

Human Resource Management Practices and Employee Performance Among Academic Staff of Private Universities in Ondo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Human Resource Management (HRM) practices are vital for optimizing employee performance, particularly in academic institutions where human capital plays a central role in achieving organisational objectives. Despite their importance, the implementation of HRM practices in private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria, is often constrained by limited financial resources, competition from public institutions, and a shortage of qualified Human Resource (HR) professionals. Against this backdrop, this study investigated the effect of key HRM practices compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management, and promotion on the performance of academic staff in private universities within the state. A survey research design was employed, and data were gathered from a sample of 385 academic staff selected through stratified random sampling from a population of 568. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize the data, while multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the relationships between the variables. The findings revealed that all four HRM practices had statistically significant and positive effects on employee performance, with compensation and benefits exerting the most substantial impact, followed by promotion, training and development, and performance management. The results highlight the strategic importance of HRM practices in enhancing teaching, research, and administrative effectiveness among academic staff. The study concludes that strengthening HRM practices is crucial for improving employee outcomes in private universities. It recommends that university management prioritize regular and equitable compensation, transparent and merit-based promotion, continuous professional development focused on pedagogy and technology, and performance appraisal systems that support institutional goals.*

Keywords: compensation and benefits, employee performance, human resource management practices, training and development, performance management, private universities, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) has become increasingly central to organisational effectiveness, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors such as higher education. As Nigeria's higher education landscape continues to expand, the rise of private universities especially in Ondo State has highlighted the importance of robust HRM practices in ensuring institutional sustainability, faculty retention, and academic excellence (Ajayi, 2020; Akinlabi & Kehinde, 2021). These private institutions have emerged to bridge the gaps left by overstretched public universities, providing access to tertiary education in a competitive and dynamic educational environment.

Effective HRM practices are critical to managing academic staff performance and aligning individual capabilities with institutional objectives. In the context of private universities, these practices are essential for attracting and retaining qualified personnel, fostering professional development, and enhancing institutional productivity (Saeed et al., 2021; Al-Emadi et al., 2020). HRM practices such as compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management, and promotion have been recognized as essential drivers of employee performance across sectors, including higher education (Milkovich & Newman, 2021; Aguinis, 2019).

Compensation and benefits are pivotal in motivating and retaining high-caliber academic staff. Empirical evidence suggests that competitive pay, bonuses, health coverage, and retirement plans significantly influence job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the university setting (Oguntimehin & Fasasi, 2022; Acheampong et al., 2023). In Nigeria, the scarcity of resources and lack of standardized compensation structures in many private universities often undermine staff morale and performance.

Performance management, encompassing goal setting, feedback, and appraisal systems, aligns individual efforts with institutional goals. It has been shown to positively influence academic staff performance, particularly when linked to developmental feedback and transparent evaluation procedures (Adeniji, 2020; Baiyegunhi & Mautsa, 2020). Similarly, training and development enable academic staff to stay abreast of pedagogical innovations and technological advancements, thus improving the quality of teaching and research output (Eze, 2021; Achimugu, 2019).

Promotion practices also play a vital role in motivating employees by providing career advancement opportunities and recognizing exceptional contributions. When fairly implemented, promotion fosters a sense of achievement, encourages talent retention, and strengthens employee loyalty (Oloyede & Owoeye, 2021; Ojeifo et al., 2022). Employee performance in universities encompasses metrics such as teaching effectiveness, research productivity, student engagement, service contributions, and professional growth (Roberts, 2017; Robbins & Judge, 2019). As such, HRM practices must be strategically implemented to optimize these performance dimensions, particularly within the context of private universities, where financial, structural, and regulatory constraints pose unique challenges (Adeyemi & Olufemi, 2017; Akinola & Adeyemi, 2018).

This study is anchored in the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employees reciprocate favorable organizational practices such as fair compensation, career growth opportunities, and support—with enhanced performance and loyalty (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Oyebode, 2020). The theory is relevant in explaining how HRM practices build mutually beneficial relationships between universities and their academic staff, thereby improving performance outcomes.

While global studies have highlighted the significance of HRM in educational institutions, there is a paucity of empirical research focused specifically on private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. Given their growing prominence and unique organizational dynamics, understanding how HRM practices influence staff performance in these institutions is both timely and necessary. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between HRM practices and employee performance among academic staff in private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. The research specifically examines how compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management, and promotion influence faculty effectiveness in teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities.

