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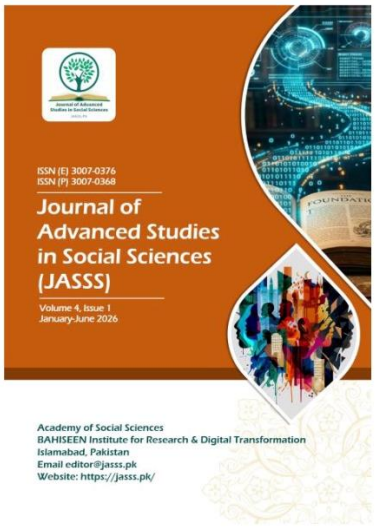

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Implementation and compliance with higher education authority workload policy in selected Public and Private Universities in Zambia

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Abstract

This paper presents a study that assessed the implementation and compliance of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) workload policy in selected public and private universities in Zambia. Guided by a positivist research paradigm, the study employed a quantitative research design to generate objective and generalizable findings on policy implementation and institutional compliance. The target population comprised approximately 4,000 academic staff, from which a stratified sample of 676 participants was drawn using simple random sampling within strata to ensure proportional representation across institutions. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed through descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation, and multiple regression, with the level of significance set at $p < 0.05$. Policy implementation was measured using a ten-item Likert-scale index covering recruitment procedures, transparency in workload allocation, disclosure of workload expectations, contractual alignment, and compensation mechanisms (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$), indicating acceptable internal consistency. The results revealed that 31% of respondents perceived high policy implementation, 50.1% moderate implementation, and 18.9% low implementation. Multiple regression analysis indicated that institutional compliance significantly predicted workload manageability ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, hidden workload components including time spent in meetings and resolving student issues ($\beta = -0.129$, $p < 0.001$), as well as enrolment-driven overloads and course availability demands ($\beta = -0.191$, $p < 0.001$) negatively influenced workload manageability. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening policy implementation mechanisms and compliance frameworks, formally recognizing hidden academic duties, to promote equitable workload distribution, enhance faculty well-being, and improve academic productivity within Zambian higher education institutions.

Keywords: Workload policy, implementation & compliance

1. Introduction

The management of academic workload is a central concern in higher education globally, affecting teaching quality, research productivity, and staff well-being. Workload policies aim to ensure fairness, transparency, and alignment with institutional objectives. Despite their adoption, implementation challenges are common. Studies from Australia and New Zealand indicate that formal workload models are often perceived as opaque, budget-driven, and misaligned with academic realities, resulting in dissatisfaction, perceptions of inequity, and erosion of trust (Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2013; Campbell & O'Hara, 2014; Shore & Wright, 2015). Technology-enhanced learning adds further complexity, as tasks such as course design, online support, and platform management are often unrecognized. In Africa, structural and economic pressures intensify workload challenges. Rapid enrolment growth, limited staffing, constrained budgets, and rising research expectations often push staff beyond formal allocations (Aina & Mji, 2020; Chirikure, 2021; Masaiti & Tembo, 2025). In Zambia, both public and private universities have expanded significantly, with program diversification and growing student numbers increasing the need for effective workload policies (Mumba & Banda, 2020). The Higher Education Authority (HEA) provides formal guidelines covering teaching, supervision, research, and administrative duties (HEA, 2021). Empirical evidence shows persistent issues: workload overload, inequitable task distribution, and limited recognition of extra duties, particularly in high-enrolment departments (Kabwe et al., 2024; Muyunda, 2021; Nyondo, 2021). Public universities operate under closer state oversight with formal governance and promotion frameworks, while private universities have more autonomy but lean staffing and less formal workload monitoring, creating sectoral differences in policy experience (Mwelwa & Phiri, 2021; Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2021).

