

An Exploration of the Practices of Locational Flexibility in Developing Economies: Insights from the Nigerian Higher Education Sector

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An Exploration of the Practices of Locational Flexibility in Developing Economies: Insights from the Nigerian Higher Education Sector

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3 **An Exploration of the Practices of Locational Flexibility in Developing Economies:**
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5 **Insights from the Nigerian Higher Education Sector**
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8
9 **Abstract**

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11 **Purpose** – This study explores the practices of locational flexibility in the Nigerian higher
12 education sector. It examines the realities of remotely organising and managing academics’
13 teaching and administrative workload, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
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17 **Design/methodology/approach** – Relying on the interpretative paradigm, the dataset consists
18 of semistructured interviews with 92 professionals in the Nigerian higher educational
19 institution (HEI) sector drawn from private and public federal government-owned and regional
20 (otherwise known as state government) tertiary institutions.
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24 **Findings** – The study highlights the practices of locational flexibility across the Nigerian
25 higher education sector. Therefore, it underscores the notions of locational flexibility from the
26 perspective of Nigerian academics. It reveals a paucity in the range and usage of locational
27 flexibility options across the Nigerian higher education sector, as well as the factors shaping
28 its implementation and utilisation. Ultimately, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the
29 findings reveal that locational flexibility is predominantly environmentally induced.
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33 **Originality/value** – This study focused on a salient topic that explores the practices of
34 locational flexibility, particularly in an underresearched context of developing economies,
35 specifically Nigeria. Moreover, the study contributes to the scarce literature on locational
36 flexibility. Additionally, unlike previous studies that are mostly preoccupied with the meaning
37 of the concept and the importance of the practice to employees’ work-life balance,
38 organisational flexibility, and overall operational performance, this study underpins the
39 practices, utilisation and barriers to implementing locational flexibility.
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43 **Keywords:** locational flexibility, higher education institutions, flexible working arrangements,
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Introduction

The Nigerian higher education sector is a well-regarded occupation with highly gifted academics who have been trained according to Western standards. However, the organisation and management of work structures and processes in this sector are notoriously bureaucratic and highly regimented, giving rise to growing concerns of academics experiencing work-life imbalance (Akanji *et al.*, 2020). Evidence from developed economies such as the UK, US, EU, Canada and some Asian countries (such as Japan and China) underscores how businesses have been rapidly adapting and adjusting to technologies that are instrumental to the practice of locational flexibility, which has resulted in significant improvement in their operational efficiency (Possenriede *et al.*, 2016; Vilhelmson and Thulin, 2016). The results of these changes have led to a transformation in work-life experiences, including improvements in academics' work productivity, as well as organisational productivity, performance, and profit. Broadly speaking, workplace flexibility encapsulates temporal, numerical, financial, and locational flexibility (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011). In other words, locational flexibility is a subset of workplace flexibility. Locational flexibility differs across organisations in different countries (Neirotti *et al.*, 2019).

There has been an increase in academic interest in locational flexibility issues over the past two decades (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011; Boell *et al.*, 2016); however, there are limited studies on the experience of this concept in the education sector. Moreover, while a large body of research on employment flexibility, especially in North America and Western Europe, has increased, less consideration has been given to the execution of similar studies in developing countries in Africa, where institutional systems and cultural values differ from those existing in the West. Therefore, exploring locational flexibility from the context of the education sector associated with adopting the practice in a developing economy's perspective is a clear departure from

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3 previous studies that have engaged the concept predominantly from the realm of meaning
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5 (largely induced by Western culture) and various benefits associated with the practice.
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9 Therefore, this research aims to explore the practices of locational flexibility in the Nigerian
10 higher education sector. On this basis, this research examines the following questions: What
11 are the experiences of locational flexibility and its practices in the Nigerian higher education
12 sector? Are there any significant challenges to adopting or implementing locational flexibility
13 within the Nigerian higher education sector? In other words, the focus of this study is to fill the
14 research gap in the literature by contributing to the understanding of employment flexibility
15 within Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs). The authors' aim is that the findings
16 hereof will contribute to the largely neglected subject of labour (locational) flexibility by
17 assessing institutional and sociocultural nuances that negatively impact the quality of
18 educational processes and output. This study includes a literature review, which captures the
19 theoretical and empirical studies within the topical subject area. This is followed by an
20 explanation of the methodology used in the study. Finally, the study findings and a discussion
21 thereof are presented.
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38 39 **Conceptualising Locational Flexibility**