The broad objective of this study is to examine the relationship between Human Resource Management practices and employee performance in private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the effect of compensation and benefits on employee performance.
- ii. Determine the extent to which training and development affect employee performance.
- iii. Assess the influence of performance management practices on employee performance.
- iv. Evaluate the effect of promotion on employee performance.

Research questions and hypotheses were carried out in line with the study specific objectives.

The choice of Ondo State is informed by the presence of multiple private universities operating within diverse administrative and operational models, making it a suitable setting for comparative HRM studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Human Resource Management (HRM)

Human Resource Management (HRM) refers to the strategic and coherent approach to managing an organization's most valued assets its employees who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). HRM practices include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, promotion, and employee relations, all of which are essential for improving employee productivity and organizational performance (Saeed et al., 2021).

Compensation and Benefits

Compensation and benefits (C&B) are among the most critical HRM practices that influence employee motivation, retention, and performance. Compensation includes direct monetary rewards such as salaries and bonuses, while benefits include health insurance, pensions, housing, and educational assistance (Milkovich & Newman, 2021). In Nigerian private universities, these packages vary depending on experience, seniority, and institutional policy. For example, Redeemer's University provides on-campus housing, healthcare services, and tuition support for staff dependents, which enhances employee retention (Oyebode, 2020). Odu (2021) notes that institutions such as Covenant University link bonuses and recognition programs directly to faculty performance metrics, encouraging higher productivity. This aligns with the findings of Acheampong et al. (2023), who emphasized that competitive and transparent compensation structures lead to increased job satisfaction and organizational loyalty in academic environments. Furthermore, well-structured benefits packages reduce employee turnover and foster a sense of organizational commitment (Oguntimehin & Fasasi, 2022).

Training and Development

Training and development (T&D) refer to activities aimed at enhancing employee capabilities and preparing them for higher responsibilities. Training focuses on short-term skill acquisition, while development focuses on long-term career growth (Noe, 2020). In the academic sector, training programs often include pedagogy enhancement, research capacity building, and administrative leadership. Private universities in Nigeria, such as Babcock University and Bowen University, routinely organize faculty development workshops that cover curriculum design, student engagement techniques, and digital learning tools (Oyeleye & Oladejo, 2020; Ogunyomi & Ogunyomi, 2021). These programs are vital for keeping staff up to date with educational trends and technologies.

Ajayi Crowther University's professional development courses and leadership seminars have been linked to increased job satisfaction and faculty retention (Odu, 2021). Such investments in training and development not only improve individual performance but also strengthen institutional capacity and sustainability (Eze, 2021). Moreover, training and development serve as essential tools for succession planning. When staff are groomed for future leadership roles, it reduces talent gaps and ensures continuity in institutional knowledge and culture (Adeyemi, 2019). This aligns with the observations by Achimugu (2019), who emphasized that structured development pathways enhance academic excellence and institutional effectiveness.

Performance Management

Performance management is a critical HRM function that involves the systematic process of planning, monitoring, evaluating, and enhancing employee performance to achieve strategic goals. It includes setting clear expectations, providing continuous feedback, assessing performance outcomes, and facilitating career development (Aguinis, 2019). In private universities, performance management frameworks are instrumental in aligning faculty efforts with institutional missions, particularly in teaching, research, and community service.

Private universities in Nigeria have increasingly adopted structured performance appraisal systems to monitor academic outputs. For instance, Bowen University implements a comprehensive performance management model that incorporates peer reviews, student evaluations, and research metrics to measure and enhance academic performance (Akinola, 2023). Similarly, Covenant University integrates developmental feedback with individual performance reviews to foster faculty growth and institutional accountability (Odu, 2021). Effective performance management practices contribute to higher levels of employee engagement and accountability. Institutions like Afe Babalola University link performance outcomes to incentives, including bonuses and career advancement, thereby motivating faculty to align their goals with broader institutional objectives (Oyebisi & Adeyemo, 2020). By providing consistent feedback and development opportunities, universities support staff in enhancing their pedagogical and research capabilities (Adeyemi, 2022).

Promotion

Promotion serves as a key motivational mechanism in HRM by recognizing and rewarding employee performance, dedication, and competence. It involves the elevation of staff to higher ranks with increased responsibility and compensation (Cascio, 2018; Noe et al., 2019). In academic environments, promotion is often based on criteria such as research output, teaching effectiveness, years of service, and administrative contributions. Well-structured promotion policies foster employee retention, morale, and a sense of achievement. For instance, Ajayi Crowther University adopts a merit-based promotion framework that considers both quantitative (e.g., number of publications) and qualitative (e.g., impact of research) metrics in evaluating academic staff (Oladele & Adebayo, 2022). These practices encourage professional development and institutional loyalty, particularly when promotions are transparently tied to performance indicators (Milkovich et al., 2021).

