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Staff Training in Higher Education Institutions: A Scoping Review of Dominant Themes and Methodological Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Staff training in institutions of higher learning is widely researched but the field is still fragmented as a wide variety of themes and methods is evident. This study reviewed 33 journal articles indexed in Scopus database, published between 2022 and 2026 with the objective of identifying dominant themes and dominant research methods used to study staff training in higher education. In order to identify the dominant themes and methods, the study analyzed the frequency of occurrence of the theme or method across the reviewed articles, because some studies engaged more than one theme or applied more than one methodological approach. Findings reveal that the most dominant theme between 2022 and 2026 is training for increased competence and individual performance (27 occurrences representing 34.62%). Although this theme dominated research focus during the reviewed period, its dominance fluctuated across the five years with most of the studies (about 52%) engaging this theme coming out in 2024. With regard to methodological orientation, the review finds that, due to the limitations of qualitative and quantitative methods there is a notable transition from paradigmatically positivist quantitative empirical studies that focus mainly on the impact of training programs towards qualitative and mixed-methods studies. Mixed methods are becoming more common because of the crucial importance of linking organizational strategic plans in the environment of new technological advancements to the actual practice of staff training and development. This review recommends more mixed-methods empirical studies that link institutional factors to training impact in order to strengthen research evidence on governance of staff training in higher education including lived experiences of the members of staff. This will take care of new emerging strategic themes like staff welfare, inclusivity and organizational leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Staff training manifests in various forms represented through different terminologies, including staff development, capacity building, professional development, or even continuing education. Staff training in higher education encompasses all structured programs that are deliberately designed to improve pedagogical skills and competencies, research skills, leadership skills, and administrative skills, as well as adaptation to new technology (Knight *et al.*, 2006; Postareff *et al.*, 2007). Empirical research has shown that benefits of staff training in higher education include improved quality in knowledge delivery, improved student performance, improved commitment to the work, and even improvements in the general performance of the institutions of higher learning (Harris & Sass, 2011; Yoon *et al.*, 2007). For these reasons, institutions of higher learning and higher learning regulatory authorities have invested in professional standards, quality assurance, and training schemes to ensure that the capacity of staff in teaching, research, technology, and leadership is strengthened (European Commission, 2013; Steinert *et al.*, 2006). Several other empirical studies have also linked staff training in higher education to institutional performance through improved teaching effectiveness

and student-teacher engagement as well as curriculum innovation (Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007). A more general term for staff training is continuing professional development (CPD).

The breadth and fragmentation of scholarship on staff training in higher education merit a scoping review to systematically map existing literature. Scoping reviews are particularly suited to examining emerging or complex fields by identifying key concepts, research trends, types of interventions, and knowledge gaps (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters *et al.*, 2020). This study, therefore, adopts a scoping review approach to examine dominant sub-themes (what sub-themes attract more of researchers' commitment) and the dominant methods used so as to increase knowledge on transitional patterns in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Staff training in institutions of higher learning has been studied from different angles using different methodological approaches and different research paradigms. Several issues related to this subject have also been treated. These include pedagogical development, support structures, institutional autonomy, training evaluation methods and systems, and the role of technology, among several others.

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One of the works with highly insightful conceptual contribution is Clegg (2003). The author analyses continuing professional development (CPD) in institutions of higher learning and argues that there are still some unresolved tensions around CPD in academic settings. On the one hand the unresolved tensions are between higher learning institutions as providers of training for other fields and as providers of the same service for their own staff. On the other hand, the tensions are between the prestige accompanying research undertakings conflicting with prestige accompanying provision of teaching-related training. Although persuasive, the argument is mostly Eurocentric and explicitly conceptual. The study deals heavily with conceptual aspects of staff training and therefore forms a basis for further discussion around CPD research.

Surveying 2,401 part-time and 248 full-time teachers at the UK Open University, Knight, Tait *et al.* (2006) found that most of CPD training was informal. The main method of training was on-the-job experience and not formal or event-based training sessions. This survey focused on just a single institution. Data was also from distance learning environment. These two limitations might affect generalizability of the findings because conventional campus based higher learning contexts might exhibit different mixtures of balanced formal and informal methods.