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42 Flexibility at work is categorised as either employer or employee flexibility (Koivisto and Rice,
43 2016). On the one hand, employer flexibility equates to the deliberate action of an organisation
44 to offer its employees flexible work arrangements (FWAs) by making changes to working time,
45 work location, and work activities to improve productivity as well as to ensure employee
46 wellbeing (Kalleberg, 2009; Kossek and Thompson, 2016). On the other hand, employee
47 flexibility refers to the uptake of FWAs that are available and suitable for an employee to
48 improve their balance of work and life obligations (Ter Hoeven and van Zoonen, 2015). Kossek
49 *et al.* (2014) suggest that workplace flexibility (WPF) facilitates the negotiation of personalised
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3 work arrangements and provides solutions to organisational inefficiencies. Flexible working
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5 arrangements facilitate improved employee wellbeing, thereby stimulating higher productivity
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7 and reducing organisational costs (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011; Adekoya *et al.*, 2022). In a sense, it is
8
9 an agreement between the employer and workers regarding the control and management of
10
11 their work environment, time, processes, or techniques in achieving continuous organisational
12
13 productivity, thereby minimising costs and maximising profit (Kossek *et al.* 2014; Bal and
14
15 Jasen, 2016). There are several forms of flexible working practices, such as annualised hours,
16
17 part-time work, job sharing, flexi-time, home working, compressed hours, and staggered hours
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19 (Kossek and Thompson, 2016).
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25 The term locational flexibility can be traced to 1970, developed from the term ‘telecommuting’
26
27 (Nilles, 1988). The term has now taken on new meaning and significance (Yu *et al.*, 2019).
28
29 However, the widespread usage of advanced computers and the Internet since the 2000s has
30
31 further facilitated the implementation of telecommuting, enabling an individual to work
32
33 remotely while maintaining contact with coworkers and the rest of the organisation with the
34
35 aid of ICT (Holtgrewe, 2014). Consequently, several business models that support locational
36
37 flexibility have emerged, such as activity-based workplaces, coworking spaces, digital working
38
39 hubs, and office clubs (Yu *et al.*, 2019).
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44 Locational flexibility can be described as a situation where workers may be able to work
45
46 remotely for some or all of their working hours (Bal and De Lange, 2015; Clarke and
47
48 Holdsworth, 2017). Both Possenriede *et al.* (2016) and Yu *et al.* (2019) argue that locational
49
50 flexibility is a mechanism that allows for work to be performed away from the traditional
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52 workplace by using mobile workers, outworkers, or teleworkers. The range and usage of
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54 locational flexibility is different across diverse contexts, depending on the personal flexibility
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56 and autonomy that it offers (Mulki *et al.*, 2009). It includes working from home, on the road,
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58 at a hub, or at the client’s site (Vartiainen and Hyrkkänen, 2010).
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3 In recent years, people have advocated the necessity for remote working or teleworking, among
4 other FWAs, to balance work and family roles (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011; Adisa *et al.*, 2019).
5
6 Similarly, Vartiainen and Hyrkkänen (2010) argue that using technology-supported devices as
7 a medium for maintaining communication between the employee and the employer can
8 facilitate locational flexibility. In his seminal work on organisational flexibility, Atkinson
9 (1984) mirrors locational flexibility as one within the second periphery clusters where remote
10 workers are contingent workers segmented away from the core workforce. They offer employer
11 cost savings by creating fewer workspaces while offering employees in the periphery segment
12 options of remote working (Mordi, 2013; Felstead and Henseke, 2017). However, the theory
13 has been criticised since the advancement of technology provides core employees with ICT
14 tools for performing the primary aspects of their work through the use of digital working hubs
15 that promote video conferencing, teleworking, and an on-demand workplace (Yu *et al.*, 2019).
16
17 The empirical organisational flexibility discourse highlights the benefits and costs of locational
18 flexibility for both employers and employees. For instance, WPF debates in support of
19 locational flexibility have been grounded in the assumption that it provides a greater level of
20 autonomy to employees so that they may decide where their work is performed, which has
21 some positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction and the reduced costs of commuting to work
22 (Kossek and Thompson, 2016; CIPD, 2019). Similarly, Yu *et al.* (2019) argue that locational
23 flexibility promotes smart cities by enhancing business innovation and collaboration, reducing
24 costs, increasing employee satisfaction, and promoting a safe and less polluted environment.
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50 **Note that locational flexibility has also been seen to have adverse effects on flexible workers'**
51 **productivity, such as work intensification and job insecurity (Kalleberg, 2009; Fogarty *et al.*,**
52 **2011; Atkinson and Sandiford, 2016).** Bentley *et al.* (2016) found that many employees
53 working from home may find it difficult to maintain concentration on their work, as family
54 time demands could impinge on their work responsibilities and vice versa. This has become
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3 more obvious in the wake of the current COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, where many
4 professionals have had to work from home, unlike their traditional work mode (Koroma *et al.*,
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8 2014). Papatheodorou (2015) suggests that locational flexibility can thwart work-family
9
10 balance and engender work-life/family conflict due to blurring the border between work and
11
12 personal/family lives. Moreover, the effectiveness of locational flexibility is backed by the use
13
14 of digital-assisted technologies to facilitate communication between a remote worker and other
15
16 members of his/her organisation (Boell *et al.*, 2019).
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20 Furthermore, the adoption and practice of locational flexibility differ between developing and
21
22 developed countries. For instance, in a recent research ranking how 30 countries (including
23
24 Nigeria) adapt to remote work, Bana *et al.* (2021) found that developed countries adapted more
25
26 easily to remote work than their counterparts in developing countries based on three key
27
28 factors, including internet quality, experience working from home, and demographics. Their
29
30 findings suggest that developed countries (e.g., Luxembourg, Sweden, Netherlands, Canada,
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32 and Belgium) have higher internet penetration rates, better occupational mix due to having high
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34 proportions of scientists, engineers, and business and administration professionals, better social
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36 policies supporting labour flexibility, and a higher proportion of the labour force with
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38 experience working from home. In contrast, developing countries (e.g., Pakistan, China, Brazil
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40 and Nigeria) performed worse in the rankings; in fact, Nigeria ranked last of the 30 countries.
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43 Another intriguing conclusion from their study was that developing countries struggled to
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45 adjust to locational flexibility because of their high fertility rates and high proportion of homes
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47 with young children, which made it difficult to manage distractions when working from home
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49 (Bana *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, by considering the institutional and sociocultural factors in
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51 developing countries, this study deems it fit to further explore the practices of locational
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53 flexibility in Nigeria.
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Study Context

Nigeria is a sub-Saharan West African country with a population of over 200 million people and the largest economy in Africa, with a labour market of approximately 60 million people. The estimated rate of unemployment is 23.1% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The education sector is one of the most prominent sectors in Nigeria. It comprises the primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions administered by the federal, state, and local governments. The sector is regulated by the Federal Ministry of Education, which is entrusted with the formulation and implementation of policies as well as quality control (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Nigerian tertiary education is divided into universities, polytechnic institutions, and colleges of education. These divisions are further categorised into federal, state, and private institutions. There are 43 federal universities, 47 state universities, and 75 private universities; 33 federal, 91 state, and 64 private polytechnic institutions; and 22 federal, 47 state, and 20 private colleges of education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Nigeria is faced with a myriad of infrastructural failures (Agbionu *et al.*, 2018). Hence, academics across Nigerian HEIs find it difficult to operate within a technologically challenged environment. This exacerbates our concerns regarding their experiences of locational flexibility, the extent to which it is practised and the challenges that hamper locational flexibility practices in Nigerian higher education institutions.