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the degree to which individuals fulfill their job responsibilities in alignment with organizational goals. In the academic context, performance includes a combination of teaching effectiveness, research productivity, student mentoring, institutional service, and professional development (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Aguinis, 2019). Measures of Employee Performance in Nigerian Private Universities:

i. Teaching Effectiveness

Teaching quality is assessed through lecture delivery, instructional innovation, and student engagement. Active learning strategies, such as collaborative projects and technology-enhanced instruction, have been shown to improve student learning outcomes (Smith, 2018).

ii. Research Productivity

Academic performance also includes scholarly contributions such as peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, and grant acquisitions. Jones (2020) highlights the role of research output in enhancing institutional reputation and faculty development.

iii. Student Mentoring and Support

Faculty members are evaluated based on their mentorship roles, including advising students and guiding research projects. Mentoring improves student success and fosters meaningful faculty-student relationships (Adams, 2019).

iv. Service and Administrative Contributions

Contributions to departmental and university governance through committee participation and curriculum development reflect faculty commitment to institutional growth (Chen, 2021).

v. Professional Development

Engagement in ongoing learning through workshops, training programs, and academic conferences is essential for maintaining relevance and innovation in teaching (Roberts, 2017).

Theoretical Review

This study is underpinned by two complementary theories: the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) and Human Capital Theory (HCT). These theories offer robust conceptual frameworks for understanding how Human Resource Management (HRM) practices influence employee performance in academic institutions, particularly private universities.

i. Resource-Based Theory (RBT)

Originally articulated by Penrose (1959) and later expanded by Barney (1991), the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) asserts that an organization's internal resources when effectively harnessed can generate sustained competitive advantage. According to RBT, these resources must meet the VRIN criteria: they must be Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable. Barney (1991) emphasized that human resources skills, knowledge, experience, and organizational culture are among the most strategic assets a firm possesses. When private universities invest in strategic HRM practices such as staff development, performance incentives, and supportive work environments, they effectively convert human capital into a source of enduring advantage. Key assumptions of RBT include:

Resource Heterogeneity: Firms possess different bundles of resources; thus, the variation in capabilities across institutions leads to different performance outcomes (Barney, 1991; Newbert, 2007).

Resource Immobility: Some resources, particularly human skills and organizational culture, are not easily transferable or replicable by competitors due to causal ambiguity and social complexity (Barney, 1991; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001).

Resource Complementarity: The synergistic interaction between various resources such as training, motivation, and leadership yields higher productivity when aligned with institutional goals (Peteraf, 1993; Grant, 1996).

Dynamic Capabilities: Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) introduced the idea that organizations must continuously adapt by reconfiguring their resources in response to environmental changes. In academia, this is evident in how universities adjust their HR practices in response to global trends such as digitization and internationalization. RBT underscores that when private universities in Nigeria strategically invest in HR practices that nurture faculty potential, such resources become difficult for competitors to imitate, thereby strengthening institutional performance.

ii. Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Human Capital Theory, pioneered by Becker (1964), posits that individuals and organizations gain economic benefits through investments in education, training, and skill development. In this context, employees are viewed not merely as costs but as assets whose value increases with strategic development and proper management. The central assumptions of HCT include: Investment in Human Capital Increases Productivity: Employees who receive formal training, mentoring, and other development initiatives become more effective and efficient in their roles (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1994).

Human Capital is Transferable: Skills and knowledge acquired through work or education can be applied across various roles and sectors, contributing to organizational flexibility and innovation (Sweetland, 1996). Intangibility and Embeddedness: Human capital resides within individuals and cannot be owned by the organization, making it essential for institutions to implement retention strategies (Wright & McMahan, 2011). Uncertain Returns: Investment in human capital does not guarantee outcomes due to environmental volatility and changes in market demand (Romer, 2001). However, over time, institutions with sustained investment tend to outperform their counterparts. In the context of Nigerian private universities, HCT is particularly relevant. Effective HRM practices such as continuous professional development, fair promotion systems, and performance management enable institutions to build, retain, and optimize faculty capabilities. For instance, when universities offer career progression pathways and research funding, they enhance faculty motivation and institutional performance (Adelakun, 2022; Akinlabi & Kehinde, 2021).

