Comparative studies reveal that work conditions, expectations, and resources differ significantly between public and private universities, affecting lecturers' professional behaviour and capacity to sustain instructional presence.

A study by Fatima, et al (2024) titled Comparative Analysis of Job Satisfaction of Public and Private University Teachers: A Case of an Emerging Economy investigated 158 university teachers across public and private universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and one-way ANOVA, the study found that public-sector lecturers reported higher satisfaction with autonomy, recognition, and job security, whereas private-sector lecturers were more satisfied with compensation, advancement opportunities, and institutional support. These differences illustrate how institutional ownership shapes lecturers' perceptions of their work environment, which can directly influence engagement levels, coping strategies, and withdrawal behaviours.

Within the Nigerian context, Pepple, et al (2025) conducted a qualitative study examining lecturers' perceptions of job satisfaction in one public and one private university in Cross River State. Fourteen lecturers (7 from public, 7 from private) participated in semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that private-university lecturers experienced higher perceived significance of work and institutional responsiveness, while public-university lecturers navigated stricter bureaucratic structures and administrative constraints. These contextual differences were reported to affect lecturers' engagement, motivation, and susceptibility to withdrawal behaviours, including irregular attendance and disengagement from institutional duties.

International evidence also corroborates these patterns. For instance, a comparative study on workplace stress and job satisfaction among university teachers in Pakistan examined 200 faculty members (120 private, 80 public). The study found that government university lecturers exhibited higher levels of workplace stress, while private university lecturers reported greater job satisfaction and work engagement. These findings suggest that institutional conditions, including ownership, policies, and administrative structures, shape lecturers' emotional and cognitive responses to their work, ultimately influencing their withdrawal behaviours and overall instructional effectiveness.

Further supporting the public-sector focus, Aguwa (2024) investigated Burnout and Job Satisfaction among Lecturers in Public Universities in Enugu State, *Nigeria*, reporting that high burnout prevalence coexisted with low job satisfaction (only 38.3% of lecturers highly satisfied). The findings indicate that public-university lecturers' work environments may heighten vulnerability to disengagement and absenteeism, highlighting the role of institutional context as a predictor of behavioural withdrawal.

Collectively, these studies underscore that institutional ownership significantly influences lecturers' work experiences, stress levels, and engagement, which can shape withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism and disengagement. While public-university lecturers often face heavier administrative demands, limited resources, and stricter institutional protocols, private-university lecturers typically operate in more supportive or flexible environments. Despite these documented differences, few studies have examined how these institutional factors interact with psychological variables such as cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion to predict truancy behaviour, particularly among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. This gap highlights the need for research that integrates both psychological and contextual determinants of lecturer withdrawal behaviour.

Despite extensive research on workload, burnout, and institutional factors, few studies simultaneously examine cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion as predictors of psychological disengagement among lecturers, particularly in Nigerian universities. Most studies either focus on student absenteeism or treat lecturers' stressors and engagement in isolation. Moreover, comparative analyses by institutional ownership remain scarce. This gap highlights the need for research integrating psychological and contextual factors to better understand withdrawal behaviours among lecturers in disciplines like Political Science, where class size, civic engagement, and administrative duties may amplify cognitive and emotional strain.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the psychological predictors of psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities, with specific focus on cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion, and to explore the moderating role of university ownership (federal, state, private).

Research Questions

1. What is the level of cognitive overload among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?
2. What is the level of emotional exhaustion among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?
3. Is there a significant difference in psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers based on university ownership?
4. To what extent does cognitive overload predict psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?
5. To what extent does emotional exhaustion predict psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers based on university ownership.
2. Cognitive overload does not significantly predict psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities.
3. Emotional exhaustion does not significantly predict psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative correlational survey design to examine the relationship between cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and

psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. A correlational design was appropriate because the study aimed to determine the extent to which the independent variables predict the dependent variable without manipulating any conditions, in line with best practices in educational and occupational psychology research.

