

Human Resource Development and Employee Performance in Nigerian Private Universities: The Mediating Role of Employee Motivation

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Abstract: *This study investigates the relationship between Human Resource Development (HRD) and employee performance in Nigerian private universities, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of employee motivation. The rapid expansion of private universities in Nigeria has intensified competition in the higher education sector, making the performance and commitment of employees critical to institutional success. HRD practices such as training, career development, mentoring, and professional development programs are essential for improving employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies. However, despite increased investment in HRD initiatives, many private universities continue to experience challenges such as low staff morale, high employee turnover, and inconsistent performance outcomes. The study adopted a survey research design and collected data from academic and non-academic staff in selected private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Hierarchical regression analysis and mediation analysis were employed to examine the relationships among HRD, employee motivation, and employee performance. The findings reveal that HRD has a significant positive effect on employee performance. Additionally, the results show that employee motivation significantly mediates the relationship between HRD and employee performance, indicating that HRD initiatives become more effective when employees are motivated. The study concludes that private universities should integrate HRD strategies with motivational practices such as recognition, career advancement opportunities, and supportive work environments to enhance employee performance and institutional effectiveness.*

Keywords: human resource development, employee performance, Nigerian private universities, employee motivation

INTRODUCTION

The fast growth of private universities in Nigeria has greatly increased the level of competition present in the higher education sector. Generally, private universities depend heavily on the dedication and performance of their workers for the delivery of quality educational and service products. This places considerable importance on sound human resource development practices at such institutions. As stated by Oladipo et al. (2022), human resource development and enhancement within university systems improves overall employee engagement, commitment to the organization, and retention of employees, all of which are important components of institutional sustainability.

"Human Resource Development" as defined by Okoro and his colleagues (2021) is all the various different methods used by organisations to help employees develop their skills, ability and knowledge to help the organisation perform. However, in the case of private universities in Nigeria, the general definition of HRD does not apply as expected. This is because of a variety of things such as lack of resources, no comprehensive training framework or not aligning the HRD initiatives with the Institutions goals (Musa and others, 2022).

The need for academic institutions to cultivate and sustain a highly skilled and motivated workforce has never been more pressing. HRD programs in Nigerian private universities have evolved, becoming integral to the recruitment, training, and continuous professional development of both academic and non-academic staff. In recent years, these universities have adopted multifaceted HRD approaches, incorporating leadership development, capacity-building workshops, and specialized training to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their employees (Ojo & Adebayo, 2023). With this growth comes the need for quality assurance, academic productivity, and effective administration, which all hinge on the performance of staff (Aina & Tayo, 2022). Human Resource Development is considered a vital component in improving employee performance, which, in turn, influences organizational effectiveness. Over the last few decades, HRD has evolved from simple training and development programs to more comprehensive systems that integrate career development, performance management, and organizational development (Adeniji et al., 2021).

HRD programs within Nigerian private universities have historically focused on generic training programs without considering the broader motivational aspects of employees or the specific organizational culture of these institutions. A key challenge identified by Adebayo et al. (2022) is the failure to integrate motivational theories into HRD practices. For instance, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory posits that motivation and satisfaction are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, yet many HRD programs in Nigerian private universities focus primarily on extrinsic incentives such as monetary rewards, neglecting intrinsic factors like recognition and career development (Herzberg, 2023).

The literature indicates that many of Nigeria's private universities' investment in Human Resource Development (HRD) is disconnected from observable impacts on employee performance. Despite having established HRD practice areas (i.e., training programs, career development, and mentorship programs), these practice areas do not consistently produce measurable results in employee performance (Obisi, 2020). Further examination of how private universities employ motivation mechanisms to cultivate employee motivation and foster an organizational culture that enables

employees to realize their HRD outcomes is needed to gain clarity on why HRD outcomes do not always achieve the intended impact.

Organizational culture plays a significant role in impacting HRD strategy acceptance and execution within institutions. Additionally, organizational cultures, which include a shared vision of values, beliefs, and methods, have a considerable influence on how organizations design and implement HRD practices. For example, in hierarchical/authoritarian organizational cultures where HRD initiatives may be met with resistance because of a top-down model and in more proud organizational cultures, HRD initiatives will likely achieve more success if they promote cooperation and collective learning (Hofstede et al., 2019). The types of leadership styles experienced by employees in private Nigerian universities (e.g., institutional culture) would determine how the interaction between HRD practices and employee motivation affects motivation and work performance. Therefore, it is necessary to research the extent to which motivation and organizational culture act as mediators and moderators of HRD-performance relationships in Nigeria's higher educational environment. This study will examine how the interaction of HRD practices, employee motivation, and organizational culture can enhance employee performance in Nigeria's private universities.