Both RBT and HCT offer valuable lenses through which the impact of HRM practices on employee performance can be understood. While RBT emphasizes the strategic value of human resources as a source of competitive advantage, HCT highlights the importance of investing in people to improve organizational outcomes. Together, these theories justify why HRM practices such as compensation, promotion, performance evaluation, and professional development are essential levers for enhancing employee performance in Nigerian private universities.

Empirical Review

Numerous empirical studies have explored the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and employee performance across private universities in Nigeria. These studies emphasize various HRM dimensions such as training, performance management, compensation, and employee engagement. Owoyemi and Obigbemi (2021) conducted a quantitative study on the impact of HRM practices on employee performance in selected private universities in Lagos State. Using structured questionnaires and correlation analysis, they found that HRM practices—particularly training, compensation, and performance appraisal positively influenced job satisfaction and productivity among academic and non-academic staff. Similarly, Ogbonna and Edeh (2020) employed a mixed-methods approach to examine HRM practices in private universities in Enugu State. Their findings revealed that employee training, performance management, and employee relations significantly enhanced staff productivity and organizational commitment. The inclusion of qualitative interviews offered deeper insights into employees' perceptions of HR practices.

Ogunsanya and Adeniji (2019), through a survey conducted in private universities in Ogun State, confirmed that effective HRM practices, especially training and development, and performance appraisals, were significantly associated with improved employee satisfaction and productivity. Adeyemo and Akinwande (2020) focused their investigation on private universities in Ondo State. Their findings showed that strategic HRM practices particularly competitive recruitment and career development positively influenced faculty and staff performance. This study remains one of the few empirical works addressing HRM in the Ondo State university context.

In Northern Nigeria, Ahmed and Abubakar (2021) utilized a mixed-methods approach to explore the role of HRM practices in employee motivation. Their study showed that recognition systems and structured performance management enhanced staff commitment and overall performance. Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2020) evaluated the impact of training and development through a longitudinal approach in private universities in Abuja. Their pre- and post-assessment revealed a significant performance increase after implementing structured training programs.

Ibrahim and Abdullahi (2020) focused on the mediating role of HRM practices between employee engagement and organizational commitment. Their findings, derived from statistical mediation analysis, indicated that effective HRM policies significantly influence employee loyalty and performance outcomes in private institutions. A cross-sectional study by Olaniyan and Ajayi (2021) examined the impact of compensation on employee retention and performance in private universities. Regression analysis confirmed that competitive compensation packages enhance both retention rates and staff output. Afolabi and Salau (2022), using a case study design across several institutions, demonstrated that performance management systems when properly implemented promote higher motivation and align individual goals with organizational objectives.

Okorie and Umejiesi (2021) conducted a study on training and development using longitudinal data from selected universities. Their analysis showed that structured capacity-building programs significantly enhanced organizational efficiency and employee competencies. Despite these valuable contributions, most of the existing studies have concentrated on a few states—particularly Lagos, Ogun, and Enugu—with minimal focus on Ondo State. Moreover, a recurring gap across these studies is the limited investigation into the role of promotion as a key HRM component. Only Adeyemo and Akinwande (2020) offer state-specific insights relevant to Ondo State, but they also fail to explicitly examine promotion practices.

While there is growing empirical evidence that HRM practices positively influence employee performance in Nigerian private universities, the scope remains geographically limited, with a noticeable underrepresentation of Ondo State institutions. Additionally, the omission of promotion as a critical HRM practice across many studies limits the comprehensiveness of findings. This study addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on private universities in Ondo State and incorporating promotion alongside compensation, training, and performance management in assessing HRM influence on employee performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design to investigate the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and employee performance among academic staff of private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. The choice of this design is informed by its effectiveness in gathering quantifiable data from a large population and

in facilitating the analysis of relationships between variables where secondary data are unavailable (Groves et al., 2009). Survey designs are particularly suitable for HRM research that seeks to capture attitudes, practices, and perceptions within organizational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population for this study comprised all academic staff across the four recognized private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. These include: Achievers University, Owo, Wesley University, Ondo, Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, SAM Maris University, Supare-Akoko.

