

# The Influence of Professional Development Program Practices in Enhancing Academic Staff Competency

(A Case of St. Augustine University of Tanzania)

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of professional development program practices in enhancing academic staff competency in universities. Specifically, the study aims at examining how needs assessment helps in identifying knowledge gap among academic staff, determining the contribution of program design toward skills improvement, and finally finding out the effect of program evaluation on work abilities of academic staff. The study involved a total population of 274 academic staff out of which a sample size of 127 was selected on both purposive and random basis. Data collection deployed structured questionnaire to solicit data from academic staff and interview from heads of departments and the deputy vice chancellor for academic affairs. Data analysis was done both quantitatively using SPSS software and qualitatively using thematic analysis. The key findings of the study reveal that needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation significantly influence academic staff competency.

**Originality:** the current study combines both qualitative and quantitative approach of data collection and analysis.

**Keywords:** Training Needs Assessment, Program Design, Professional Development Programs, Staff Competency

## INTRODUCTION

The changing educational background shaped by technological advancements and changing academic needs, highlights the importance of on-going professional development programs (PDPs) for academic staff in higher learning institutions (Kakoma, 2022). Effective professional development programs are important for improving educator's competencies, directly impacting teaching quality and student outcomes. However, concerns continue that current development initiatives may not fully meet the specific needs of academic staff, potentially reducing their effectiveness (Kakoma, 2022).

The earliest history of training and development of employees is rooted in the origins of education itself (Torracco, 2016). Training and development in the United States emerged in the period during and after its involvement in World War II. The emergence resulted from a demand for competent workers and innovation in technology.

Professional Development Programs have changed

significantly over the years, influenced by changes in educational theories, workplace demands, and technological advancements. Significant changes in PDPs took place from the early 19th century to date. Due to advancement occurring in formal education, the PDPs approach has been restructured from time to time particularly in fields like medicine, management, law, business and education (Gardner et al., 2017).

The industrial revolution in Europe is one of the push factors that gave rise to the need for well skilled labour, thus necessitating the importance of professional training programs (Fredrick Taylor (1911). This marked the beginning of formalized PDP's for educators. Additionally, economic growth and the need for a more educated workforce were a result of the expansion of higher education and vocational training programs globally. Moreover, the concept of lifelong learning that has gained prominence emphasizes the need for continuous PDPs throughout one's career (Agyeman, 2024).

The history of PDPs practices in Africa is a multidimensional story influenced by various factors including colonial legacies,

post-independence nation-building efforts, global economic trends, and local cultural dynamics (AU, 2016). After gaining independence in the 1950s and 1960s, many African nations prioritized education as a tool for nation-building. In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a strong emphasis on vocational and technical training to address skill shortages in the labour market. Many countries established technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions to provide skills that were directly applicable to the job market (ADB, 2018). The advancement of PDPs practices in Africa continued as consequences of rapid changes in economic, social, and technology particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where jobs demanded workers with advanced knowledge, specialized skills, and work abilities to meet society's demands.

Moreover, PDPs in Tanzania are closely tied to its colonial era, post-independence reforms, and contemporary efforts to modernize and improve the workforce. During the German colonial period (1885-1919), formal education and PDPs were limited and primarily focused on basic literacy and vocational skills for a small elite group. The Germans educate a few Africans to serve in lower administrative roles. The British introduced a more structured education system, but PDPs were still primarily aimed at creating a small clerical personnel to support colonial administration (AU, 2016)

After gaining independence in 1961, the president of Tanganyika by then (now Tanzania), the late Julius Nyerere emphasized on education as a foundation of national development (Nyerere, 1968). In 1967, the Arusha declaration outlined the government's commitment to education for all, leading to the expansion of primary and secondary education which later led into professional training programs to address skilled workforce gap in the country.

In Tanzanian universities, PDPs started at the University of Dar-es-Salaam (UDSM) which is the oldest university in Tanzania. Since its establishment in 1961, UDSM has been at the forefront of higher education and PDPs in the country (Mwamila et al., 2004). As to its operation, the university provides both short-term and long-term training internally and externally to address the market demand. By 2024, Tanzania has 49 universities out of which 19 are public while the remaining 30 are private universities. These universities provide a range of training programs that target at enhancing skills, capabilities, and competencies that cope up with the changing environment (Kitilya, 2009). Hence, universities have a long history of contributing to the PDPs of Tanzania's workforce. The universities' commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation to changing market needs ensures that they remain pillars of PDPs in the country for enhancing the academic staff and the public in general. The focus of the present study is to examine how PDP practices influence the competency amongst academic staff in universities.