Postareff *et al.* (2007) used a more quantitative approach in measuring how teaching methods and approaches are affected by pedagogical training. They collected data through the Approaches to Teaching Inventory covering 200 University of Helsinki. Their findings showed that only extended training, covering a year or more, effectively caused teachers to move toward a more student-centered approach. This study helped to correct the notion that any CPD training would produce the intended benefits. Nevertheless, the study is also limited by being cross-sectional and focused on a single university. Lam and Gayton (2025) extend CPD research to six UK universities. Yet, the qualitative study is narrow in scope as it addresses only one specific gap in pedagogical competency rather than on CPD in general hence failing to shed light on how the studied problem affects the whole sector.

More diversified research methods and techniques are seen in Peng and Pastor (2026), who conducted a qualitative case study of a public university in Zhejiang Province in China, focused on administrative support for teachers' CPD. The authors employed interviews, focus groups discussions, and documentary reviews and analyzed the data using reflexive thematic analysis. Their findings reported on themes like technology integration, leadership development, institutional priorities, and budget, training monitoring and international exchange. Yet, in this study the views of trainees could not be captured as the study relied heavily on administrator accounts alone. In another similar study, Ngo *et al.* (2023) designed a stakeholder case study of Tay Nguyen University in Vietnam, employing exploratory factor

analysis and regression techniques. They focused on institutional autonomy and social responsibility.

Ortega Vergara *et al.* (2024) approached institutional support methodologically differently. They used grounded theory to study how transferred or newly appointed academic staff was inducted at universities of Hidalgo in Mexico. They also focused on themes like effectiveness and organizational strategic plans. Other studies treated the themes of evaluation and leadership as important aspects of institutional success. Xi and Pastor (2026) used mixed-methods design. The study combined key informant interviews with exploratory factor analysis working with a sample of 200 respondents. Managers, experts, teachers, and students. The resulting three-factor structure achieved strong reliability (Cronbach's Li and Pastor (2026), used descriptive-correlational design working with a sample of 55 respondents, while Iqbal *et al.* (2024) used a larger sample, covering 121 high ranking universities in Pakistan. This study employed partial least squares equations and interpreted its findings using Organizational Learning Theory. They also focused on themes such as job satisfaction, and university productivity.

Although most studies focus on academic staff, there are also studies that focus on nonacademic staff. For example, Matlakala and Bezuidenhout (2024) surveyed administrative staff at a South African university, engaging the themes of training-needs analysis and talent management. This study used cross sectional survey design. McComb and Eather (2024) studied sessional academic staff in Australian universities. They used mixed-methods design and employed semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire. They engaged the themes of employment conditions, psychological wellbeing, and career progression. On their side, Ahmed *et al.* (2024) examine influence of CPD on employee performance collecting data from University of Cape Coast in Ghana. They focused on the theme of staff retention.

A synthesis of methodology and themes in these studies shows clearly that the field of CPD in higher learning is a beneficiary of a multitude of varied methodological approaches and thematic orientations. Most of research in this field uses primary data. Systematic and scoping reviews are still not so common in literature on CPD in higher learning. Some studies are limited by their narrow thematic focus while others are limited by their methodological scope. Nevertheless, the field seems to be very reach in terms of thematic areas. There is a very long list of themes that CPD research in higher learning could choose from. In addition, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches are all suitable and have been applied in research in this field. The gap that remains is to consolidate information on the choices of themes and methods in order to guide future choices by researchers in the field.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Elsevier launched Scopus as a new search and discovery

tool in 2004, at that time already containing about 27 million peer-reviewed scientific publications. The content of this abstract and citation database has grown to more than 100 million records with over 7,000 publishers. Scopus covers publications from 1788 to date. This makes it one of the largest curated databases. This means that Scopus content is selected for inclusion in the data base following a highly rigorous process. The content submitted for inclusion is normally scrutinized through a highly professional review process and selected only when it satisfies high scores of criteria for scientific quality and rigor. The review process involves an external content selection and advisory board (CSAB). The Board consists of independent scientists who are experts in their specific knowledge areas. This process ensures that only high-quality curated content is indexed. This is one reason why Scopus is highly trustworthy (Baas *et al.*, 2020). Literature search was conducted using Scopus academic database purposively selected due its position among the largest indexers. The search query syntax used was (TITLE staff OR employee AND training OR development AND universities OR colleges) AND PUBYEAR > 2021 AND PUBYEAR < 2027. The search result brought 88

suggestions. The resulting identified journal articles were screened using predefined eligibility criteria.