The sector is plagued by poor funding, mismanagement, incessant industrial strike actions, and dysfunctional and unethical practices, including inadequate implementation of budgetary allocations, leading to insufficient staffing and nonavailability of the most essential instructional materials (World Education Services [WES], 2017; IseOlorunkanmi *et al.*, 2021). There are approximately 16 million students in these Nigerian tertiary institutions (UNESCO, 2018). The poor teacher-to-student ratio due to the overcrowding of students in limited-

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3 capacity classrooms remains one of the major challenges within the sector (WES, 2017).
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5 Furthermore, the management of work structures and processes in this sector is viewed as
6
7 excessively bureaucratic and highly regimented (Omodero and Nwangwa, 2020) and
8
9 undermines support for academics within the sector (IseOlorunkanmi *et al.*, 2021). Despite
10
11 several restructuring measures over the years, the availability and usage of FWAs that permit
12
13 locational flexibility across the sector mirrors the deteriorating rate of academics' wellbeing
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17 (Adekoya *et al.*, 2019; Akanji *et al.*, 2020).
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20 **Methodology**

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22 This study is guided by interpretivism, allowing researchers to discover rich narratives from
23
24 individuals' lived experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This approach is used following the
25
26 authors' interest in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the researched phenomenon by
27
28 drawing inferences from the patterns that occur during the event (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).
29
30 Similar studies have also adopted this approach in Nigeria (Mordi *et al.*, 2013; Adisa *et al.*,
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32 2019). A case study design was used in this study to provide an opportunity to explore the
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34 meanings, motivations, and implications of daily activities and life events. While a case study
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36 approach can provide sufficient qualitative data, generalisation of the results may be difficult.
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38 Nevertheless, case studies are essential in clarifying concepts and generating theories from data
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42 (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).
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47 *Insert Table 1 about here*
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50 Using the snowballing approach, which allows a researcher to use the initial study participants
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52 to recruit other participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), participants were solicited through
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54 referrals and personal contacts (emails and phone numbers). **Participants were recruited from**
55
56 **across the six geopolitical regions in Nigeria, including states such as Lagos, Oyo, Osun,**
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58 **Kwara, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Cross River, Enugu and Adamawa.** Among the six geographical
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3 regions, the South–West region was the most representative in our research since it has the
4 highest number of state and private HEIs compared to other regions. This study interviewed 92
5 participants with academic or administrative responsibilities across Nigeria’s federal, state, and
6 private tertiary institutions. **By academics, we refer to participants with primary teaching roles,**
7 **while participants such as vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, provosts, rectors,**
8 **registrars, bursars, and departmental heads are referred to as administrative staff.** The
9 demographics of the recruited participants are presented in Table 1.

10
11 In fulfilment of the study’s confidentiality agreement, pseudonyms were used for the
12 participants’ representation. They have been named according to their rank or position and their
13 HEI division (i.e., federal, state, or private). Furthermore, the eligibility of each participant was
14 based on the length of employment with their current employer (a minimum of one year), age
15 (25 years old and older), and marital status (single, married, divorced, and separated).
16 Semistructured interviews, which lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, were conducted using
17 electronic and audio devices and online media (telephone audio calls, WhatsApp calls, and
18 Skype) according to the preferences of the interviewees. The data collection instrument was
19 deemed fit as a result of the face-to-face restriction caused by the lockdown and self-isolation
20 instructions from the Nigerian government. Consent forms were sent via email to the
21 participants, and their employers’ consent was also sought. An open-ended questioning style
22 was employed to allow for flexibility in discussing and exploring the participants’ views. For
23 reliability purposes, the researchers were also able to arrange meetings through online and
24 social media platforms to compare notes and ensure the coverage of all interview protocols in
25 the pursuit of data dependability (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Note that the study aims to
26 explore the practices of locational flexibility in the Nigerian higher education sector. Saturation
27 was attained after 78 participants were interviewed, given that no new information was added
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3 that reinforced the findings of the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Nevertheless, 14 more
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5 interviews were conducted to substantiate the existing themes.
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8 **Data Analysis**

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11 Data transcription took place immediately after the interviews were conducted. Iteratively, the
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13 transcription and analysis of data were performed in a systematic, repetitive, and recurring
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15 manner while adopting the thematic analysis procedure (TAP). TAP involves the identification,
16
17 analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
18
19 Following the three major steps of thematic analysis proposed by Pratt *et al.* (2006), the
20
21 researchers first derived the first-order codes through provisional categorisation by using the
22
23 open-coding method for data reduction. This was done by analysing transcribed text contexts
24
25 and identifying phrases or words that recur and are significant to the research enquiry (see
26
27 Table 2). A contact summary form, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), was used to
28
29 record the provisional categories that were identified from the interview extracts at different
30
31 points in time. This enabled us to identify the relevant issues and themes that resulted in
32
33 additional questions. Upon completing name coding and categorisation, we carefully reviewed
34
35 the interview data to eliminate any risk of omission or mismatching within the categories.
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42 The theoretical categories were then generated by consolidating the first-order codes based on
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44 the interview data regarding the participants' concerns as they relate to their experiences of
45
46 locational flexibility, organisational productivity, and wellbeing. In the final step, we attempted
47
48 to establish theoretical explanations for the prevalence of the studied phenomenon. Key themes
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50 concerning the practices of locational flexibility in Nigerian HEIs unravelled. Cross-
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52 comparisons were undertaken, followed by the validation of conceptual categories, until a
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54 consensus on the main themes was attained.
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Insert Table 2 about here

Findings

Notions of Locational Flexibility in the Nigerian Higher Education Sector

Locational flexibility is not a strange concept in the education sector, particularly among professionals in HEIs in the Western hemisphere (Kossek and Thompson, 2016; Bal and Jasen, 2016). In Nigeria, there is a general agreement that locational flexibility can be described as the ability to undertake work at home or in a particular location outside the traditional workplace. Some of the following quotations typify the shared views of the participants:

Locational flexibility is not strange in Nigeria, but it is not well pronounced within the education sector [...].