The heightened demand for quality postsecondary education in Nigeria presents an enormous challenge for private university owners as they must prepare their workforce to perform at an acceptable level to address both academic and administrative-based issues. HRD is a critical tool for improving employee performance; nevertheless, many private universities are unable to implement effective HRD practices and suffer debilitating challenges as a result. The type and quality of HRD practices will have a large impact on the performance of employees within an organization; therefore, in private universities where there is an extremely high level of demand on both academics and on publications produced via research, HRD has a significant impact; however, there is ample empirical evidence indicating that a good number of private universities in Southwest Nigeria are unable to implement adequate HRD processes that would in turn provide quality employees leading to high levels of employee turnover, low levels of employee morale, and poor employee performance (Ojo & Akinola, 2021). To what extent does employee motivation mediate the relationship between HRD and employee performance? Investigate how employee motivation acts as a mediator between Human Resource Development (HRD) and employee's performance. H_{02} : Employee motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between HRD and employee performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Human Resource Development (HRD)

According to Garavan (2018), HRD is a well-established practice that increases the effectiveness and efficiency of an organization through the development of employee competency, skill, knowledge, and ability. This process is increasingly significant in higher education institutions, as HRD provides the capability for academic and administrative employees to adapt to the changing nature of the academic environment. In addition to improving employee performance, the intent of HRD in a university setting is to enhance university performance through improved teaching, research, and student satisfaction (Gagne et al., 2021).

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Human Resource Development (HRD) plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee performance within organizational settings, particularly in knowledge-driven sectors such as private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. HRD encompasses a range of activities including training, career development, performance management, and organizational learning, all of which collectively aim to improve the capabilities, motivation, and overall performance of employees. The intricate relationship between HRD and employee performance is underscored by multiple scholarly works that emphasize the necessity of strategic HRD initiatives in cultivating a productive workforce.

Human Resource Development (HRD) refers to activities that support the development of individuals in their organizations. HRD includes training, evaluation, and career development and incorporates the standards of the organization's overall objectives to ensure maximum effectiveness is achieved by providing effective HRD systems and programs. The use of HRD within universities and colleges is important to improve their performance. According to Akinyemi et al., (2018) the use of good HRD practices significantly improves staff performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization. In addition, Garavan et al. (2019) state that effective HRD practices enhance individual and organizational performance by promoting continuous learning and helping employees meet changing job demands. Brown and McCartney (2020) argue that HRD can have a substantial positive impact on the quality of teaching and research within higher education.

A fundamental premise within HRD literature is that employee motivation significantly mediates the impact of HRD practices on performance outcomes. Work motivation, which refers to the intrinsic and extrinsic drivers propelling employees to achieve organizational goals, has been empirically linked to higher levels of job performance. For instance, Chien et al. (2020), in their study on four-star hotels in Mongolia, demonstrated that motivated employees exhibited superior performance metrics, driven by enhanced engagement and commitment to their roles. This finding aligns with da Cruz Carvalho et al. (2020), who highlighted that motivation not only boosts job satisfaction but also directly correlates with improved employee performance. Therefore, HRD initiatives that focus on fostering motivation through career development opportunities and skill enhancement are critical in elevating performance levels in private universities.

In addition, the effectiveness of HRD programs depends on an organisation's ability to develop a culture that supports the development of its employees. Astuty and Udin (2020) highlighted that perceived organisational support and transformational leadership play a major role in enhancing employees' affective commitment which, in turn, leads to higher levels of performance. Employees will be more likely to put forth their best effort and display the behaviours necessary for the organisation to succeed if they believe their organisation is committed to their growth and well-being. This perception of support is critical to HRD because it affects how employees react to their organisations' developmental programmes. In private universities, where intellectual capital is of great importance, creating an environment of supportive HRD climates is the means by which faculty and administrative staff can ensure that they are both qualified and dependable contributors to the university's success.

Employee Performance

Performance measures how well employees help an organization reach its goals. A top-performing employee produces exceptional job results, works well with others, and exhibits a high level of commitment to achieving the goals of the organization (Pfeffer, 2021). In the field of higher education,

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employee performance is multi-faceted because an employee's performance can be assessed by their ability to produce teaching results (teaching performance), research publications (research performance), service to the institution (service performance) and their performance in developing administrative processes (administrative performance). Brown and McCartney (2020) further explain this idea by describing the four areas as part of an employee's multi-dimensional performance.