Universities all over the world consider PDPs a critical condition for them to remain relevant, innovative, and competitive (Mabindisa, 2021). This is to say that PDPs are vital for both employees and institutional development. However, PDPs in Tanzanian universities are faced with a list of challenges including less or no consideration during promotion for it is reported that some universities do not consider such programs as part of the criteria for staff promotion (Matiba, 2023). Additionally, studies have revealed that there is a lack of needs assessment when identifying who deserves what kind of training (Gardenar et al., 2017). Lack of needs assessment raises several questions like; what gaps are being addressed during PDPs? How are participants being selected? Do such PDPs add value to both trainees and respective institutions? SAUT, one of the universities operating in Tanzania faces similar challenges with an additional challenge of shortage of funds to afford PDPs particularly those organized outside SAUT. The SAUT-HR statistics on training revealed that over 70 percent of the academic staff attending PDPs organized outside the university use their own sources to finance such training (SAUT- training statistics, July 2024). The main question now is "do these PDPs enhance academic staff competency"? The previous studies including (Agyeman 2024; Gardner et al, 2017; Pham 2021) came up with insufficient knowledge of how PDPs practices particularly needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation improves staff competency consequently creating a lacuna for further studies. Hence, the current study aims at examining how PDPs practices (needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation) may influence academic staff competency.

### **Underlying Theory**

The study adopted human capital theory which advocates that investments in employee's education, training, and overall development enhance their skills, knowledge, and productivity, thereby increasing their economic value and performance within an organization (Becker, 1964).

### **Empirical Literature review**

Empirical literature review is organized basing on the study variables where independent variables comprises of needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation while dependent variable is staff competency.

Needs assessment is composed of three levels namely individual, departmental, and institutional while program design is composed of the message content, on-the-job training, off-the-job training and teaching methods whereas program evaluation includes relevance of the content, alignment of program goals with institutional objectives, and the effectiveness of the training methods. Dependent variable is staff competency which encompasses of knowledge, skills, and

work ability.

### **The Influence of Needs Assessment on Identifying Knowledge Gap**

Under this variable, the study concentrated on examining the influence of needs assessment on identifying knowledge gap. It examined all three levels of needs assessment that is individual, departmental, and institutional level based on the evidence from previous empirical studies.

The institutional level of assessment focuses on identifying areas in the institution where training is needed whereas the departmental needs assessment focuses on the training needs of a particular department. On the other side, individual needs assessment analyses the knowledge, attitude and skills gap of an employee.

A careful needs assessment is required to establish a systematic identification of what is required to improve performance. This is done by carefully determining knowledge, skills, attitude, and the level of performance of the given employee (Ririhena & Notanubun 2021).

A study by Vutagwa and Muli (2019) which was done in manufacturing industry asserts that needs assessment has a significant effect on employee's competence. The same study found that organizational, individual, and manufacturing needs analysis are significantly related to the competency of employees. Likewise, Robert and Mori (2024) while studying the effect of training needs assessment in enhancing staff skills and firm performance realized that employees who after training needs assessment attended the training were more productive than their counterparts as reflected by their output and sales.

More so, Kipara & Rwabishugi, (2022) examined the effectiveness of training needs assessment on employee's performance in water projects using a case study of KUWASA in Kasulu Town- Kigoma Region in Tanzania. Specifically, the study examined levels of training needs assessment adopted by KUWASA to design training programs. The findings reveal that individual training needs are identified through the analysis of the current and past performance of respective employee.

Furthermore, Mutisya& Mutegi (2019) studied the effect of training needs assessment on organizational performance in the City-County of Nairobi and found that the most influential component of needs assessment was the individual needs assessment. Individual training needs assessment involves taking into account the needs of individuals by examining the lacking skills, knowledge, and abilities. This is an implication that if individual training needs are well identified and worked upon; the rest (departmental and organizational need) can be easily identified and dealt with by competent staff.

Another study that was carried out by Kura and Abba (2018) in Ramat Polytechnic, Maiduguri, Borno state aiming at

evaluating staff training needs assessment and realized that training needs assessment is not a priority. This is an opposing results as compared to others like (Mutisya and Mutegi, 2019; Kipara & Rwabishugi, 2022; Vutagwa and Muli 2019) that collectively appreciate the necessity of training needs assessment while identifying skill and knowledge gap.