Locational flexibility is the ability of employees to work from anywhere while leveraging the available technological devices, regardless of one's geographical location (Lecturer II – State Polytechnic).

Locational flexibility is about not allowing whatever business activities you conduct to be restricted by location [...], especially with the aid of technology, which gives flexibility for work and increased productivity (Professor/Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Private University).

I think locational flexibility would be another term for remote working [...] it literally would suggest that people work in locations other than their main office (Lecturer III – State College of Education]

From the variety of responses, it is evident that locational flexibility is a known concept within the Nigerian education sector. In addition, the participants construe locational flexibility as an essential aspect of daily working, despite the inability to successfully disengage work from their fixed office location. The participants' conceptualisations of locational flexibility align with other studies (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011; Possenriede *et al.*, 2016) that suggest that locational flexibility is a mechanism that allows for work to be performed away from the traditional workplace.

Adoption of Locational Flexibility in the Nigerian Higher Education Sector

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3 Predominantly, the range and scope of locational flexibility have been sparse among this group
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5 of professionals. Based on our findings, an overwhelming majority (87%) of the participants
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7 claimed that the locational flexibility options are limited in Nigerian HEIs and support only
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9 home working, while other forms of locational flexibility (such as digital working hubs and
10
11 coworking spaces) are rarely used. The following responses exemplify the range and usage of
12
13 locational flexibility:
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17 Before the pandemic, there was nothing like locational flexibility in my institution, as all lectures were face-
18
19 to-face. My faculty took the initiative of using the Zoom platform [...] (a lecturer in my faculty paid for this,
20
21 not the university) in order for us to continue engaging the students in spite of the lockdown occasioned by
22
23 the pandemic. [...] We started with the final-year students (Associate Professor – State University).
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26
27 As a lecturer in a federal HEI, I can say that there is nothing like locational flexibility. There were no provisions
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29 to teach remotely, as our delivery has always been on a face-to-face basis, including management meetings
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31 (Professor – Federal University).
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34 My teaching responsibilities are more hands-on and require delivering technical education [...] Therefore, in
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36 Nigeria, we don't have sophisticated technology, and working from home is impossible for my kind of job
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38 (Principal Lecturer – State Polytechnic).
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41 We are a federal university, set up for distance and flexible learning. However, online platforms are mostly
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43 used for registration, tuition payments, and downloading lecture materials. Our exams are not conducted
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45 virtually but face-to-face. However, the online platform is not strong enough to support online delivery [...] –
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47 imagine having 2000 students registered for a course, and during the lecture delivery, only approximately 30
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49 students are in attendance. This is because our technology is inadequate (Associate Professor/Head of
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51 Department – Federal University).
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54 The above quotes are representative of the shared views that most tertiary institutions in Nigeria
55
56 do not practice locational flexibility. The limited adoption of locational flexibility is common
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58 among these HEIs, regardless of their classification (universities, polytechnics, or colleges of
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60 education), as it is challenging for Nigerian tertiary institutions to encourage locational
flexibility given the difficulties they face as a developing nation.

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3 Generally, while some academic staff members in Nigerian HEIs undertake aspects of their
4 administrative duties and research from home, teaching remotely with technological aid within
5 and outside most tertiary institutions in Nigeria is significantly limited. According to Adejumo
6 (2020), the availability of effective distance learning programmes to aid locational flexibility
7 across Nigerian HEIs is scarce. Furthermore, despite the paucity in the usage of locational
8 flexibility over the years, the majority of Nigerian HEIs practising locational flexibility are
9 predominantly private institutions. Most state and federal HEIs do not practice remote teaching
10 and research. This finding resonates with Agbionu *et al.*'s (2018) study, which suggests that
11 private HEIs in Nigeria, based on commercial and profitability-related motives, are better
12 innovators than state and federal HEIs.
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27 **Locational Flexibility: Reactionary or Environmentally Induced**

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29 The availability and usage of organisational flexible working arrangements across many
30 Nigerian organisations are sparse (Mordi *et al.*, 2013; Ajonbadi, 2019). Based on this study's
31 findings, a majority (88%) of the participants view the implementation of locational flexibility
32 as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following extracts typify the participants'
33 impression as to whether locational flexibility is used as a strategy or an environmental reaction
34 in Nigerian HEIs:
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44 As a relatively new private university, the pandemic is an eye-opener for us, and it has changed my perspective
45 on the type of university we must run. Therefore, rather than concentrate on the conventional approach of
46 teaching and learning, we have now included in our strategic plan that we are going to ensure the university is
47 technologically driven [...]. It is an environmental reaction for us, and almost all federal and state universities
48 in Nigeria, because I have worked with them. It is possible that the pandemic will force the management
49 [teams] of the institutions to reconsider their positions and include locational flexibility as a policy in the [near]
50 future (Professor/Vice-Chancellor – Private University).
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3 Locational flexibility to me is an environmental reaction as informed by the pandemic. It could be said to be
4 strategic for the private HEIs because theirs is for profit-making, and they cannot afford to be out of business
5
6 (Rector, State Polytechnic).
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8

9
10 For us, this pandemic has been challenging [...] You may have heard that our academic session is now on hold
11 because we are unable to afford to attend physical classes and lack the necessary resources to do it online. This
12
13 may be a disadvantage of being a third-tier HEI in Nigeria [...] (Provost, State College of Education).
14
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16 Despite the limited evidence that portrays locational flexibility as a strategic approach in
17 Nigerian HEIs, the majority of this evidence suggests that although locational flexibility is
18 inherent in institutional policy, its implementation over time has been deficient prior to the
19 outbreak of the pandemic. Evidence from the HEIs' senior management/administrative staff
20 (e.g., Vice-chancellors, Provosts, Rectors, and Faculty Deans) suggests that the drastic shift
21 toward developing a locational flexibility policy and its implementation in the education sector
22 emerged as a result of the environmental complexity and turbulence due to the COVID-19
23 pandemic.
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35 **Factors Shaping the Implementation and Utilisation of Locational Flexibility**