Theoretical perspectives clarify these challenges. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory suggests policies act as hygiene factors that reduce dissatisfaction if applied consistently (Herzberg et al., 1959). Equity Theory emphasizes fairness as central to motivation (Adams, 1965), while Implementation Theory highlights the importance of capacity, governance, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring for policy success (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Matland, 1995). Research on workload implementation in Zambia remains limited, highlighting the need to Assess how HEA policies affect workload manageability (Musheba, Chibamba & Mulenga, 2022; Nuwaha, Atukunda & Kyamemya, 2023).

1.1 Problem Statement

Higher education institutions play a critical role in national development by producing skilled graduates, generating knowledge, and promoting innovation. In Zambia, universities support socio-economic transformation through teaching, research, and public engagement. Rapid expansion over the past two decades has intensified pressures on academic staff, leading to challenges in workload allocation, policy implementation, and institutional compliance. These issues threaten academic quality, staff well-being, and institutional sustainability, directly linking to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has established national workload policy guidelines to promote equitable and transparent distribution of teaching, research, administrative, and community responsibilities. These include a standard 40-hour workweek, lecturer-to-student ratios of 1:50 for face-to-face teaching and 1:100 for online delivery, and supervision benchmarks of 8 undergraduate students, 5 master's students, and a maximum of 3 doctoral students per lecturer (HEA, 2024). However, evidence indicates inconsistent implementation. Internal workload models are often

applied ad hoc, with allocation influenced by historical practices or institutional priorities rather than objective policy standards. Some staff carry disproportionately heavy loads, while others have lighter assignments, with minimal monitoring or enforcement (Musheba, Chibamba, & Mulenga, 2022). Implementation Theory emphasizes that effective policy outcomes depend on organizational capacity, governance structures, and context (Matland, 1995). Herzberg's Two-Factor and Equity theories suggest that inconsistent or inequitable policy application undermines motivation, engagement, and staff well-being (Herzberg, 1966; Adams, 1965). Despite formal policies, limited empirical evidence exists on their operationalization across Zambian universities. Addressing this gap is critical for equitable workload distribution, enhanced staff well-being, and sustainable institutional performance, thereby advancing SDG 4 and SDG 8 objectives. Thus, the study assessed the Implementation and Compliance with Higher Education Authority Workload Policy in selected Public and Private Universities in Zambia.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To determine the level of implementation of the workload policy among public and private universities.
2. To assess the compliance of institutions with HEA guidelines regarding policy implementation.

2. Literature Review

Effective academic workload management is a critical concern in higher education, directly influencing teaching quality, research productivity, staff well-being, and institutional performance. Workload management requires integrating structural, psychological, and cultural strategies, including realistic task allocation, adequate staffing, flexible scheduling, faculty autonomy, clear communication, and access to mental health resources (Abulela et al., 2025; Wei et al., 2025). Leadership commitment is essential for fostering an environment where faculty can meet institutional expectations, while alignment of productivity with human capacity supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (decent work). In Zambia, rapid expansion of higher education, constrained budgets, and limited staffing have intensified workload pressures in both public and private universities. Academic staff are tasked with teaching, research, administration, and community engagement, often exceeding formal workload allocations (Musheba, Chibamba, & Mulenga, 2022; Muyunda, 2021). How institutions allocate, monitor, and recognize these roles significantly affects staff motivation, perceptions of fairness, job satisfaction, and commitment. Implementation Theory provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics, emphasizing that policy effectiveness depends not only on design but also on enactment, monitoring, and contextual adaptation (Matland, 1995). Similarly, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory highlights that excessive workloads act as poor hygiene factors, generating dissatisfaction, while limited time for research and professional growth undermines intrinsic motivators such as achievement and career advancement (Herzberg, 1966). Equity Theory underscores that perceptions of fairness in workload allocation are central to faculty engagement and well-being (Adams, 1965).