This study restricted its choice of sources to studies that focused only on staff training in higher education published between 2022 and 2026. Genre type was restricted to journal articles only. Clear methodology was also another basis for inclusion in the analysis. The study excluded studies that focused on primary or secondary education, opinion papers or editorials, conference abstracts without full papers, and studies lacking methodological transparency as well as student training without staff focus. Retrieved records underwent a multi-stage screening process of title screening, abstract screening, and finally full-text eligibility assessment. As most of the suggested studies included staff training in their titles but their main body contents majored on other issues, only 33 unique studies were considered good enough for analysis representing 78 total thematic assignments. From these thematic assignments thematic occurrences were counted to identify the extent to which each theme featured in the 33 studies. Therefore, rather than counting ‘studies’ this review counted ‘occurrences.’ Selected studies were coded along three analytical axes:

Table 1: Coding axes for each objective

Analytical Area	Coding Focus
Sub-themes	Performance, institutions, leadership, welfare
Methodology	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed

Source: Authors’ analysis

The study then identified clearly defined categories of coding variables. The first was methodological orientation coding variables category, which included research approach such as Qualitative / Quantitative / Mixed as well as research design, data collection tools, and analytical techniques. The second was impact evaluation coding based on outcome measurement rigor (Descriptive outcome reporting, moderate evaluation, and rigorous causal evaluation). The final was the support systems coding which included lived experiences of trained staff based on institutional and situational factors affecting welfare for both teachers and students. Methodological classification followed Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2018) research design typology, while thematic classifications were designed in line with training evaluation hierarchies such as Kirkpatrick’s model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

This study adopted a scoping review methodology to

systematically map focus, and trends in literature on staff training in higher education from 2022 to 2026. Scoping reviews are appropriate for identifying key concepts, dominant themes, methodological approaches, and research gaps within broad knowledge fields (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). The scoping review was guided by two analytical objectives:

1. To identify dominant themes in staff training empirical studies from 2022 to 2026.

2. To examine the most common research approaches used to study staff training in higher education.

The studies were grouped into two main categories. The first was the category of policy studies, and the second was the category of impact evaluation studies. The type of methodological orientation for each of these groups was studied according to pre-defined coding rules as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Coding Rules for each group of studies

Indicators	Classified as
Interviews, focus groups, document analyses	Qualitative
Surveys + statistics, experiments, regressions	Quantitative
Surveys + interviews / triangulation	Mixed
Impact measurement (productivity, performance)	Quantitative – Learning
Policy review/governance critique	Qualitative – Learning

Source: Authors’ analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this analysis show that the largest group of researchers engaging staff training in higher education between 2022 and 2026 (27 occurrences representing 34.62%) conceptualized staff training primarily as a tool for improving both competence and performance. The predominance of this theme indicates an emphasis on staff training as a strategy or tool for improving employee capability and organizational performance. The second largest group of researchers is mostly concerned with how institutional context is critical for ensuring that staff training actually leads to improved practices. The third

largest group of researchers is interested in the role of staff training in staff well-being, staff retention, and inclusive learning. A smaller group views staff training as a strategic organizational commitment that may lead to improved quality assurance, institutional productivity, and institutional learning. Finally, the most recent studies are focusing on digital transformations including artificial intelligence and online learning. Although this theme received the least attention, the trend shows that focus on this theme is rapidly expanding. Table 3 shows a summary of this pattern in thematic focus relating themes to their corresponding studies.