### **Program Design and Skills Improvement**

The findings by Hassan et al., (2019) regarding the role of training design in influencing training effectiveness of employees in the public sector noted that, training plays an important role in improving the performance of an organization. The findings disclose that training improved the understanding of public officials on the decentralization and de-concentration (D &D) policy and their ability to apply D&D policy. Similarly, Hidayat (2022) analyzed the role of job training in improving employee performance of CV Agung Diponegoro and affirms that there is a positive and significant influence of training on employee performance.

Another study by Mang'anyi et al., (2018) examined the effects of employee training on employee performance of the Judiciary of Kenya and proclaimed that training resources and policies have a significant relationship with employee performance and they recommended that during budgetary allocation, the organization should allocate adequate resources for employee training. Moreover, Halim et al., (2023) studied the relationship between on-the-job training and employee performance in manufacturing companies. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents reported that on-the-job training had increased their skill level. Meanwhile, the relationship between on-the-job training and employee performance showed a significant positive impact. Equally, Juita (2023) examined the effect of on-the-job and off-the-job training through competence on the performance of employees of the Mojokerto Water Supply Company. The results show that on-the-job and off-the-job training tremendously improves employees' performance.

Besides, Khalili et al (2016) while studying the effectiveness of teaching methods in higher education in Iran based on the experiences of the best professors in the country and the best local professors at Isfahan university of technology revealed that the mixed method approach (i.e. student and teacher-centred) is the best when used along with educational planning and previous readiness.

### **Program Evaluation and Work Abilities**

A study by Vengdasamy et al., (2020) evaluated the influence of individual characteristics, training content, and manager support on the effectiveness of on-the-job training (OJT) in the banking and finance industry. The multiple regression results show that self-efficacy, motivation to learn,

training content, and manager support have a positive influence on OJT training effectiveness. Rahim et al., (2022) analyzed the effectiveness of training programs towards worker commitment in the education subsector in Malaysia. The effectiveness was measured through the use of three main elements, namely training course content, the role of the trainer, and support from top management. Results show that the role of the trainer and support from top management significantly influence worker commitment. Additionally, Abudlhabib & Al-Dhaafri (2020) examined the joint effect of training methods and readiness for training on the effective training process (ETP). The results show that training methods have a considerable impact on ETP. The study has various theoretical and practical implications, and the findings are likely to help managers make informed decisions on how to effectively apply training approaches in organizations.

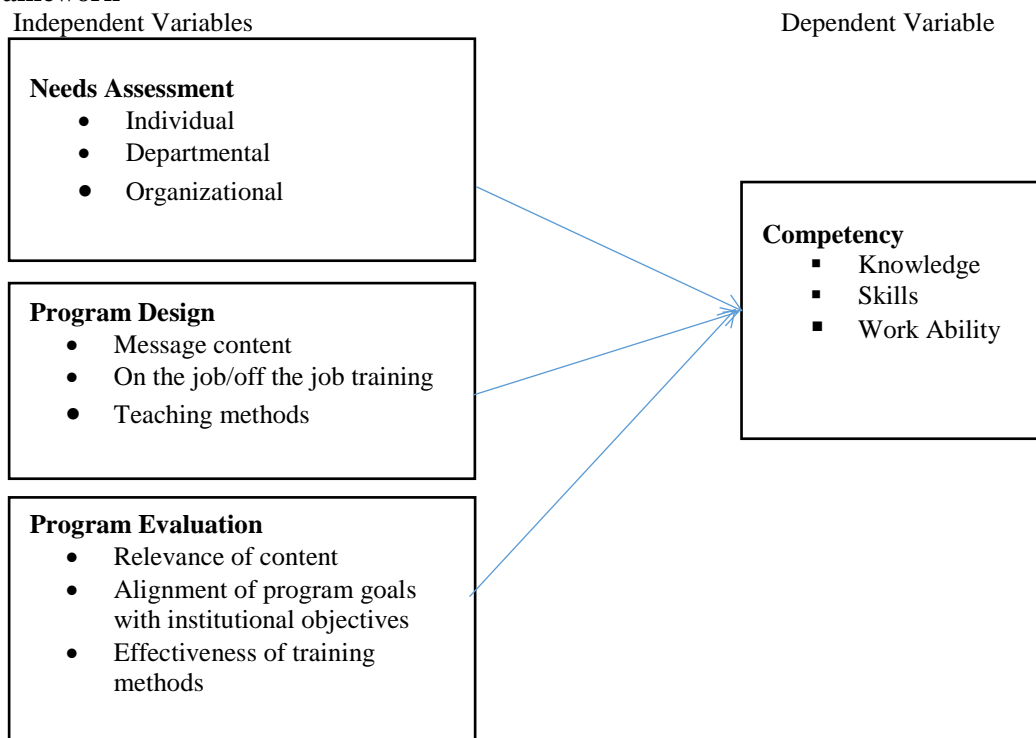
Further, Sanchez & Olvido (2024) when assessing the alignment of AB Economics program objectives with the Pangasinan State University's vision, mission, and goals reported that stakeholders are highly impressed and accept the VMGO, which is clear, consistent, and likely to be achievable. Besides, Faisal et al., (2023), investigates trainee reactions to employee training programs, emphasizing the dimensions of