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38 This study's findings show that there are profound factors shaping the implementation and utilisation
39 of locational flexibility in Nigerian HEIs. A key factor affecting the implementation of locational
40 flexibility is the attitude towards locational flexibility and its utility among academics and
41 administrators. This attitude has been, at best, diverse. Most Nigerian academics appeared to be
42 indifferent or neutral towards remote work. In contrast, the minority seemed to believe in its benefits,
43 underscoring the need for Nigerian tertiary institutions to be like their counterparts in developed
44 countries. This study found overwhelming evidence suggesting factors impeding the implementation
45 and utilisation of locational flexibility in Nigerian HEIs. The following extracts are typical of all the
46 participants' responses:
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3 The government and management of the institution must be ready to fund the technology needed for effective
4 remote working. We very much lack infrastructural facilities [...]. Additionally, the idea of lecturers having
5 to use their money to buy internet data to teach or have meetings via Zoom or Microsoft Teams is absurd.
6
7 Some of us doing so is based on the exigencies and the firm belief in the system that it must not collapse [...].
8
9 Can you actually imagine that even the institution's website is problematic and often frustrates both the
10 lecturers and students? (Professor – State University).
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15 Infrastructure constitutes a major impediment to the smooth implementation of working remotely. Currently,
16 I am working from home, and I always have to power my generating set from 8 am till 6 pm, because I have
17 lectures and meetings in between [...]. It is very annoying because the institution is not paying me for the fuel
18 I burn every day [...] (Lecturer I – Private Polytechnic).
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24 The erratic power supply, unresponsive university website, and lack of funds necessary for
25 setting up adequate internet facilities are the main challenges facing the adoption of locational
26 flexibility in Nigerian HEIs. This corroborates Bana *et al.*'s (2021) finding that the quality of
27 the internet affects the adoption of remote work in developing countries. Additionally, we
28 found that while the challenges hindering the adoption of locational flexibility are similar
29 across universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, there are few distinctions based on
30 work demands and culture. For instance, it appears that Nigerian universities, compared to
31 polytechnics and colleges of education, place higher demands on their academics regarding
32 their research activities. However, many lecturers can only access quality internet and the
33 available database while on campus. In polytechnics, the requirement of hands-on teaching due
34 to the technical nature of the courses taught without commensurate technology to facilitate
35 online delivery makes locational flexibility more challenging. The colleges of education in
36 Nigeria, regarded as teacher training colleges, are underfunded and rarely equipped with the
37 tools necessary to carry out their duties off campus.
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56 In addition to the poor infrastructure, the lethargic attitude of the organisational leadership
57 serves as another crucial barrier recognised by the participants. More than half of the
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3 participants alleged that the institutions' management failed to bolster employees' wellbeing.

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5 The participants raised their concerns about the lack of creative and innovative capabilities
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7 among the leadership to facilitate flexible working:
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10 The creative capacity of our leadership is questionable. They are not creative and innovative enough, as they
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12 tend to focus more on the personal profits or money they will make from the project rather than delivering the
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14 service [...] (Professor – Federal University).
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17 The major barrier in my view is the expertise of lecturers, [who require] training. A number of the lecturers
18
19 are not IT savvy, even [in terms of connecting] to virtual management or staff meetings, much less having to
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21 cope with the technology to facilitate the effective online delivery of lectures [...] (Chief Lecturer – Federal
22
23 Polytechnic).
24

25 One major barrier is the human factor. A number of professionals in the HEIs are not as flexible to adapt to
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27 new realities [...]. They become more resistant just because they do not want the status quo to change.
28
29 Therefore, the buy-in of the people directly involved (lecturers) is essential to ensure success (ICT
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31 Departmental Head – State University).
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34 The issue of trust and behavioural factors form another barrier [...]. For instance, my head of department keeps
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36 tabs on me just to check if I am actually doing any work. Therefore, I think our line managers will find it
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38 difficult to believe that employees who are supposed to be working remotely are actually working [...]. They
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40 are so used to seeing us at our desks or teaching in the classes (Senior Technologist – State Polytechnic).
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42 Experiences of poor leadership culture, which is significantly influenced by corrupt practices
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44 in Nigerian HEIs, underpin some of the acute hindrances to implementing and utilising
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46 locational flexibility. This finding aligns with Akanji *et al.*'s (2020) argument about leadership
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48 style and organisational culture as key impediments to utilising locational flexibility and the
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50 growth of the Nigerian education sector. In addition, the lack of digital expertise associated
51
52 with the use of technology impedes the use of locational flexibility (Bentley *et al.*, 2016;
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54 Wheatley, 2017). It is also noteworthy that in Nigeria, managerial control and presenteeism are
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56 deemed a significant impediment to implementing locational flexibility. In Nigeria, the
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3 prevalent human resource management style is unitarist in its orientation and prefers a face-to-
4 face management approach. To that extent, embracing locational flexibility as a strategic
5 approach to managing workers is naturally not considered. This point corroborates Clarke and
6 Holdsworth's (2017) argument, highlighting the challenges of managing the performance of
7 flexible workers. Employers want to have their employees present in the central workplace for
8 effective managerial supervision and control, which impedes flexible working practices.
9
10 Similarly, Mulki *et al.* (2009) and Vilhelmson and Thulin (2016) asserted that organisations
11 resist promoting remote working for fear of a drastic decline in organisational synergy, growing
12 concerns regarding data security, and fear of loss of control over remote employees.
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17 Finally, several participants made the point that the collectivist nature of Nigerian society,
18 where kinship networks are vital because they enable people to rely on one another for
19 everyday survival, has also impacted the adoption of locational flexibility. Some of the
20 following quotations typify the shared views of the participants:
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35 Another challenge is the sociocultural [reality]. Your neighbour or colleague could ask that their children stay
36 with you when they return from school, thereby turning you into an emergency childminder all because they
37 are aware that you are at home (Associate Professor – Private University).
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42 [...] One must consider that the family structure we have in Nigeria may not support working remotely
43 because, despite the high poverty rate in the country, we also have a high population, and parents want to give
44 birth to as many children as possible without considering how they will cater to them (Principal Lecturer –
45 State College of Education).
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50 One of the challenges here is the proportion of students [who have] laptops or tablets [and are thereby able] to
51 engage in remote teaching and learning. In fact, some of the students do not have Android phones [...]. The
52 poverty in the economy is pervasive, and for most students in the state and federal institutions, who
53 predominantly come from low-income families, such gadgets are [luxuries] to them. Most HEIs are ill-
54 equipped with laptops and computers, as the available ones cannot serve [even] 5% of the student population.
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3 Even as lecturers, the majority use their personal laptops because there are no provisions, except for
4 departmental and faculty heads (Associate Professor/Faculty Dean – Federal University).
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8 Similar to Bana *et al.*'s (2021) finding that country demographic factors affect their ability to
9 adapt to remote work, our findings also revealed that Nigeria's demographic characteristics,
10 such as high population, rise in the number of children living in households of low-income
11 families and collectivist culture, affect the adoption of locational flexibility. It is clear that
12 problems among students, particularly those who lack funds and access to good internet
13 facilities and are exposed to the deplorable state of infrastructural and social amenities,
14 formulate significant barriers to the implementation and utilisation of locational flexibility.
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25 **Discussion, Conclusion and Implications**