Table 3: Dominant themes (2022–2026)

Theme	Corresponding Studies	Study focus
Increased competence and job performance	Ahmed <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ekerin and John (2022); Elhag <i>et al.</i> (2026); Gerpe Pérez and Porto Castro (2024); Iqbal (2026); Iqbal <i>et al.</i> (2024); Izah (2022); Lam and Gayton (2025); Matlakala and Bezuidenhout (2024); McComb and Eather (2024); Mountford-Zimdars and Hayes (2025); Ngo <i>et al.</i> (2023); Nhamo and Chapungu (2024); Noor <i>et al.</i> (2023); Nyambiya <i>et al.</i> (2024); Oladejo <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ortega Vergara <i>et al.</i> (2024); Osiesi <i>et al.</i> (2022); Owan <i>et al.</i> (2026); Ray <i>et al.</i> (2024); Van Puymbroeck <i>et al.</i> (2026); Babalola (2024)	Relationship between staff training and knowledge, skills, leadership capability, workplace safety practices, staff confidence, and overall performance.
Job satisfaction, wellbeing and staff retention	Baker <i>et al.</i> (2026); Elhag <i>et al.</i> (2026); Engbersen-Severijns <i>et al.</i> (2025); Iqbal <i>et al.</i> (2024); Kilmartin <i>et al.</i> (2024); McComb and Eather (2024); Mountford-Zimdars and Hayes (2025); Owan <i>et al.</i> (2026); Ray <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Influence of staff training on job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, inclusion, and employee turnover.
Staff training for inclusive teaching and student support	Babalola (2024); Baker <i>et al.</i> (2026); Engbersen-Severijns <i>et al.</i> (2025); Gerpe Pérez and Porto Castro (2024); Kilmartin <i>et al.</i> (2024); Lam and Gayton (2025); Mountford-Zimdars and Hayes (2025); Ray <i>et al.</i> (2024); Van Puymbroeck <i>et al.</i> (2026)	Teaching staff training for culturally responsive teaching, inclusive education, disability support, sign language literacy, and student mental health.
Staff training and digital transformation	Izah (2022); Noor <i>et al.</i> (2023); Ray <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Artificial intelligence, e-learning, and technology-enhanced staff training.
Teaching quality assurance and institutional performance	Ekerin and John (2022); Iqbal (2026); Iqbal <i>et al.</i> (2024); Izah (2022); Ngo <i>et al.</i> (2023); Oladejo <i>et al.</i> (2024); Osiesi <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Contribution of staff training to institutional effectiveness, sustainable quality assurance, and research capacity.
Institutional factors affecting effectiveness of staff training	Ahmed <i>et al.</i> (2024); Baker <i>et al.</i> (2026); de Jong (2026); Engbersen-Severijns <i>et al.</i> (2025); Iqbal (2026); Matlakala and Bezuidenhout (2024); McComb and Eather (2024); Mountford-Zimdars and Hayes (2025); Ngo <i>et al.</i> (2023); Nhamo and Chapungu (2024); Nyambiya <i>et al.</i> (2024); Oladejo <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ortega Vergara <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Contextual factors influencing the success and sustainability of staff training initiatives including culture, financing, leadership, and policy support

Source: Author's analysis

Table 4: Percentage representation of occurrences of each theme

Major Theme	Occurrences (n)	Percentage
Increased competence and job performance	27	34.62%
Institutional factors affecting effectiveness of staff training	16	20.51%
Job satisfaction, wellbeing and staff retention	12	15.38%

Staff training for inclusive teaching and student support	11	14.10%
Teaching quality assurance and institutional performance	7	8.97%
Staff training and digital transformation		

Source: Author's analysis

The annual temporal analysis of the dominant theme pattern reveals that in each year the researchers focused on certain specific emphases. Table 4 shows a summary

of dominant themes for each of the five years of this analysis.

Table 5: Annual trend of dominant themes

Year	Dominant focus/trend
2022	How to build staff competence for the aim of restoring organizational performance
2023	Reviewing and strengthening institutional learning, improving productivity and employing emerging digital technologies.
2024	How to broadly diversify higher education to accommodate inclusivity in education, to manage digital transformations, improve leadership practices in higher learning, to make higher learning institutions more sustainable and introducing policies for staff well-being.
2025	Putting greater emphasis on how to institutionalize inclusive teaching practices and techniques, greater emphasis on employee welfare and job security, and institutionalize support systems for these objectives.
2026	Emphasis on strategic workforce development including organizational leadership skills for institutional resilience while ensuring that the attained professionalism remains sustainable.