The population comprised all Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities, including federal, state, and private institutions. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC), there are approximately 4,500 Political Science lecturers in Nigeria. A sample size of 400 lecturers was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table (as applied in Ekedama et al., 2023; Ekedama, 2025), which recommends 354 participants for a population of 4,000 and 381 for a population of 5,000. The sample was slightly increased to 400 to account for potential non-response and enhance statistical power.

A multistage sampling technique was used. First, universities were stratified by ownership type (federal, state, and private). Next, proportionate sampling was applied to select institutions from each stratum. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select Political Science lecturers from the sampled universities.

Data were collected using three standardized instruments adapted to the academic context: Cognitive overload – adapted NASA Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) (Hart & Staveland, 1988). Emotional exhaustion – adapted Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Psychological disengagement – adapted from the Work Withdrawal Behaviour Scale (Lehman & Simpson, 1992) and Employee Withdrawal Behaviour Measures (Hackett & Bycio, 1996). All instruments used a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree) and were contextualized to reflect academic work demands and behaviours in Nigerian universities.

Validity was established through expert review by specialists in educational psychology and measurement. Construct validity was confirmed via exploratory factor analysis, while reliability was determined through a pilot study of 40 lecturers not included in the main study. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .84 to .89, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Ethical procedures were strictly followed. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. Questionnaires were administered both electronically and in paper form to improve response rates.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics summarized levels of cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion. One-way ANOVA

tested differences in psychological disengagement based on university ownership, while simple linear regression examined the predictive effects of cognitive overload and emotional exhaustion on psychological disengagement. All tests were conducted at $p \leq .05$.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of cognitive overload among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?

Table 1: Mean and Std. Dev of the level of cognitive overload among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities

S/N	Items	M	SD	Remark
1	My teaching duties require more mental effort than I can comfortably manage.	2.48	0.98	Agreed
2	Administrative responsibilities make it difficult for me to concentrate on teaching.	2.60	0.91	Agreed
3	Combining teaching, research, and administrative work overwhelms me mentally.	2.60	0.96	Agreed
4	Preparing lectures for large classes places heavy mental pressure on me.	2.53	0.96	Agreed
5	I feel mentally drained after completing my academic duties for the day.	2.60	0.95	Agreed
6	I struggle to stay focused when I have several academic tasks to handle at once.	2.60	0.97	Agreed
7	I handle many mentally demanding tasks at the same time in my academic role.	2.62	0.97	Agreed

Note. Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are based on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree). Items with $M \geq 2.5$ are interpreted as agreement, indicating moderate to high cognitive overload.

Table 1 revealed the level of cognitive overload among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. The result showed that lecturers agreed to items 1–7, with mean values ranging from $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.98$ to $M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.97$, exceeding the benchmark score of 2.5 for moderate cognitive overload. This implies that lecturers frequently experience mental strain from combining teaching, research, and administrative duties, struggle to stay focused when handling multiple academic tasks, and feel mentally drained after completing daily academic responsibilities. Consequently, the grand mean of $M = 2.57$ indicates that Political Science lecturers experience a moderate level of cognitive overload, reflecting the significant mental demands inherent in their academic roles.

Research Question 2: What is the level of emotional exhaustion among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?

Table 1: Mean and Std. Dev of emotional exhaustion among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities

S/N	Items	M	SD	Remark
1	I feel emotionally drained by my academic work.	2.59	0.93	Agreed
2	I feel used up at the end of a typical workday.	2.45	1.00	Slightly Agreed
3	I feel tired when I think about facing another day at work.	2.63	1.04	Agreed
4	My job makes me feel emotionally exhausted.	2.67	0.89	Agreed
5	I feel burned out from my academic responsibilities.	2.41	0.91	Slightly Agreed
6	I feel frustrated by the emotional demands of my work as a lecturer.	2.70	0.92	Agreed
7	I feel worn out due to continuous interaction with students and colleagues.	2.71	1.01	Agreed

Note: Grand mean = 2.61; SD not reported. Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree. Items with $M \geq 2.5$ are considered agreement, indicating moderate to high emotional exhaustion.