perceived training efficiency (PTE), perceived trainer performance (PTP), and perceived usefulness of training (PUT). Findings reveal positive perceptions in terms of training efficiency and trainer performance implying a significant relationship between program evaluation and work abilities of employees.

Additionally, Abubakar (2024) investigates the relationship between employee understanding of banking technology and the effectiveness of training programs designed to enhance their adaptability. This research undertakes a comprehensive examination of the influence exerted by training and skill development programs on employee performance within private banks. The results reveal significant improvements in employee adaptability and job performance implying that the training was effective.

Finally but not least, Van and Hong (2023) carried out a study on factors for improving the effectiveness of professional training of employees in modern conditions in civil servants of Hanoi city. The findings reveal the dissatisfaction of employees with the training programs of professional development. The dissatisfaction helped the management to re-design training programs that captures the needs of employees.

### Conceptual Framework



*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*

## Research Methods

The study adopted pragmatism research philosophy which focuses on problem solving and producing actionable results. This approach was elastic in that it allowed the use of quantitative and qualitative methods (mixed method) that best suit the current study which utilize both interview and survey questionnaire to collect data. Interview was used to collect data from heads of department and DVCAA while questionnaires solicited data from members of academic staff. Moreover, the study deployed a cross-sectional research design where data were collected at a single point of time.

Study population is 274 academic staff of St. Augustine University of Tanzania, main campus located in Mwanza City, Tanzania. The population categories include; academic staff, heads of department and the deputy vice chancellor for academic affairs (DVCAA). Out of this population (274) a sample size of 127 was selected using both random sampling for academic staff and purposive sampling for heads of department and DVCAA. Linear regression analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed for quantitative data analysis while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data.

## RESULTS

### Correlation Analysis

This section focuses on correlation analysis, which tests the relationships between the key variables of the study, specifically needs assessment, program design, program

evaluation, and academic staff competency. Correlation analysis helps determine the strength and direction of the association between these variables, providing an understanding of how changes in one aspect of the PDPs may influence academic staff competency. By analyzing these relationships, the study intended to identify which components of PDPs are most effective in enhancing staff performance and whether there is a significant correlation between PDP practices and the overall improvement of academic competencies.

In this study, Pearson correlation is employed to assess the relationships between key variables such as needs assessment, program design, program evaluation, and academic staff competency. The analysis helps determine the degree to which these variables are associated and whether improvements in PDPs positively influence academic staff competency.

The Pearson correlation analysis in table 1 reveals positive relationships between needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation. The correlation between needs assessment and program design is 0.523, indicating that improvements in assessing staff needs are positively associated with better program design. Similarly, the correlation between needs assessment and program evaluation is 0.471, showing that as needs assessment improves, the effectiveness of program evaluation also improves. Additionally, there is a positive correlation of 0.498 between program design and program evaluation, suggesting that well-designed programs lead to more favourable evaluations. Overall, these positive correlations imply that enhancing any of these variables can have a beneficial impact on others, contributing to improved academic staff competency.