Source: Author's analysis

This temporal pattern from 2022 to 2026 shows clearly that the focus of literature on staff training in higher education has evolved from emphasizing individual capacity building geared towards improved institutional output toward a more diversified approach which is more holistic and strategic. The evolution is marked by the integration of staff competence with other intervening variables like inclusivity, organizational leadership, digital transformation, institutional culture, employee welfare, safety and well-being, as well as organizational sustainability.

Another notable issue in the reviewed literature is that authors are extending their research to life skills and innovative approaches to teaching. They show that teaching competency requires an integration of several techniques and approaches. The findings support Halfon (2026) who reported that pedagogical mastery remains the dominant component (represented in over 50% of themes) but also that effective teaching in higher learning increasingly requires integrating such other virtues like emotional intelligence to complement skills like digital competence. Killingback, Tomlinson and Stern (2024) suggest that, given the learning context post COVID 19, increasingly, pedagogical training needs to include empathy and life skills like student wellbeing awareness. Issues of sustained impact and academic ethics have also been addressed in recent literature. For example, Azimkhan *et al.* (2025) conclude that training aligned with technological competency is essential for effective e-learning but suggest that the sustainability of the long-term impact of technological training needs structured training programs that ensure long-term impact assessment. Ogunleye, *et al.* (2024) recommend that staff

training must ensure that teachers effectively integrate artificial intelligence but that they also preserve academic integrity.

Further analysis indicated that the annual featuring of the most dominant theme followed a normal distribution curve structure. The peak of the curve was found to be in the year 2024 (Fig. 1). The analysis shows that, in addition to the fact that most writers focused on staff training for improved performance, most of these writers published their works in 2024. The concentration of studies focusing on the most dominant theme in 2024 suggests that this year was the most thematically productive year of the review period for organizations involved in higher education. This is because most of the writers drew insight from various issues related to higher education and discussed how these various issues could be harnessed and focused on staff performance for the benefit of institutions of higher learning.

The graph in Figure 1 demonstrates that Theme 1 (staff training for increased competence and job performance) remained the most prominent research theme in the area of staff training in higher education throughout the reviewed period of 2022–2026 period, yet its dominance followed a definite trend showing considerable fluctuation over time. The figure shows that 27 studies engaged theme 1 during the period of the review. Their annual dominance was as shown in Figure 1, which indicates that the number of studies featuring theme 1 declined from five in the year 2022 to only two studies in the year 2023. This was followed by a sharp increase to fourteen studies (about 52%) in the year 2024, representing the highest concentration of studies engaging theme 1 during the review period. This peak suggests that research attention

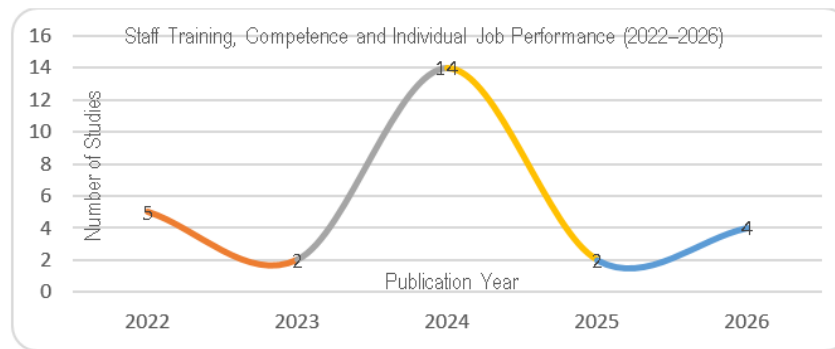


Figure 1: Annual featuring of the most dominant theme.

Source: Author's analysis

in this year had its intensity around how to improve staff competence, staff effectiveness in teaching, added professional skills, and overall performance of the employees of higher learning. After this impressive surge, the number of publications decreased again to two studies in the year 2025. The trend later improved modestly to four studies in the year 2026.