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27 This paper explores the extent to which locational flexibility policies and practices are a reality
28 for employees in the Nigerian higher education sector. Specifically, the study explores the
29 practices of locational flexibility in Nigerian HEIs. As a result, we also identified the factors
30 shaping the implementation and utilisation of locational flexibility across Nigerian HEIs. Note
31 that this study set out to contribute to understanding the concept of locational flexibility as one
32 of the forms of organisational flexibility, which is grossly underresearched in Nigeria. Based
33 on the realities of locational flexibility within the study context and with particular reference
34 to the factors that hamper its implementation and utilisation across Nigerian HEIs, our study
35 presents substantial theoretical and practical implications.
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49 From the theoretical standpoint, the study findings are notable concerning the realities of
50 locational flexibility in Nigeria HEIs. First, we contribute to the literature related to the concept
51 of locational flexibility by highlighting the problems associated with its widespread
52 applicability in the Nigerian context. This study points out that locational flexibility is a
53 familiar concept across Nigerian HEIs. However, the phenomenon was made more pronounced
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3 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings reveal that the notions of locational
4 flexibility across Nigerian HEIs substantially harmonise with the prevailing conceptualisations,
5 where locational flexibility has been defined as a means of performing work-related duties
6 outside of the traditional workplace (Hill *et al.*, 2008). This finding is consistent with previous
7 research showing that locational flexibility facilitates employees' ability to choose from a range
8 of flexible work arrangements that influence where work is performed (Possenriede *et al.*,
9 2016; Felstead and Henseke, 2017). Given the large body of research that has established the
10 underlying factors facilitating locational flexibility (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011), employee autonomy
11 remains the primary pillar supporting successful locational flexibility practices. This means
12 that organisations must agree to allow (by providing flexible work options) and support their
13 employees (through digital technologies) to implement schedules and structures that enable
14 work to be performed outside of the physical office space.
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31 Based on the conceptualisation of locational flexibility as previously explained, our findings
32 point to the paucity of its adoption in Nigeria. Unlike Western countries, where locational
33 flexibility is habitually practised, the practice of locational flexibility in Nigeria is sparse and
34 grossly underutilised. Following the study of Andrade and Alden-Rivers (2019), the practices
35 of locational flexibility in HEIs across the globe are facilitated through home working, distance
36 learning, telecommuting, digital working hubs and coworking space. However, given the
37 enormity of challenges faced by Nigerian academics in an environment that is technologically
38 challenged, there is a limit to the practice of locational flexibility. Thus, locational flexibility
39 in Nigerian HEIs is predominantly restricted to home-working, especially in the wake of the
40 COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, our finding is consistent with the studies of Agbionu *et al.*
41 (2018) and Adejumo (2020), revealing that locational flexibility practices are not only scarce
42 within Nigerian HEIs but also bedevilled by the institutional and sociocultural factors that
43 hamper their usage. Beyond the need to promote employee autonomy, Nigerian HEIs lack the
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3 latitude to practice locational flexibility due to the limited support and institutional failure to
4 provide the necessary infrastructure and policies to foster locational flexibility practices.
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9 In addition, Felstead and Henseke (2017) suggest that environmental uncertainty compels a
10 transformation in an organisation's structures and procedures as a coping mechanism within
11 the changing environment. Therefore, changes in the external environment (e.g., COVID-19)
12 influence HEIs to react positively to locational flexibility. In a sense, it can be argued that the
13 current clamour for locational flexibility or the pursuit of virtual flexible teams working in
14 Nigerian HEIs has been an environmentally driven reaction due to the COVID-19 pandemic,
15 as opposed to a strategic choice made by the organisation's 'power-holders' (top management)
16 in Nigerian HEIs. Therefore, it appears that the reactive environmental nature across Nigerian
17 HEIs is due to compelling changes in social norms and expectations as influenced by the
18 pandemic. Presumably, in addition to the education sector, several other sectors may also
19 practice locational flexibility sporadically, further buttressing such practices as hinged on
20 environmental determinism rather than being a strategic choice (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).
21 This is in contrast to Western studies where locational flexibility is more prominent across
22 HEIs, given that it is predominantly a strategic approach through the recent varieties of digital
23 education strategies (Andrade and Alden-Rivers, 2019; Orr *et al.*, 2019). However, the
24 pandemic has also made it contingent on increasing the effort for virtual learning and teaching.
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46 As Howe (2012) suggests, an alternative way to decipher the causal explanation of the research
47 phenomenon (e.g., the reason behind the farfetched reality of locational flexibility) is to
48 understand the inner workings and factors leading to its limited adoption. In our reflection on
49 the militating factors of locational flexibility implementation, we find that they are linked to
50 several theories that may contribute to understanding the phenomenon. First, the resource-
51 based view (RBV), as a framework that explores an organisation's internal competencies to
52 gain competitive advantage through its internal resources and human capital (Ojala and Pyoria,
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3 2018), is crucial for implementing locational flexibility. Nigerian HEIs' fundamental challenge
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5 is the inadequacy of the sophisticated infrastructure needed to facilitate locational flexibility.
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7 More importantly, the education sector (especially academics), as an example of the knowledge
8
9 economy, requires ICTs to deliver services effectively. Note that knowledge workers (e.g.,
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11 academics) are generally distinguished as nomadic or mobile workers recognised for their
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13 abilities to work in multiple locations (Koroma *et al.*, 2014). Hence, ICTs are crucial for
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15 facilitating locational-flexible work because promoting regular communication and easy access
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17 to information, especially for knowledge workers, eliminates geographical and organisational
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19 boundaries (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011).
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25 Many institutions of higher learning in Nigeria have not invested the much-needed resources
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27 in ICT. Nigerian HEIs (especially government-owned institutions) depend mainly on annual
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29 budgetary allocations from the state and federal governments to facilitate their operations. In
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31 addition, UNESCO recommended a 26% budgetary allocation to education based on GNP, but
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33 the amount allocated to education by the Nigerian government has continued to be smaller. For
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35 example, Nigeria's budgetary allocation to education was 6.7% in 2020 and 7.05% in 2019,
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37 7.04% in 2018, 7.4% in 2017 and 4% in 2016, whereas the average budget of an African
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39 country is estimated to be 16% of its budget allocation (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).
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41 Furthermore, our findings suggest that the limited adoption of locational flexibility in Nigeria
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43 is better practised in private HEIs than in government (state and federal) HEIs. This is primarily
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45 due to the lack of investment in sophisticated technology across public organisations in Nigeria
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47 compared to private organisations. Our study resonates with some Western studies'
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49 experiences that emphasise the public sector's resilience to the traditional or classic model of
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51 public organisations, where the public sector remains dormant in implementing FWAs
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57 (Whyman *et al.*, 2015).
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3 Furthermore, internal resources are also related to human capital possession, such as
4 employees' knowledge, skills and attitudes. As Holtgrewe (2014) suggested, human capital
5 and technical expertise are essential for teleworkers and may explain an organisation's
6 adoption of locational flexibility. Therefore, the lack of expertise among Nigerian academics
7 to effectively exploit the available virtual learning and teaching platforms inhibits the
8 utilisation of locational flexibility. The current practice in a few Nigerian HEIs due to the
9 unprecedented COVID-19 consequences has forced higher institutions to explore structural
10 flexibility – adjusting their needs to adapt to economic and environmental fluctuations.
11 However, this finding is central to the conclusions from Cegarra-Navarro and Martelo-
12 Landrogez's (2020) study, which critiques the theory of the knowledge economy over its
13 heavy dependence on knowledge production but neglects the dissemination and impact of
14 knowledge as a crucial challenge for flexible work. Thus, without appropriate training
15 regarding the usage of ICTs, academics may still struggle to use them even when available.
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34 Institutional theory also explains the reason behind the farfetched reality of locational
35 flexibility across Nigerian HEIs. Following the underlying principles of institutional theory
36 that social norms, beliefs, culture and values influence organisational decision-making
37 (Nordbäck *et al.*, 2017), our findings reveal that sociocultural values and attitudes impede the
38 adoption of locational flexibility. This theoretical perspective mirrors the impact of
39 management attitude and leadership attributes on adopting or implementing locational
40 flexibility (Messerschmidt and Hinz, 2013). For instance, our findings suggest that managerial
41 control and presenteeism impede the adoption of locational flexibility in Nigeria. The majority
42 of Nigerian managers prefer seeing their employees in person. Generally, managers in Nigeria
43 believe in presenteeism or surveillance and control by sight. They are sceptical as to the
44 effectiveness of locational flexible working. This perception and posturing impede the adoption
45 or effectiveness of locational flexibility practices (Clarke and Holdsworth, 2017; Webster and
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3 Leung, 2017). The emphasis herein relates to most managers' bureaucratic nature that
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5 construes presenteeism as a standard practice (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011).
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9 The loss of a manager's visibility and presence associated with employees working offsite
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11 despite the ad hoc but limited effectiveness to manage such situations persists as a growing
12
13 challenge within the organisational flexibility debate (Fogarty *et al.*, 2011; Felstead and
14
15 Henseke, 2017). Many Nigerian managers downplay the benefits from the freedom of working
16
17 space (or flex-space), work methods and spatial mobility. Thus, employee autonomy is
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19 particularly crucial for the effectiveness of locational flexibility, which is lacking within the
20
21 study context. Furthermore, leadership must reduce problems within the system to enhance
22
23 efficiency. Problems ensue where the leadership fails to ensure judicious use of the financial
24
25 resources given to them. Corruption as a culture, especially in Nigerian public HEIs, deters
26
27 locational flexibility practices' adoption and effectiveness. It hinders leaders (top management)
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29 in HEIs from exhibiting innovative and creative abilities towards facilitating work flexibility
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31 (Akanji *et al.*, 2020).
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37 From a practical perspective, this study identified several factors that inhibit the
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39 implementation and utilisation of locational flexibility in Nigerian HEIs. The study found that
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41 the lack of technical knowledge and expertise on the part of the professionals and service users
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43 (students) serves as a significant deterrent to utilising locational flexibility. Thus, human
44
45 resources managers' importance in ensuring that employees are adequately trained by
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47 providing them with the necessary knowledge to utilise locational flexibility cannot be
48
49 overemphasised. As Bentley *et al.* (2016) suggested, human resource managers are obligated
50
51 to foster talent management by recruiting talented employees and training and retraining
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53 existing employees in preparation for the ever-changing business environment. Furthermore,
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55 this study's findings call for the effective governance and management of institutions, which
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57 must invest in technology-supported infrastructure within HEIs and across related sectors as a
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3 mechanism for facilitating locational flexibility. It is also crucial for management teams to
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5 rethink the prevalent educational practices by shifting from a traditional to a digital-based
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7 educational system. It is advocated that locational flexibility should henceforth be considered
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9 from a strategic perspective rather than as a means of reacting to environmental circumstances.
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11 This is, however, also conditional on the managerial perspective of presenteeism and control.
12
13 Locational flexibility should be regarded as a win–win situation in leader-followership
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15 exchanges rather than the authoritative and politicised governance culture inherent in Africa,
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17 which undermines organisational progress (Ajonbadi and Adekoya, 2019; Akanji *et al.*, 2020).
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22 **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