Teaching remains the core component of academic workload. Full-time staff in Zambian universities typically handle two to three courses per semester, often exceeding these assignments due to staff shortages and rising student enrolments (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Phiri, 2021). Workload encompasses not only contact hours but also course preparation,

assessment, grading, academic advising, and curriculum development. When these additional duties are unaccounted for, faculty perceive inequity, leading to dissatisfaction and reduced performance. Leadership roles, such as Deans and Heads of Departments, require reduced teaching loads; however, combining these responsibilities with research and service obligations can generate role overload and further inequities in perceived workload.

Public universities often attempt to balance teaching, research, and service using models such as 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% service (Gilbert & Zeng, 2013; Kimaro, 2024). In practice, administrative and teaching demands often dominate, leaving limited time for research. Large class sizes, particularly those exceeding 70–75 students, contribute to workload overload, while part-time and adjunct staff frequently receive inequitable assignments without sufficient support or recognition (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011; Gilbert & Zeng, 2013). Administrative and service duties, such as committee participation and community engagement, are often poorly captured in formal workload models, exacerbating inequities and affecting job satisfaction.

Globally, universities have increasingly adopted formal workload policies to manage these complex responsibilities, with effectiveness enhanced by faculty participation in policy formulation, transparent workload calculation methods, and alignment with institutional goals (Kenny & Fluck, 2021; Paewai, Meyer, & Houston, 2007). Top-down impositions of workload models without consultation often provoke resistance, undermine motivation, and impede compliance (Hornibrook, 2012). Evidence from Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa demonstrates that participatory and transparent workload policies improve faculty trust, engagement, and productivity, while neglecting research, supervision, and service responsibilities can lead to burnout and attrition (Kenny & Fluck, 2021; Gregory & Lodge, 2015).

In African contexts, including Zambia, implementation challenges are compounded by resource constraints, governance capacity gaps, rapid student population growth, and institutional cultural factors (Kenny & Fluck, 2014). Departments with transparent workload frameworks aligned with internal quality assurance mechanisms report better staff satisfaction and workload manageability (Park et al., 2022). However, limited awareness of policies and insufficient administrative capacity impede consistent application. Public-private comparisons suggest that policy effectiveness depends not only on formal adoption but also on participatory governance, consistent monitoring, and equitable application across faculties (Gregory & Lodge, 2015).

Emerging policy domains, such as information security and ethical governance of artificial intelligence, illustrate the complexity of compliance. In Sweden, independent universities demonstrate higher adherence to GenAI ethical guidelines, while larger institutions rely primarily on guidance documents, resulting in uneven compliance (Erhardt et al., 2025). Gender-sensitive policy implementation, such as policies addressing gender-based violence in the UK, is similarly influenced by institutional culture, leadership engagement, and resource availability rather than formal mandates (Kenny & Fluck, 2021). Cross-national evidence from Pakistan and China indicates that governance capacity, monitoring mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement are central to successful policy enactment (Manzoor, Kamal & Ahmed, 2025; Liu & Maniam, 2025).

In Zambia, Higher Education Authority (HEA) regulations establish formal workload policies, lecturer-student ratios (1:50 for face-to-face teaching and 1:100 for online delivery), and supervision benchmarks (8 undergraduate, 5 master's, 3 doctoral students per lecturer) to safeguard academic standards, staff well-being, and institutional productivity (HEA, 2024). Yet empirical evidence reveals uneven implementation due to

limited resources, weak communication, governance inefficiencies, and insufficient stakeholder engagement (Biswakarma & Dhakal, 2023; Novitasari et al., 2025). Some institutions demonstrate proactive integration of HEA frameworks within quality assurance systems, promoting fairness, compliance, and staff satisfaction, while others exhibit partial or inconsistent adherence, reflecting broader challenges in African higher education systems (Paewai, Meyer & Houston, 2007).