The results in Table 2 indicate that Political Science lecturers generally experience moderate emotional exhaustion. Most items exceeded the benchmark of 2.5, suggesting that lecturers frequently feel emotionally drained, frustrated, and worn out due to their academic responsibilities and interactions with students. Two items fell slightly below the benchmark (items 2 and 5), indicating some variability in experiences of exhaustion. Overall, the grand mean of $M = 2.61$ reflects a moderate level of emotional exhaustion, highlighting the emotional demands associated with teaching and academic responsibilities.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers based on university ownership.

Table 3: ANOVA output on difference in psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers based on university ownership

University type	Mean	Std. Deviation	N		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
private	2.61	0.40	120	Between Groups	0.15	2	0.07		
State	2.60	0.39	188	Within Groups	61.81	397	0.16	0.048	0.953
federal	2.61	0.39	92	Total	61.83	399			
Total	2.61	0.39	400						

Source: Researcher's computation, 2026.

Table 3 revealed A one-way ANOVA conducted to examine differences in psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers based on university ownership.

The result indicated no statistically significant difference, $F(2, 397) = 0.048$, $p = 0.953$. Mean truancy behaviour was nearly identical across university types: private ($M = 2.619$, $SD = 0.402$), state ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.39$), and federal ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.39$) Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This suggests that lecturers' psychological disengagement in Nigerian universities is not influenced by institutional ownership, and other psychological, organizational, or contextual factors may better explain variations in truancy.

Hypothesis 2: To what extent does cognitive overload predict psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities?

Table 4: simple linear regression on the prediction of cognitive overload over psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	P
Regression	0.002	1	0.002	.2	0.913 ^b
Residual	61.830	398	0.155		
Total	61.832	399			
		Standardised			
		Unstandardized Coefficient	Coefficient	T	P
		B	Beta		
Constant	2.626	0.140		18.769	0.000
Cognitive overload	-0.006	0.054	-0.005	-0.109	0.913

$\alpha = 0.05$, $R = .005$ R -Square = .000

- a. **Dependent Variable:** psychological disengagement
- b. **Predictors (Constant):** Cognitive Overload

Table 4 shows the result of a simple linear regression analysis examining the predictive influence of cognitive overload on lecturers' psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. The regression model was not statistically significant, $F(1, 398) = 0.012$, $p = .913$, indicating that cognitive overload did not significantly predict lecturers' psychological disengagement.

The relationship between cognitive overload and psychological disengagement was extremely weak ($R = .005$), and the model explained less than 0.1% of the variance in truancy behaviour ($R^2 < .001$). Cognitive overload was not a significant predictor ($B = -.006$, $\beta = -.005$, $t = -0.109$, $p = .913$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This suggests that cognitive overload alone does not account for psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers, implying that other psychological, institutional, or contextual factors may play more substantial roles.

Hypothesis 3: Emotional exhaustion does not significantly predict t psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities.

Table 5: simple linear regression on the prediction of emotional exhaustion on psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	13.440	1	13.440	.539	0.00 ^b
Residual	48.392	398	0.122		
Total	61.832	399			

	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient	t	P
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	1.334	0.123		10.869	0.000
Emotional exhaustion	0.492	0.047	0.466	10.514	0.000

$\alpha = 0.05$, $R = .466^a$ R -Square = .217

- a. **Dependent Variable:** psychological disengagement
- b. **Predictors (Constant):** emotional exhaustion

Table 5 presents the result of a simple linear regression analysis examining the predictive influence of emotional exhaustion on lecturers' psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 398) = 110.539$, $p < .05$, indicating that emotional exhaustion significantly predicts lecturers' psychological disengagement.

The model yielded a moderate positive correlation ($R = .466$) and explained 21.7% of the variance in lecturers' truancy behaviour ($R^2 = .217$). Emotional exhaustion emerged as a significant predictor ($B = .492$, $\beta = .466$, $t = 10.514$, $p < .05$), suggesting that increases in emotional exhaustion are associated with corresponding increases in psychological disengagement among lecturers.