According to institutional records as of 2024, the total academic staff population across the four universities stood at 528. These include Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers I and II, and Assistant Lecturers. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, a sample size of 382 was determined at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. To ensure proportional representation, stratified random sampling was employed. The academic staff were stratified based on their academic ranks (Professors, Associate Professors, etc.), and random sampling was applied within each stratum. This technique was chosen to guarantee inclusivity and to ensure that every academic cadre was adequately represented in the sample.

Primary data were used for this study. Data collection was carried out through a structured questionnaire designed in line with a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire items were designed to capture HRM dimensions including compensation and benefits, training and development, performance management, promotion, and employee performance indicators. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by subject matter experts in Human Resource Management, including the research supervisor. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated prior to final administration.

Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, a standard method for measuring internal consistency of multi-item scales (DeVellis, 2017). As shown in Table 1, all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), confirming that the instrument is reliable.

Table 1: Reliability Test

Variables	No of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Compensation and Benefits	5	0.76
Training and Development	5	0.78
Performance Management	5	0.78
Staff Promotion	5	0.83
Employee Performance	5	0.77
Average		0.78

Source: SPSS 25 output, 2025

The questionnaires were administered in person by the lead researcher with the support of five trained research assistants. Each assistant was assigned to one of the four universities. The entire data collection exercise spanned two weeks, ensuring comprehensive coverage and high response rates. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the data collection process. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed for data analysis. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize responses to the research questions. Inferential statistics, specifically multiple regression analysis, were applied to test the study's hypotheses and to evaluate the predictive power of HRM practices on employee performance.

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25. This analytical approach enabled the researcher to assess the individual and combined effects of HRM practices on performance outcomes.

The model of specification used for this study was stated in a functional form. The functional form of the model is specified as follows:

$$EMPP = f (HMP) \quad (1)$$

The linear form of the model is formulated as follows

$$EMPP = \alpha + \beta_1 CB + \beta_2 TRA + \beta_3 PMGT + \beta_4 PR + e \quad (2)$$

Where:

EMPP = Employee Performance CB = Compensation and Benefits TRA = Training

PMGT = Performance Management PR = Promotion α = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ and β_4 are regression parameters that measure the effect of compensation and benefits, training, performance management and promotion on employee performance respectively.

Uit = Error term that captures other variables affecting employee performance that were omitted in model 2. The parameters ($\alpha, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ and β_4) of the model were estimated using Ordinary Least Square (OLS). The adoption of OLS was based on the fact that it produces efficient estimates that are best, linear and unbiased.

This model was chosen to quantitatively capture the direction and strength of the relationship between HRM practices and employee performance among academic staff in private universities.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed across the four selected private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. Out of these, 385 questionnaires were successfully retrieved and deemed usable, resulting in a response rate of 96.3%. This is considered highly satisfactory and exceeds the minimum threshold of 30% typically acceptable for survey-based research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The distribution is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Response Rate

Response	Rate
Questionnaires distribution	400
Questionnaires returned	385
Questionnaires not returned	15
Response rate	96.3%

Table 3: Model Summary

Table 3 shows the R-Square of the model which shows the summary of the model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.738 ^a	.847	.522	.90132	2.064
a. Predictors: (Constant), Compensation and benefits, Performance Management, Training, Promotion					
b. Dependent Variable: Employees' performance					

Source: SPSS Output Version 25

The R-squared value of 0.847 suggests that approximately 84.7% of the variance in employee performance is explained by the four HRM predictors. This indicates a high explanatory power of the model. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 2.064 falls within the acceptable range (1.5–2.5), suggesting no evidence of autocorrelation in the residuals.

Table 4: ANOVA

Table 4 shows the analysis of variance of the model. ANOVA is used to determine the overall significance of the estimated model.

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	281.792	4	70.448	72.180	.000 ^b
	Residual	190.223	195	.976		
	Total	472.015	199			
a. Dependent Variable: Employees' performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Compensation and benefits, Performance Management, Training, Promotion						

Source: SPSS Output Version 25

The F-statistic value of 72.180 is statistically significant at $p < .001$, indicating that the model is a good fit and that the HRM variables collectively have a significant influence on employee performance in private universities in Ondo State.