Effective compliance in Zambian HEIs is reinforced when workload and quality assurance policies are embedded within participatory governance structures, supported by leadership, continuous feedback, and institutional capacity development. Integrating SDG 4 and SDG 8 principles ensures alignment between institutional policies and global commitments to quality education and decent work, fostering sustainable faculty engagement and institutional performance (Kenny, 2018). Implementation Theory emphasizes that robust policy outcomes are contingent upon organizational capacity, monitoring mechanisms, and contextual adaptation (Matland, 1995), while Herzberg's Two-Factor and Equity theories highlight the importance of fair, transparent, and motivating workload allocations (Herzberg, 1966; Adams, 1965).

In other words, effective academic workload management and policy compliance are complex, multi-layered, and context-dependent processes. Literature consistently emphasizes participatory policy design, transparent communication, leadership engagement, capacity building, adequate resource allocation, continuous monitoring, and responsiveness to emerging technological innovations as essential strategies for achieving sustainable implementation. In Zambia, integrating HEA frameworks with these strategies promotes equitable workload distribution, enhances staff well-being, strengthens institutional performance, and supports the achievement of SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (decent work), ultimately bridging the gap between policy formulation and meaningful institutional practice.

2.1 Theoretical Concept

Integrating Implementation Theory, Equity Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining the management and compliance of workload policies in Zambian higher education institutions. Implementation Theory (Matland, 1995) emphasizes that effective policy outcomes depend on organizational capacity, governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing monitoring. This perspective helps explain variations in policy application and institutional adherence to HEA workload guidelines.

Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) highlights that perceptions of fairness in workload allocation are central to faculty motivation, engagement, and satisfaction. Unequal distribution of teaching, research, and service responsibilities can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced performance, while equitable allocation fosters trust and commitment.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) distinguishes between hygiene factors, such as manageable workloads and job security, and motivators, such as opportunities for professional growth and recognition. Properly implemented workload policies that balance these factors enhance faculty well-being and institutional productivity.

Together, these three theories provide a holistic lens for analyzing how HEA workload policies are implemented, how institutions ensure compliance, and how faculty perceptions of fairness and workload management influence overall academic performance and satisfaction

3. Methods

This study adopted a positivist research paradigm**,** emphasizing objective measurement and the generation of generalizable findings through empirical evidence. Guided by this paradigm, a quantitative research design was employed. The target population comprised 4,121 academic staff across selected public and private universities in Zambia**.** A sample of 676 academic staff was selected for the study using stratified sampling to ensure proportional representation across institutions, with simple random sampling applied within each stratum to select participants. Data was collected using structured questionnaires that measured policy implementation through a ten-item Likert-scale index covering recruitment procedures, transparency in workload allocation, disclosure of workload expectations, contractual alignment, and compensation mechanisms. The instrument demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$)**.** data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize responses, bivariate correlation analysis to examine relationships between variables, and multiple regression analysis to assess the predictive effect of institutional compliance on workload manageability. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$**.** This methodology ensured that the study produced objective, statistically robust, and generalizable findings regarding the implementation and compliance of the HEA workload policy in Zambian universities.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Workload Manageability Index (WMI)

The Workload Manageability Index (WMI) had a mean score of 2.89 (median = 3.00; IQR = 2.20-3.60), with scores ranging from 1.00 to 5.00. The findings suggest that while some respondents reported manageable workloads, overall perceptions leaned toward moderate strain, with substantial dispersion in individual experiences.

Table 1: Measurement characteristics, reliability, and descriptive statistics of composite workload indices.

A: Construct definition

Composite Index	Construct measured	Constituent domains	Number of items	Response scale
Workload Policy Implementation Index (WPII)	Extent of institutional implementation of workload-related policies	Recruitment transparency, disclosure of duties, workload alignment with contracts, compensation for workload and overloads	10	1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree)
Workload Manageability Index (WMI)	Individual experience of workload manageability	Equity of workload distribution. Workload	5	1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree)

		growth over time, impact on personal life and productivity, and capacity for academic engagement	

Note: Higher scores indicate stronger perceived policy implementation (WPII) and greater workload manageability (WMI).