**Table 1;** Pearson Correlation Analysis

		Needs Assessment	Program Design	Program Evaluation
Needs Assessment	Pearson Correlation	1	0.523	0.471
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.002	0.008
	N	109	109	109
Program Design	Pearson Correlation	0.523	1	0.498
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002		0.004
	N	109	109	109
Program Evaluation	Pearson Correlation	0.471	0.498	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008	0.004	
	N	109	109	109

### Analysis of Variance

The ANOVA results as presented in table 2 indicate that the regression model is statistically significant in explaining the relationship between the predictors (needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation) and dependent variable (academic staff competency). The

regression sum of squares is 40.926 with 3 degrees of freedom, and the mean square is 13.642. The model has an F-value of 19.378 and a p-value (Sig.) of 0.001, which is well below the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the predictors collectively have a significant impact on academic staff competency. The residual sum of squares is 40.927 with 104 degrees of freedom, showing

that a significant portion of the variance in academic staff competency is explained by the regression model. Thus, the

predictors are statistically significant in influencing the competency of academic staff at.

**Table 2: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.926	3	13.642	19.378	0.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	40.927	104	0.390		
	Total	81.853	108			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Competency

b. Predictors: (Constant), Needs assessment, Program design, and Program evaluation

### Model Summary

The results from table 3 reveal a strong relationship between the predictors (Needs Assessment, Program Design, and Program Evaluation) and dependent variable (academic staff competency). The R-value of 0.751 indicates a strong positive correlation, while the R Square of 0.701 suggests that 70.1% of the variance in staff competency is explained by the

model. The Adjusted R Square of 0.573 shows that, the model remains robust even when accounting for complexity. The Standard error of the estimate is 0.542, indicating some variability in predictions, but the R square change of 0.61 highlights the significant contribution of the predictors. The F Change value of 15.321 with a 0.001 significance level confirms the model's statistical significance, underscoring the effectiveness of needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation in enhancing academic staff competency.

**Table3: Model summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std.Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.751 <sup>a</sup>	0.701	0.573	0.542	0.61	15.321	3	105	0.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Needs assessment, Program design, and Program evaluation

b. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Competency

### Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was deployed to examine the relationship between independent variables (needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation) and dependent variable (staff competency).

By analysing the predictive power of these independent variables, the study aims to identify which factors have the most significant impact on enhancing staff competency. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of how various aspects of PDPs collectively influence academic performance and growth.

The regression equation used is;  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \epsilon$ , where Y denotes academic staff competency, X1, X2, and X3 represent the independent variables (needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation) while  $\epsilon$  is the error

term capturing unexplained variation.

The regression results as shown in table 4 indicate that all three predictors; needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation have significant positive impact on academic staff competency. The constant value of 1.926 ( $p = 0.000$ ) represents the baseline level of competency when all other factors are held constant.

Needs assessment has an unstandardized coefficient of 0.250 ( $p = 0.002$ ), meaning that a one-unit improvement in needs assessment leads to a 25 percent increase in competency. More so, program design has a coefficient of 0.300 ( $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that a one-unit increase in program design results in a 30 percent rise in competency. Further, program evaluation shows the strongest effect, with a coefficient of 0.350 ( $p = 0.000$ ) suggesting that a one-unit increase in program evaluation leads to a 35 percent increase in academic staff competency. These findings confirm that all three study variables significantly contribute to improving staff competency. These findings are backed up by the human capital theory that advocates that training means investing in employee

to improve his/her competency which in turn pays back through improved productivity. Furthermore, the results show that the

strongest predictor is program evaluation 35% followed by program design 30%, and lastly needs assessment 25%.

**Table 4:** Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.926	0.354		5.435	0.000
	Needs Assessment	0.250	0.080	0.240	3.125	0.002
	Program Design	0.300	0.085	0.290	3.529	0.001
	Program Evaluation	0.350	0.090	0.340	3.889	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Staff Competency

### Needs Assessment and Knowledge Gap

The study aims at investigating and analyzing how needs assessment influences the identification of knowledge gaps among members of academic staff. The model summary (table 3) shows the R-square is 0.701 implying that 70.1% of the variance in academic staff competency is explained by the combination of independent variables; needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation. The results as presented in table 4 reveal a strong relationship at a five percent confidence interval between needs assessment and knowledge gap with a t-statistic of 3.125 and  $p \leq 0.002$ . This implies that needs assessment if well done, has a big chance to identify the knowledge gap amongst academic staff. Effective identification of the specific development needs of staff ensures that professional development programs (PDPs) are better tailored to improve individual weaknesses. These findings are in line with the findings by Ririhena and Notanubun (2021), who emphasized that a well-conducted needs assessment is crucial for understanding the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to improve staff competency. Besides, Vutagwa and Muli (2019) highlighted the positive relationship between organizational needs analysis and performance, reinforcing the idea that addressing staff-specific gaps through targeted needs assessments can significantly improve employee performance. On the other hand, results from interview held with heads of department reveal considerable dissatisfaction among respondents in various aspects of needs identification. For instance, regarding customization of PDPs, 70.0% of respondents are dissatisfied, explaining that their professional development plans do not adequately align with their individual needs. With regard to collaboration between management and departments, 50% expressed dissatisfaction, highlighting a lack of effective collaboration between management and departments in identifying collective PDP needs. Dissatisfaction was further found in the assessment of PDPs, where 80% of respondents reported dissatisfaction with current strategies used to development needs of academic staff where