It is also noted that the leadership and administrative training theme is another new focus in the field of staff development research. Higher education institutions often choose department heads, program coordinators, and deans based on their academic achievements rather than their management skills. This leaves gaps in governance and organizational leadership. As a result, training programs focus on strategic planning, managing finances, resolving conflicts, and keeping an eye on performance in academic units. As colleges and universities become more complicated, formal training for leadership roles has become more common in staff development plans. Leaders in academic institutions must manage collegial governance structures, find a balance between independence and responsibility, and help faculty members who value participatory decision-making to work together. This entails interpersonal negotiation, decentralized leadership methodologies, and the capacity to navigate opposition to institutional reforms. Leadership training thus prepares academics to shift from individual scholarly responsibilities to collective organizational governance (Bryman, 2007).

Leadership skills are becoming more and more crucial

as the environment within which institutions of higher learning are operating changes. Hence, universities and other institutions of higher learning are investing in professional development focusing on producing leaders fitted for the new and constantly improving global higher education context. This context also includes leadership skills related to financial management and the ability to manage the internationalization of programs in both teaching and research. In addition, Dong *et al.* (2026) suggests that higher learning institutions require leaders who can manage complexities brought by digital transformation and the need for global collaboration. Nguyen *et al.* (2026) also suggest that administrators in higher learning institutions need competencies in policy analysis, governance of technology, and staff support systems in order to ensure that teaching is aligned with institutional plans. Killingback *et al.* (2024) bring in a new concept of organizational culture suggesting that effective leadership training should make sure that institutional values are incorporated in teaching practices. An examination of the annual trend of dominant methodological tendencies reveals that the evolution of themes moved in tandem with an evolution in methods. There has been a gradual transition from predominantly quantitative evaluations (majorly focused on training outcomes) to more qualitative and mixed-methods research that explore institutional contexts, and staff experiences. A summary of this transition is given in Table 6.

Table 6: Overall methodological transition between 2022 and 2026.

Year	Studies	Dominant Method	Description
2022	Ekerin & John (2022); Izah (2022); Osiesi <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Quantitative	Mostly studies cross-sectional survey designs employing structured questionnaires with statistical analyses (descriptive statistics, correlation, regression etc.)
2023	Ngo <i>et al.</i> (2023) ; Noor <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Emerging mixed methods	Quantitative surveys still dominating but some studies began including interviews, documentary reviews, and case studies.

2024	Ahmed <i>et al.</i> (2024); Babalola (2024); Gerpe Pérez & Porto Castro (2024); Iqbal <i>et al.</i> (2024); Kilmartin <i>et al.</i> (2024); Matlakala & Bezuidenhout (2024); McComb & Eather (2024); Nhamo & Chapungu (2024); Nyambiya <i>et al.</i> (2024); Oladejo <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ortega Vergara <i>et al.</i> (2024); Ray <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Mixed methods with qualitative analyses	This year witnessed a combination of surveys with interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, document analysis, and thematic analysis coupled with intervening mixed-methods to examine complex institutional research questions.
2025	Engbersen-Severijns <i>et al.</i> (2025); Lam & Gayton (2025); Mountford-Zimdars & Hayes (2025)	Predominantly qualitative qualified with mixed methods in data analysis	Most studies used qualitative case studies, collecting data through interviews, and analyzing thematically. In addition, simple quantitative analyses helped to explain staff views about welfare, inclusion, and institutional support systems.
2026	Baker <i>et al.</i> (2026); de Jong (2026); Elhag <i>et al.</i> (2026); Iqbal (2026); Owan <i>et al.</i> (2026); Van Puymbroeck <i>et al.</i> (2026)	Mostly mixed methods accompanied by advanced quantifications	Mixed-methods widely used to assess leadership skills, and staff welfare. Most of emerging research increasingly includes quantitative impact evaluation in qualitative analyses.

Source: Author's analysis

Table 7: Annual featuring of dominant research methods

Year	Dominant Method
2022	Literature on staff training in higher education dominated by quantitative surveys engaging statistical evaluations.
2023	Noticeable emergence of mixed methods in the midst of predominantly quantitative tendencies in research methodology.
2024	Predominance of mixed methods with a noticeable increase in qualitative case studies and the use of interviews.
2025	Qualitative approaches become prominent applied. Mixed methods still widely employed.
2026	Mixed-methods research became the leading methodological design.