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25 While this study highlights the problems facing HEIs in practising locational flexibility in
26
27 Nigeria (a non-Western context), it also has some limitations, which could open up
28
29 opportunities for future research. This study is limited to the education sector, specifically
30
31 HEIs, and further research could explore other knowledge economy sectors and leverage cross-
32
33 sectoral comparisons. Additionally, our study focuses on Nigeria as an underresearched context
34
35 in sub-Saharan Africa. We suggest that future studies might consider several other developing
36
37 countries. Future research may use a longitudinal design for larger representative samples to
38
39 examine the impact of current locational flexibility on workers. **It will also be intriguing to**
40
41 **investigate the unions' perspective and offer a more thorough study of how the problems**
42
43 **associated with students' limited access to technology devices can improve teaching and**
44
45 **learning when locational flexibility is embraced. The experiences of locational flexibility**
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47 **among nonacademic and lower administrative staff (e.g., course/faculty administrators, library**
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49 **assistants, personal secretaries and office assistants) may be considered for future research,**
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51 **given that their work schedules are different.**
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Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Number	Percentage
Marital status		
Single	17	18%
Married with children	69	75%
Divorced	6	7%
Gender		
Male	58	
Female	34	63%
		37%
Age		
25-34	9	10%
35-44	30	33%
45-54	22	24%
55-64	15	16%
65 and above	16	17%
Staff category		
Academic staff	54	59%
Administrative staff	38	41%
Institution		
Federal	9	21%
State	12	47%
Private	10	32%
HEI Category		
Universities	21	67.7%
Polytechnics	8	25.8%
Colleges of education	2	6.5%
Length of years		
1-5	7	8%
6-10	17	18%
11-15	20	22%
16-20	23	25%
20-25	13	14%
26 and above	12	13%
Position		
Vice-chancellor	4	4%
Deputy vice-chancellor	10	11%
Provost	3	3%
Rector	6	7%
Registrar	4	4%
Bursar	5	5%
Faculty dean	6	7%
Head of department	12	13%
ICT departmental head	2	2%