B: Reliability

Composite Index	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Reliability interpretation
Workload Policy Implementation Index (WPII)	10	0.79	Acceptable to good internal consistency
Workload Manageability Index	5	0.81	Good internal consistency

Note: Cronbach's alpha values exceed the conventional threshold of 0.70, supporting the internal consistency and suitability of both indices for inferential analysis.

C: Desc1riptive statistics

Index	Mean	SD	Median	IQR	Minimum-Maximum
Workload Policy Implementation Index (WPII)	3.52	0.72	3.60	3.00-4.00	1.60-5.00
Workload Manageability Index (WMI)	2.89	0.95	3.00	2.20-3.60	1.00-5.00

Note: Scores are derived from Likert-type items and computed as row-wise means, with higher values indicating stronger policy implementation and greater workload manageability, respectively.

4.2 What is the level of implementation of the workload policy among the public and private universities?

Based on the Workload Policy Implementation Index (WPII), 50.1% of respondents perceived a moderate level of implementation of workload-related policies, while 31.0% reported high levels of implementation. Conversely, 18.9% perceived policy implementation to be low, indicating that nearly one in five academic staff experiences weak institutional implementation of workload-related policies.

In contrast to the Workload Policy Implementation, only 15.1% of respondents reported high workload manageability. A substantial proportion (43.5%) experienced low workload manageability, while 41.4% reported moderate levels. This distribution suggests that, despite

moderate-high levels of perceived policy implementation, a considerable proportion of academic staff continue to experience challenges in managing their workload.

Table 2: Prevalence Estimates

Dimension	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Workload Policy implementation (WPII)	31.0	50.1	18.9
Workload manageability (WMI)	15.1	41.4	43.5

Inferential Statistics

A supporting bivariate analysis revealed a statistically significant association between levels of workload policy implementation and workload manageability (χ^2 (4) = 83.45, $p < 0.001$). The strength of this association was moderate (Cramer's V = 0.25). Higher levels of perceived workload policy management were associated with a greater proportion of respondents reporting moderate to high workload manageability. In contrast, low levels of policy implementation were disproportionately associated with low workload manageability.

Association between workload policy implementation and workload manageability

An unadjusted linear regression was conducted to examine the relationship between workload policy implementation and workload manageability. Workload policy implementation was positively and significantly associated with workload manageability. A one-unit increase in the Workload Policy Implementation Index was associated with a 0.31-unit increase in the Workload Policy Implementation Index ($\beta = 0.31$, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.001$). The model explained approximately 5.5% of the variance in workload manageability ($R^2 = 0.055$).

Although modest, this effect size is meaningful given the multifactorial nature of workload experiences in academic institutions and supports the relevance of institutional policy environments in shaping individual workload outcomes.

The prevalence of workload policy implementation in public and private universities, particularly in Zambia, reflects a complex interplay between formal policy presence and variable enactment experiences among academic staff. Descriptive findings indicate that 31.0% of faculty perceived high implementation, 50.1% moderate implementation, and 18.9% low implementation, revealing inconsistencies in daily institutional operationalization (Arendse, 2021). This aligns with global evidence showing that while universities often formally document workload policies, effective realization is constrained by gaps in governance integration, resource allocation, and faculty engagement, emphasizing the distinction between policy existence and practical enactment (Arendse, 2021; Duignan, 2001).

Empirical analysis further demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between perceived policy implementation and workload manageability ($\chi^2(4) = 83.45$, $p < 0.001$; Cramer's V = 0.25), highlighting that faculty perceptions of enactment directly shape experiences of workload management. This resonates with literature emphasizing that transparent, equitable, and participatory workload frameworks enhance fairness perceptions, even amid growing academic responsibilities (Kenny & Fluck, 2022/23; Nnadozie & Chinomona, 2024). Implementation Theory provides a lens to understand these variations, noting that outcomes depend not only on policy clarity but also on contextual factors such as organizational capacity, communication, enforcement, and local discretion (Matland, 1995). In the Zambian context, formal workload policies may be well-articulated yet inconsistently applied across departments, contributing to heterogeneous staff experiences.

Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) further explains how perceptions of fairness affect workload manageability, with faculty evaluating inputs such as time and expertise against outputs like recognition or career progression relative to peers. Inconsistent or opaque policy application exacerbates inequity and stress, particularly regarding gendered disparities where women often carry disproportionate service and mentoring responsibilities (Misra et al., 2021; Steinporsdottie et al., 2021). Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) complements this by framing workload policy implementation as a hygiene factor: clear policies reduce dissatisfaction but do not inherently enhance motivation or engagement. The observed prevalence of moderate implementation alongside limited reports of high workload manageability underscores the need for additional motivating conditions such as institutional support, recognition, and participatory decision-making (Nivad H. Mwilongo et al., 2025).

Comparative evidence from Australia and South Africa reinforces the importance of holistic, transparent, and participatory workload models that account for teaching, research, service, and administrative responsibilities. Australian universities implementing comprehensive models report greater faculty trust and perceived fairness, whereas narrowly defined managerial approaches focused solely on teaching hours often undermine engagement and exacerbate inequities (Kenny & Fluck, 2022/23; Duignan, 2001). Similar patterns emerge in South Africa, where poorly implemented workload allocation systems and resource constraints compromise equity and staff satisfaction (Nnadozie & Chinomona, 2024). These findings underscore that formal policies alone are insufficient; inclusive design, robust monitoring, participatory processes, and recognition of the full spectrum of academic work are critical for enhancing equitable workload management (Jesse Dodge et al., 2022; Callista Shekar Ayu Supriyono et al., 2025).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that while formal workload policies are prevalent across public and private universities, their effective implementation varies due to organizational capacity, cultural factors, and communication gaps (Arendse, 2021; Matland, 1995; Park et al., 2022). Enhancing equitable workload management requires strengthening institutional capacity for transparent communication, inclusive faculty consultation, comprehensive data systems capturing full academic duties, consistent enforcement with local flexibility, recognition programs addressing gendered disparities, aligned resource allocation, and organizational cultures valuing transparency over control (Arendse, 2021; Kenny & Fluck, 2022/23; Park et al., 2022).

4.3 What is the compliance of institutions with HEA guidelines regarding policy implementation

Table 3 Unadjusted Linear Regression Model

Predictor	β (Estimate)	SE	t-value	p-value
Workload Policy Implementation Index	0.31	0.05	6.24	< 0.001
Constant	1.82	0.18	10.29	<0.001
Model statistics R^2 = 0.055, Adjusted R^2 = 0.054; N = 665				

Source: Field data2025

To determine whether this association remained independent of institutional and professional characteristics, an adjusted regression analysis was subsequently conducted. In the adjusted linear regression analysis, perceived workload policy implementation

remained independently associated with workload manageability. After controlling for institution type, employment status, academic rank, years worked at the institution, and gender, a one-unit increase in the Workload Policy Implementation Index was associated with a 0.24-unit increase in the Workload Manageability Index ($p < 0.001$). This association was only modestly attenuated compared to the unadjusted model, indicating a robust relationship between institutional workload policy implementation and individual workload experience. The adjusted model explained approximately 18% of the variance in workload manageability (adjusted $R^2 = 0.18$)