Table 5: Coefficients (Test of Hypothesis)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.836	.251		3.331	.000
	Compensation and benefits	.520	.088	.599	5.901	.000
	Performance management	.327	.102	.258	3.206	.000
	Training	.505	.068	.501	7.426	.000
	Promotion	.517	.078	.511	6.628	.021
a. Dependent Variable: Employees' performance						

Source: SPSS Output Version 25

Hypothesis 1: *Compensation and benefits have no significant effect on employee performance.*

The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.599$) is significant ($t = 5.901$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that compensation and benefits have a positive and significant impact on employee performance. Decision: *Reject the null hypothesis.*

Hypothesis 2: *Performance management has no significant effect on employee performance.*

The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.258$) is significant ($t = 3.206$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a positive and significant relationship between performance management and employee performance. Decision: *Reject the null hypothesis.*

Hypothesis 3: *Training has no significant effect on employee performance.*

The beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.501$) is significant ($t = 7.426$, $p < 0.05$), showing that training and development significantly enhance employee performance. Decision: *Reject the null hypothesis*.

Hypothesis 4: *Promotion has no significant effect on employee performance.*

The coefficient ($\beta = 0.511$) is significant ($t = 6.628$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that promotion has a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance. Decision: *Reject the null hypothesis*.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study demonstrate that all four dimensions of HRM practices compensation and benefits, performance management, training, and promotion have statistically significant and positive effects on employee performance in private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. Compensation and Benefits: This finding supports earlier works (e.g., Oyebo, 2020; Oguntimehin & Fasasi, 2022) which found that equitable pay structures and benefits improve staff motivation and retention.

Performance Management: Aligns with the assertions of Aguinis (2019) and Akinola (2023) that structured performance appraisal frameworks improve goal alignment and productivity.

Training and Development: Reinforces studies by Eze (2021) and Oyeleye & Oladejo (2020), who found that professional development opportunities enhance knowledge, teaching effectiveness, and job satisfaction.

Promotion: Corroborates Noe et al. (2019) and Oloyede & Owofe (2021), who emphasized the role of career progression in motivating employees and reducing turnover. These findings are consistent with the Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which posits that when organizations invest in employee welfare both materially (compensation) and developmentally (training, promotion) employees reciprocate with higher performance and loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the impact of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices specifically compensation and benefits, performance management, training, and promotion on employee performance among academic staff in private universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. Using regression analysis, the results revealed that all four HRM practices significantly and positively influence employee performance. Among the variables examined, compensation and benefits exerted the strongest effect, followed closely by promotion, highlighting the importance of both material incentives and career advancement opportunities in fostering academic staff performance.

The findings underscore the critical role of strategic HRM practices in enhancing teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and administrative efficiency within the private higher education sector. This study fills an empirical gap in the literature by focusing specifically on private universities in Ondo State an area that has received limited scholarly attention despite the sector's growth and significance in Nigeria's educational landscape.

From a theoretical perspective, the results support the propositions of the Social Exchange Theory, which posits that when institutions invest in the welfare and development of employees through equitable compensation, clear performance management systems, professional development opportunities, and transparent promotion structures employees reciprocate with increased commitment, productivity, and organizational loyalty.

While this study has made a significant contribution, it is not without limitations. The focus on academic staff alone restricts the generalizability of the findings to non-academic personnel. Additionally, the exclusive use of quantitative data through structured questionnaires limits the depth of insight into employees' perceptions and experiences. Future studies are encouraged to adopt a mixed-methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection (interviews or focus groups) to offer richer and more nuanced understanding of HRM dynamics in Nigerian private universities. Furthermore, incorporating student evaluations could serve as a complementary measure of employee performance and enhance objectivity.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Management of private universities in Ondo State should prioritize timely, adequate, and equitable compensation. Structured and competitive salary schemes, including bonuses, housing allowances, health insurance, and retirement plans, should be maintained and improved to attract and retain talented academic staff.
- ii. Institutions should implement regular and transparent performance appraisal mechanisms such as Annual Performance Reviews (APR). These evaluations should be based on clear performance indicators related to teaching quality, research output, and service contributions. Objective and constructive feedback should guide faculty development plans.
- iii. Regular capacity-building initiatives should be institutionalized. Universities should sponsor seminars, workshops, in-service training, and leadership development programs. Such initiatives should address pedagogical innovation, technological integration, curriculum enhancement, and research competencies.
- iv. Promotion policies should be well-defined, fair, transparent, and merit-driven. Clear guidelines on promotion criteria should be communicated to all staff to ensure trust and motivation. Periodic review of promotion frameworks is recommended to align them with evolving academic and institutional standards.
- v. By adopting these recommendations, private universities in Ondo State and similar contexts can enhance staff performance, foster academic excellence, and strengthen their institutional reputation in a competitive higher education landscape.

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