they are not consulted. Some interviewees reported similar opinions as follows;

*“We try to consult our staff, but it’s not systematic. Sometimes we rely on informal conversations, which don’t always give a clear picture of their needs”.*

This kind of findings shows the necessity of the findings by Kipara & Rwabishugi (2022) who established that needs assessment should be formal and regularly done. This will ensure that the required skills are always in place to withstand the changing environment.

Another interviewee added that;

*“There’s a room for improvement on how we engage staff about their development. It feels like we need a more structured approach”.*

This admission of the management that there is a room for improvement on how needs assessments are conducted making the exercise formal indicates a positive intention of management regarding needs assessment among academic staff. A study by Gardemar et al (2017) recommends for formal identification of training needs. Lack of formal training needs raises questions like; who deserves training? What gaps are being addressed? Such questions indicate the necessity of training needs assessment which reveals the individual needs, departmental needs, and organizational needs.

More so, another interviewee made an addition that;

*“PDPs are supposed to be discipline tailored, but in practice, they often end up being generic. There’s a lack of resources and time to adequately assess and address each staff member’s unique needs”.*

The respondents have a perception that their specific departmental needs are not well captured when PDPs are too generic to the extent that some disciplines are either partially or not considered at all. Hence, both training needs assessment and PDPs should keenly be prepared insuring that the specific needs are made a priority.

Some respondents felt that the collaboration between management and departments could be improved as one of them expressed that;

*“There are times when our inputs as department heads are not*

fully considered. We provide assessments and feedback, but the final decision on PDPs sometimes overlooks the specific needs we identify at the department level”.

The findings show that needs assessment at SAUT is not individual tailored, rather it is generic, trying to cover the general training needs of academic staff. This implies that the university as asserted by Mutisya & Mutegi (2019), should go further taking on board individual training needs rather than ending up with general needs. This is because some disciplines have unique needs that need unique identification approach and consideration.

Another member of management admitted that this is a challenge, explaining that;

*“It’s difficult to balance individual and departmental needs with the university’s broader strategy. As a result, some departments may feel their specific concerns are not fully addressed, which leads to dissatisfaction. We would like to offer more customized programs, but the resources to cater for individual training needs are scarce”.*

Truly it is hard to meet the training needs of every individual person and department across the big university like SAUT due to resource constraints. This is in line with Matiba (2023) who affirms that DPDs in Tanzanian universities face a number of challenges including financial resources. However there is a need of striking a balance ensuring that unique needs of specific individuals like those with disabilities, the aged ones and the young ones need to be considered. This is emphasized by Mutisya & Mutegi (2019) who proclaimed that the most influential of the needs assessment is the individual needs assessment. Individual training needs assessment involves taking into account the needs of individuals in examining the skills, knowledge, and abilities gap affected by the respective occupational group which ultimately affects their performance. Another area of dissatisfaction reported was lack of proper follow-up and assessment of PDP implementation as one of the interviewees informed that;

*“We conduct needs assessments, but there is no thorough follow-up to ensure the identified needs are being worked upon. Many times, staffs feel that they are left on their own to seek out development opportunities”.*

Follow ups on the implementation of the needs identified ensures that both individual and organizational needs are taken care of. Otherwise it is the misuse of the organizational resources carrying out needs assessment and at the end leaving it unimplemented. In their study, Kura & Abba (2018) found similar findings at Ramat polytechnic Maiduguri where after training needs have been identified there is less initiative to ensure that the needs are being worked upon.

In contrast to the above responses from interviewees, another interviewee shows satisfaction with needs assessment practice reporting that;

*“Head of departments are being consulted by the management about departmental development needs and that the provided PDPs address their gaps”.*

The findings indicate a contradictory perception on how needs assessment is carried out at SAUT while others show dissatisfaction with the procedure, others show satisfaction. This is an indication that training needs assessment is done but there is a need to improve the exercise making it formal, regular and specific to individual needs.