Figure 1 Predicted relationship between WPII and WMI

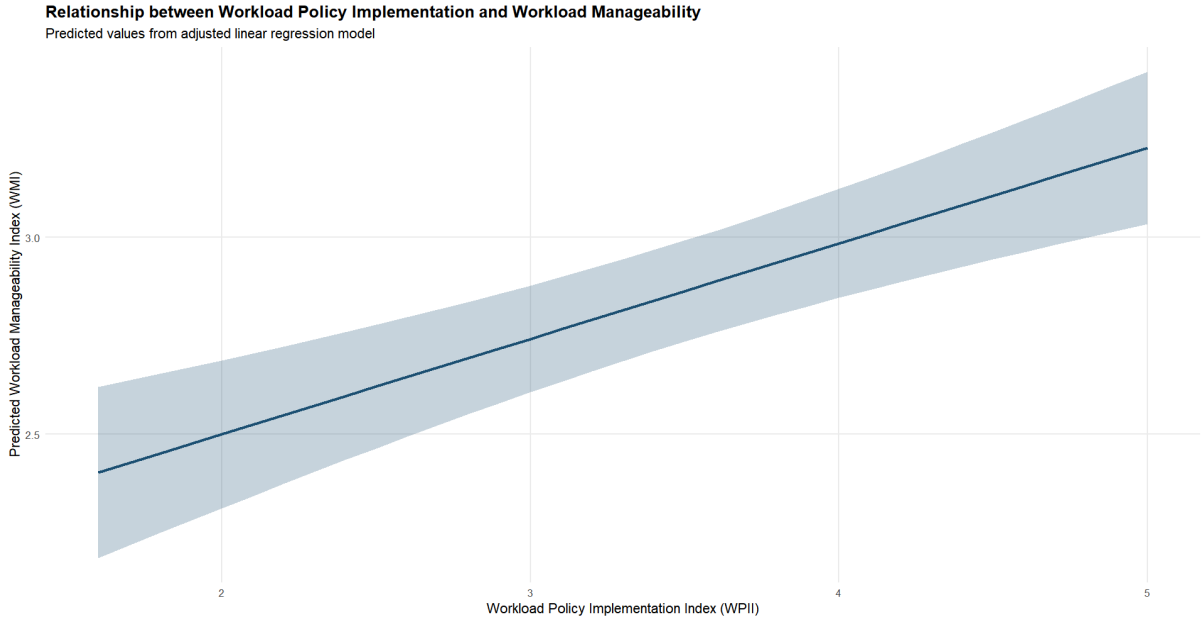

Figure 1 illustrates the adjusted relationship between workload policy implementation and workload manageability. Predicted values from the multivariate linear regression model indicate a clear positive association with higher levels of perceived policy implementation corresponding to higher levels of workload manageability. The relationship remains approximately linear across the observed range of the Workload Policy Implementation Index, with relatively narrow confidence intervals, indicating stability of the estimated effect after adjustment for institutional, employment, academic, and demographic covariates.

Table 4 presents the adjusted linear regression model examining the association between workload policy implementation and workload manageability. After adjusting for institutional and professional characteristics, higher perceived workload policy implementation remained significantly associated with improved workload manageability.

Table 4: Adjusted linear regression model for workload manageability

Predictor	Adjusted β	95% CI	p-value
Intercept	0.429	-0.544 to 1.402	0.387
Workload Policy Implementation Index (WPII)	0.242	0.148 to 0.337	<0.001
Public institution (vs Private)	0.291	0.138 to 0.445	<0.001
Full-time employment (vs Contract)	1.784	0.883 to 2.684	<0.001
Part-time employment (vs Contract)	1.464	0.573 to 2.356	<0.001

Associate Professor (vs Assistant Lecturer)	-0.328	-0.693 to 0.037	0.078
Lecturer (vs Assistant Lecturer)	-0.248	-0.454 to -0.043	0.018
Professor (vs Assistant Lecturer)	-0.272	-0.591 to 0.047	0.095
Senior Lecturer (vs Assistant Lecturer)	-0.133	-0.292 to 0.025	0.098
>20 years at institution (vs <5 years)	0.457	0.146 to 0.767	0.004
11–15 years at institution (vs <5 years)	-0.064	-0.266 to 0.139	0.538
16–20 years at institution (vs <5 years)	0.412	0.155 to 0.669	0.002
5–10 years at institution (vs <5 years)	-0.199	-0.385 to -0.014	0.035
Male (vs Female)	0.122	-0.017 to 0.261	0.085

Model adjusted for institution type, employment status, academic rank, years worked, and gender. N = 665; Adjusted R^2 = 0.18.