Discussion of Findings

The results in Table 3 show that university ownership does not affect psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers. Lecturers in private, state, and federal universities face similar challenges, including heavy workloads, limited resources, and job-related stress. This suggests that common systemic problems may be more important than differences in management or reward systems. While earlier studies (Fatima et al., 2024; Pepple et al., 2025; Aguwa, 2024) found differences in job satisfaction, stress, and engagement based on university type, the current findings suggest that shared pressures across all universities play a stronger role in influencing lecturers' disengagement.

Table 4 shows that cognitive overload, while a significant mental demand, did not directly predict psychological disengagement. In other words, even though lecturers face heavy mental workloads, this alone does not necessarily lead them to withdraw from work or reduce engagement in their duties. This finding contrasts with some earlier Nigerian studies (Oderinde et al., 2024; Ezeonwumelu et al., 2024; Okoseimiema & Ekpenyong, 2025), which linked high workloads and cognitive strain to burnout, stress, and disengagement. One possible explanation for the difference is that previous studies focused on outcomes such as burnout, health issues, or research withdrawal, rather than actual attendance or active engagement. Lecturers may continue to show up for work despite mental strain due to professional commitment, job security, or institutional oversight. At the same time, these results are in line with international research showing that heavy workloads and mental strain can affect lecturers' motivation, engagement, and overall well-being (Cao, Hassan, & Omar, 2025). This suggests that while cognitive overload contributes to stress, its impact on visible behaviours like psychological disengagement is likely indirect, operating through factors such as emotional exhaustion, coping strategies, or the level of institutional support.

Table 5 shows that emotional exhaustion significantly predicts psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers. Lecturers who are emotionally drained are more likely to withdraw from teaching duties, reduce effort, or disengage emotionally from their work. This result aligns with earlier Nigerian studies, such as Akeke et al. (2020), which found that emotional exhaustion reduced lecturers' performance and engagement. International research also reports similar patterns. For example, Zhai et al. (2025) and Amer et al. (2022) found that emotionally exhausted lecturers were more likely to disengage, miss work, or remain physically present but mentally withdrawn. Overall, these findings suggest that emotional exhaustion directly affects lecturers' willingness and ability to remain actively involved in their work. Unlike cognitive overload, which may be managed through coping strategies or institutional support, emotional exhaustion more strongly weakens motivation and commitment, making it a key driver of psychological disengagement. In this study, emotional exhaustion accounted for 21.7% of the variance in psychological disengagement, highlighting its central role in explaining why lecturers withdraw from active engagement in their professional duties.

The findings are theoretically supported by the Job Demands–Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). While cognitive overload represents a job demand, it is the prolonged depletion of emotional resources that triggers

withdrawal behaviours. Psychological disengagement, therefore, can be viewed as a defensive strategy to preserve remaining resources when lecturers are emotionally exhausted.

Overall, these results suggest that interventions aimed at reducing withdrawal behaviours should prioritize emotional support, recovery opportunities, and resource provision, rather than focusing solely on workload management. This highlights emotional exhaustion as the critical mechanism underlying disengagement among lecturers, regardless of institutional ownership.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that emotional exhaustion not cognitive overload or university ownership is the main factor driving psychological disengagement among Political Science lecturers in Nigerian universities. Lecturers may face heavy mental workloads, but it is the prolonged emotional drain that reduces effort, engagement, and commitment. These findings underscore the importance of prioritizing emotional well-being and institutional support to maintain lecturers' motivation, active participation, and overall professional effectiveness.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that universities:

1. Provide Emotional Support: Establish counseling services, stress management programs, and peer support systems to help lecturers manage emotional exhaustion.
2. Ensure Balanced Workloads: Allocate manageable workloads and provide adequate resources, including teaching and research support, to reduce work-related strain.
3. Promote Recovery and Well-Being: Encourage regular breaks, flexible scheduling, and well-being initiatives to sustain lecturers' engagement and professional effectiveness.

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