### **Program Design and Skills Improvement**

The study aims at investigating and analysing how program design contributes to skills improvement of academic staff which in turn leads into staff competence. The results as per table 4 reveal a significant relationship at a five percent confidence interval between program design and skills improvement with a t-statistic of 3.529 and  $p \leq 0.001$ . This implies that if the programs are tailored to address needs gap, they significantly improve the skills of academic staff. This is to say that, skills of academic staff improve when PDPs are designed with clear goals, practical applications, and relevant content.

These findings are consistent with Hidayat (2022) who demonstrated that effective program design, including on-the-job training and relevant teaching methods, significantly improves employee performance. Similarly, Mang’unyi et al. (2018) argued that diverse instructional methods and the allocation of adequate resources are essential for improving skills and competencies. Besides, the findings are in line with the human capital theory (HCT) that stresses that investments in systematic training programs tailored to both individual and organizational needs enhances productivity and increases economic value.

The interview findings regarding the contribution of program design toward improving staff skills revealed varied opinions as follows.

*“The university frequently gathers feedback from us, and this input plays a key role in shaping the PDPs content. What we learn from the PDPs is tailored to our discipline”.*

The finding is an indication that PDPs exist and considers the needs of various disciplines across the university. This ensures that the training addresses the specific challenges that staff face in their respective fields. However, one of the interviewee disagreed with the former one, explaining that;

*“The PDPs content often lacks specificity and does not fully address the diverse challenges we face. The methods used are often too generic and don’t consider the varying learning preferences of staff”.*

Again this represents the perception contradiction amongst respondents indicating that even if the university has PDPs in place, they are not individual needs oriented. More so, This the



findings indicate that there is a need to modify the PDPs contents and training methods to suit the needs of individual academic staff as well as those of the university. The same was also revealed by Mutisya & Mutegi (2019), stresses that for better performance results, training programs should focus on individual employee needs.

Another interviewee informed that;

*“On-the-job training program is effectively applied in real-world of academic settings but it should incorporate a large portion of practical training”.*

This reveals the importance of skills oriented programs that address the skill gap at work place. Employees value training programs if they are meant to bring solution to their work places, in particular those programs that involve practical aspect. This is supported by the previous study by Halim et al (2023) who established that practical training through on-the-job approach has a bigger chance to increase productivity. This is because learning by doing involves more sense organs than it is with lecturing making learning process and transfer of learning easier.

However, contradiction was reported as another interviewee shared that;

*“SAUT offers PDPs using a range of teaching methods, including workshops, online modules, and personalized coaching, which accommodate different learning preferences. Some of us prefer hands-on workshops, while others opt for online learning due to resource constraints, and SAUT’s PDPs offer the flexibility to choose what works best”.*

From this, it is noted that PDPs at SAUT involves various training methods including practical training. This is in line with Khalili et al (2016) who confirmed that mixed-up training methods impresses and easily capture the interest of learners making learning effective. The contradicting interview results imply that some would prefer more practical sessions to lecture approach.

In contrast another respondent informed that;

*“There’s a gap between the training provided and its practical implementation; we don’t see much change in everyday tasks”.*

Training becomes meaningful when it is transferred to work place and brings about changes in productivity. If people get trained but the skills acquired are not applied, then such training is useless and wastage. The findings indicate that there is no follow up to check whether the transfer of learning is in place. The previous study by Kura and Abba (2018) find similar results, where it was revealed that implementation of the identified training needs was not a priority.

Regarding the inclusivity of PDP teaching methods, 80.0% agreed that the methods cater for the diverse needs of academic staff, while 20.0% disagreed, signalling some dissatisfaction with the accommodation of different learning styles within the program. One of the respondents highlighted that;

*“After applying new teaching strategies, we usually receive feedback from both academic staff and students that help in refining our training methods and ensure that we’re on the right track. Our department had unique needs regarding updated teaching techniques, and after reporting this concern to the management, new modules were incorporated into the following PDPs to address those gaps”.*

This is another indication of how serious the management take into consideration the individual and departmental needs regarding the PDPs content that suits them. Individual tailored programs are necessary particularly in addressing the specific skill gap.