Lecturer (excluding faculty deans and departmental heads) 40 44%

Table 2: Qualitative data analysis

Research inquiry	Illustrative quotes	First-order codes	Creation of conceptual categories through code consolidation	Main themes
Notions of locational flexibility	Locational flexibility allows tasks to be carried out outside one's office location without any restriction [...] (Lecturer I – State HEI).	Working outside the fixed office	Conceptualisation of locational flexibility	Notions of locational flexibility
Range and usage of locational flexibility	<p>[...] I make use of Zoom to conduct some of my lectures and meetings [...]. Although, this pandemic has made it mandatory to work from home and more frequently [...] (Lecturer 1 – Private HEI).</p> <p>I have adopted the use of Telegram to engage my students [...] this is something I devised for myself since I now work from home because of the pandemic [...] (Professor – State HEI).</p> <p>There is nothing like locational flexibility in my institution—everything I do is from my office [...] (Professor – Federal HEI).</p>	<p>Locational flexibility in the form of home working before the pandemic</p> <p>Locational flexibility in the form of home working during the pandemic</p> <p>Non-existence of locational flexibility before or during the pandemic</p>	Range and usage of locational flexibility	Adoption of locational flexibility
Motive for the implementation and utilisation of locational flexibility	<p>It is firstly a strategic move because we have a distance learning programme run by the institution; however, the pandemic has made it mandatory to revisit our strategy (Professor, Vice-Chancellor – Private HEI).</p> <p>Locational flexibility has become a child of necessity for us as we never really had any form of flexible working</p>	<p>A distance learning programme as a strategy for locational flexibility</p> <p>Lack of a policy to facilitate locational flexibility</p>	<p>Locational flexibility as a strategic move</p> <p>Locational flexibility as an environmental reaction</p>	Locational flexibility: reactionary or environmentally induced

	arrangement (Lecturer II – State HEI).			
Factors shaping the implementation and utilisation of locational flexibility	<p>Infrastructure is a primary barrier [...], power supply failure, internet data, or WiFi accessibility and affordability are the most deadly barriers [...] (Professor – Federal HEI).</p> <p>The lackadaisical attitude and disposition of the top management to locational flexibility is a primary concern even to our wellbeing [...] (Lecturer I – State HEI).</p> <p>Both the academic and administrative staff lack the capacity for locational flexibility, so we all require training to improve our skills in order to cope with the new reality (Associate Professor – State HEI).</p> <p>For me, my head of department makes it look like this profession seems to always require our physical presence at work, whereas, with the limited facilities that we have, we can actually work remotely while the sophisticated systems are gradually built [...] (Senior Lecturer – Private HEI).</p> <p>Working remotely can sometimes be stressful especially when my kids are at home [...] sometimes my neighbours drop their children off at my place in the disguise of wanting them to have a play date with my kids, and it can be really noisy (Lecturer I – Private HEI).</p>	<p>Lack of infrastructure and funding</p> <p>Leadership problems</p> <p>Inadequate knowledge, incapacity, resistance to change</p> <p>Managerial scepticism, authority and control</p> <p>Collectivism issues</p>	<p>Financial barriers to locational flexibility</p> <p>Leadership and organisational culture as a barrier to locational flexibility</p> <p>Lack of expertise as a barrier to locational flexibility</p> <p>Presenteeism and managerial control as barriers to locational flexibility</p> <p>Familial and sociocultural barriers to locational flexibility</p>	<p>Factors shaping the implementation and utilisation of locational flexibility</p>

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