Model diagnostics were conducted to assess the assumptions underlying the adjusted linear regression model. Visual inspection of residuals versus fitted values indicated approximate linearity and homoscedasticity, with no evidence of systematic patterns. Normal Q-Q plots showed residuals to be approximately normally distributed, with minor deviations at the tails. Variance inflation factors for all predictors were below 2, indicating no concern for multicollinearity. These diagnostics support the adequacy of the model for inferential statistics.

The compliance of Zambian higher education institutions (HEIs) with Higher Education Authority (HEA) workload policy guidelines demonstrates a positive, albeit modest, impact on academic staff experiences of workload manageability. The unadjusted linear regression analysis revealed a significant association between perceived workload policy implementation and workload manageability ($\beta = 0.31$, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.055$), indicating that academics in institutions perceived to implement workload policies more robustly report better manageability of their workloads (Daka et al., 2025). While modest, this effect underscores that compliance involves more than the formal existence of policy documents; it requires active enactment, monitoring, and staff awareness to meaningfully influence workplace outcomes.

In Zambia, the HEA provides a regulatory framework through the Higher Education Act No. 4 of 2013, complemented by quality assurance standards such as the Zambia Standards & Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ZSG QA), which collectively guide HEIs in establishing internal quality assurance mechanisms, governance structures, and monitoring systems (www.hea.org.zm). Empirical studies, however, highlight structural and operational challenges including uneven staff awareness, limited engagement in QA processes, and resource constraints that hinder consistent compliance and the translation of formal policies into practice. Consequently, academic perceptions of workload manageability are influenced not only by policy presence but also by the effectiveness of local enactment, institutional capacity, and stakeholder engagement.

This interpretation aligns with implementation research, which emphasizes that policy outcomes depend on context-specific enactment conditions, such as clarity, institutional resources, monitoring mechanisms, and participatory processes, rather than on policy existence alone. From a global perspective, active and transparent implementation of workload policies supports the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting equitable and high-quality teaching environments, and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by fostering fair, predictable, and manageable academic workloads. Meaningful compliance with HEA guidelines, therefore, contributes not only to individual workload manageability but also to broader institutional quality, staff well-being, and sustainable higher education practices in Zambia.

5. Conclusions

The study concluded that workload policy implementation in selected public and private Zambian universities is generally moderate to high, with 31% of academic staff reporting high implementation, 50.1% moderate, and 18.9% low. While formal policies exist, inconsistencies in enactment reflect gaps in transparency, communication, recognition of hidden workload such as time devoted to meetings, resolving student issues, enrolment-driven overloads, and course availability pressures and staff engagement, highlighting that policy effectiveness depends on active operationalization, consistent monitoring, and alignment with faculty expectations, as explained by Implementation and Equity Theories. Institutional compliance with HEA workload guidelines significantly predicts perceptions of manageable workloads ($\beta = 0.31$, SE = 0.05, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.055$), indicating that adherence to regulatory standards fosters clearer, fairer, and more manageable academic environments. To enhance implementation and compliance, universities should build on existing institutional practices by strengthening consistency in policy enactment across faculties, integrating workload policies into internal quality assurance frameworks, and improving transparency and communication. Institutions should also explicitly recognise all academic duties, including hidden and non-formalised tasks such as time spent in meetings, student support and issue resolution, enrolment-driven workload pressures, and course availability demands. Furthermore, universities should promote faculty engagement through structured consultations and feedback mechanisms, establish robust monitoring and enforcement systems, and allocate adequate resources to support effective and sustainable policy implementation.

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