The findings generally reflect the mixed views on how well program design contributes to staff skill enhancement. The findings show a mixed up perception regarding the influence of SAUT’s program design on skills improvement, with notable areas for improvement. However, the results indicate that program design if well-constructed has a greater chance to improve the skills among members of academic staff.

### **Program Evaluation and Work Abilities**

The findings presented in table 4 indicate a significant influence of program evaluation on work abilities of academic staff ( $t=3.889$  and  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). More so, the significant F Change of 0.001 confirms the strong influence of program evaluation on work abilities among members of academic staff. This means that intense evaluation of the training program improves working abilities of academic staff. Therefore SAUT should implement robust evaluation mechanisms, such as collecting participant feedback and reviewing the relevance of PDPs content so as to enhance continuous improvement of staff development efforts. Effective program evaluations lead to adjustments in the program contents, enhancing their alignment with current market and professional demands, which ultimately lead into greater staff competency.

Interview results on how program evaluation influence workability of academic staff shows a significant variation on perception amongst interviewees. For example, one of the respondents expressed a state of dissatisfaction asserting that; *“The standardized content is too rigid and does not allow us to cater for the specific needs of different disciplines. We need more flexibility to customize the content to suit our faculty’s unique requirements”.*

This is an implication that it is difficult to evaluate the effect of the training programs that are too general. It is hard to evaluate what is successful and what is not. On contrast, it is easier to evaluate the training programs that are specific to addressing a certain skill gap by assessing the staff is capable of performing after the training. Vengdasamy et al., (2020) while examining the influence of individual characteristics and training contents established that training programs that are discipline oriented

increases trainees' morale. Thus, there is a need for PDPs to be designed in a way that reflects the exact needs of trainees.

Regarding flexibility in training contents, respondents are of the view that the uniqueness of each discipline should be considered so that PDPs adds value to the working ability of the concerned staff.

*"Each department can request customizations to address specific challenges or needs unique to their discipline".*

This approach ensures that while all staff members receive core training, there is also an opportunity to focus on specialized areas relevant to their roles.

When asked how SAUT maintains this balance, the respondent from management side noted that;

*"We ensure that standardized contents serve as a foundation, and we allow for adjustments to meet the specific requirements of different departments".*

This further informs that PDPs at SAUT are able to cut across all discipline even if not to the fullest extent. As reported earlier, it is difficult to meet specific needs of every individual person or department due to resource constraints. What is important is making sure that the critical individual needs are being considered. This is in support of Al-Mannaee & Ryan (2018) who emphasizes that for training program to be meaningful it should be learner centred.

Regarding the alignment of PDP goals with the institution's mission, 70.0% of respondents agreed, indicating satisfaction with how effectively PDPs support the university's strategic objectives while 30.0% of interviewees are of the opinion that training goals are not adequately aligned with the institutional mission, suggesting a significant need for better strategies to align PDPs goals with the institutional mission.

Regarding the feedback mechanisms on the effectiveness of PDPs, one respondent noted that;

*"We regularly review the effectiveness of our trainings by collecting feedback from participants and making necessary revisions to keep the programs up to date. We take participant feedback seriously, and it informs the changes we make to ensure the PDPs are always relevant and effective".*

The results indicate that the university regularly conducts review regarding PDPs to ensure that the program contents and methods enhance expected staff competence. These are similar findings to that of Mutisya & Mutegi (2019) who assert that feedback on how PDPs work is vital for it helps to improve the future trainings. It was explained that continuous improvement of PDPs is one of the university's priorities and that the university regularly updates PDPs contents to reflect academic trend as well as ensuring that facilitators are well prepared.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation collectively contribute to improving the competency of academic staff where program evaluation has the strongest effect followed by program design and lastly needs assessment.

## Limitations and Recommendations

The findings revealed that the needs assessment process is in place but weak in identifying and addressing the specific knowledge gaps of academic staff. Hence the study recommends for discipline oriented process that would specifically identify the training needs for each discipline.

The study further revealed a mixed perceptions regarding program design where some respondents felt that programs lack customization. The study therefore recommends for adequate consultation of staff when designing training programs. It was further discovered that feedback mechanism on program evaluation is not effective. Hence, it is recommended that continuous feedback mechanism be established to make sure that both staff and university priorities are well captured. The current study focused on three variables namely; needs assessment, program design, and program evaluation leaving out other variables such as staff motivation, resource availability, and external influences like policy changes. The study then recommends that future studies focus on such variables so as to validate the findings of the present study.

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