Source: Author's analysis

In synthesis, studies published in 2022 mainly followed the positivist research paradigm, with studies focusing on measuring staff training program effectiveness. Qualitative techniques began to feature in the field literature in 2023, to include analyses of contextual factors affecting staff training. Literature published in the year 2024 introduced a considerable turnaround. Mixed-methods became the dominant research approach in staff training in higher education institutions. Quantitative measurements started to be qualified with recognition of the effect of social, organizational, and contextual factors difficult to capture using quantitative surveys. This trend continued to cover 2025 and 2026. In this period, the qualitative nature of subjects like inclusivity, leadership, staff wellbeing, organizational culture as well as sustainability of staff training initiatives made it crucially necessary to integrate qualitative and mixed-methods designs.

As it can be seen, the trend indicates that the theme

capturing staff training for improved competence and individual performance has consistently remained the main concern of higher education staff development researchers. This is the case notwithstanding the noted year-to-year fluctuations in the annual number of publications engaging this theme. The rapid increase in the number of publications between 2023 and 2024 reflects an increased interest in strengthening academic staff capacity and skills, most likely due to post-pandemic organizational reforms, digital evolution, and increased demands for teaching quality and effectiveness of the work force.

The review demonstrates that from 2022 to 2026 there has been a transition in the field from studies focused on measurement to those emphasizing the interpretation of meanings, culminating in a more integrated approach. Earlier research is found to have utilized more descriptive statistics techniques, creating outputs in the form

of technical reports. There were limited qualitative investigations centered on staff experiences, perceptions, and the development of professional identity (Clegg, 2003).

It was noted during this review that, increasingly, scholarship on staff training in higher education is influenced by constructivist thinking. This orientation, which puts emphasis on interpretation of meaning and construction of identity, started to conduct studies focusing on the actual lived experiences of the trained staff. Consequently, qualitative research designs like case studies and phenomenology become more common in the literature on higher education staff training. These studies collected data on what teachers actually experience as they implement staff training programs.

Another development in methodological inclination is seen in the period from 2022 towards 2026. During this period the field indicates some level of methodological consolidation. Qualitative narratives and descriptive data start to be used to complement quantitative metrics. A prominent example in this case is Bennett *et al.* (2022). Table 6 shows that methodological inclination in this field has transitioned from emphasis on measurement to emphasis on meaning and now to emphasis on integrating meaning interpretation with practice. More recent literature shows a clear dominance of qualitative studies engaging staff training in higher education. This is mainly due to a clear increase in systematic reviews and scoping reviews of literature. While qualitative studies dominate reviews, policy analyses, and conceptual studies, the few quantitative and mixed-approach studies that exist focus on technology and research capacity.

CONCLUSION

Scoping reviews exist that engage staff training in institutions of higher learning; yet, it is rare to find a review that treats themes and methodological approaches together. This is the novelty of this scoping review. Bridging these two aspects of literature on staff training provides an important snapshot of the state of the field. The review findings show that methodological approaches are clearly changing. Early scholarship emphasized measurement and quantitative analysis. However, influenced by the rise of constructivist thinking, research methodology in this field started to shift from a predominantly quantitative orientation to a more qualitative focus. Lately, the two methods are evidently coming together, consolidating the field's methodological focus around mixed-method studies. Another notable finding is that studies focusing on training evaluation and impact are mostly quantitative. Mixed methods are more common in studies linking training to institutional support systems, inclusive teaching, emerging technologies, leadership and staff and student welfare.

Overall, the trend indicates that staff training for competence and individual job performance dominated among major themes related to staff training and development in higher education. Individual performance

consistently remained the central focus of literature on higher education staff training and staff development. Nevertheless, year-to-year fluctuation in the volume of publications engaging this theme is noted. The year 2024 witnessed the highest concentration of publications on this theme. So, six dominant themes in staff training in higher education were identified in this review. Their dominance fluctuates annually due to increasing importance of new technologies, and new issues regarding institutional strategic objectives in a new and complex environment demanding attention for inclusivity and staff welfare. At the same time, methodologically the field is changing from strict quantitative and qualitative separation, transiting from positivist quantification towards the inclusion of more qualitative analyses involving institutional and welfare variables. This evidences a shift in paradigmatic orientation from positivism to constructivism. Future research needs to employ more of mixed methods techniques to capture the nuances of the rapidly changing realities of staff training in higher education.

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