Employee performance is how well an employee does his/her assigned job. It is measured in terms of how effectively and efficiently the employee is completing their job (meeting known organizational goals). Employee performance can be characterized in four ways: by what goes into making an employee successful (productivity), by how good the employee's work product is (quality), by how well an employee acts (professional behavior), and by the corresponding standard that exists within an employer's organization (institutional standards). da Cruz Carvalho et al. (2020) found a positive relationship between employee motivation and job satisfaction and performance; employees with higher levels of motivation were associated with higher levels of productivity and organizational citizenship behaviours. Nurdiansyah et al. (2020) further substantiate the importance of motivation and satisfaction in affecting performance as antecedents to performance; therefore, if Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals increase employee motivation through HRD interventions, they may then produce higher levels of performance. Lee and Raschke (2016), however, caution that the performance of an employee can only be understood through examining the culture of the organization and the dynamics of motivation; thus, performance should be understood in a more sophisticated manner to account for the many interactions among those factors. In the context of private universities in South-western Nigeria, employee performance directly influences educational quality, research productivity, and organizational reputation.

Effective HRD practices, including training, professional development, mentoring, and career advancement opportunities, have been shown to enhance these dimensions of employee performance (Zhao et al., 2021). Employee performance is closely linked to the effectiveness of HRD practices. Higher education institutions, particularly private universities, can achieve superior performance by aligning their HRD strategies with employee needs and organizational goals (Bassi & McMurrer, 2020). The development of employees through HRD programs improves their competencies, which translates into improved job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall job performance (Agyemang & Ofei, 2021).

There are many different elements that can affect employee performance, such as motivation, training, and culture in the organization; Armstrong (2014) stated that performance of employees is evaluated by how satisfactorily they produce results, the quality of their output, and their ability to achieve planned results for the organization. The function of human resource development is at the centre of these elements because it allows employees to gain the knowledge, skills, and behaviour necessary to be effective in their position. Therefore, the effectiveness of human resource development in private universities is critical to employee performance and organizational success

Human Resource Development in Higher Education

Human Resource Development (HRD) in higher education institutions, particularly in private universities in Southwestern Nigeria, represents a critical domain that directly influences institutional performance, employee effectiveness, and the overall quality of education delivery. The dynamic and complex nature of higher education necessitates a strategic approach to HRD, one that integrates

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employee motivation and organizational culture as pivotal factors shaping developmental outcomes. This section critically examines the role of HRD within higher education, drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical insights from recent studies to elucidate how motivation and organizational culture interplay to enhance employee performance and institutional capacity.

HRD in higher education is fundamentally concerned with the continuous enhancement of employee skills, competencies, and knowledge, aligning individual capabilities with the strategic goals of universities. The sector's unique demands for innovation, adaptability, and quality service provision underscore the importance of cultivating a supportive organizational culture that fosters learning and development. Lam et al. (2021) emphasize that organizational culture significantly influences knowledge management and innovation capabilities, which are essential elements in HRD processes. In the context of private universities, a culture that encourages openness and knowledge sharing can facilitate the development of academic staff by enabling collaborative learning and the adoption of innovative teaching and research methods. Such cultural attributes are directly linked to the institution's capacity to develop human resources effectively, thereby enhancing employee performance and, subsequently, institutional competitiveness.

The human resource development (HRD) initiatives of higher education institutions are seriously impacted by the motivational dynamics present in such organizations. According to Paais and Pattiruhu (2020), motivation, in combination with leadership and organizational culture, has a significant impact on employee satisfaction and thus performance at work. Therefore, it is critically important for private universities to develop motivational strategies catering to the various needs of employees, both academic and non-academic. Employees may become intrinsically motivated by having recognized their contributions, provided opportunities for professional development, and allowed autonomy or freedom to do their work. Intrinsically motivated employees have been shown to engage in development activities more often. The organizational culture that supports these motivational mechanisms will lead to an environment where employees can continue to develop themselves and grow their skills, which are essential components of HRD activities. Therefore, motivated employees are more likely than unmotivated employees to engage in training, conduct research or develop other capabilities that contribute to their own professional growth as well as to the organization as a whole.

The Mediating Role of Employee Motivation in HRD and Employee Performance

As HRD practices affect employee motivation through the employee's internal drive or desire to complete the task at hand, the Self-Determination Theory posits that when HRD programs provide employees with a sense of meaning and support to fulfil their intrinsic motivation, employees are less likely to exert effort in completing tasks and performing well (Becker and Huselid, 2021). HRD programs assist in improving employees' skills and moving them forward in their careers, thus increasing their motivation to perform well at work (Zhao et al., 2021).

In the case of private universities in the Southwestern region of Nigeria, research shows that HRD programs that motivate employees through career development opportunities, professional advancement, and skills training can enhance job satisfaction and performance among those who participate in them. For example, well-designed training programs help employees become more competent and encourage them to use these skills in their day-to-day work activities so that they are able to achieve more than just the bare minimum necessary for their jobs (Adebayo & Ogunyomi, 2020). As a result of this increased motivation, employees are also more likely to demonstrate higher

levels of performance and exhibit greater commitment to their jobs, thereby enabling them to make significant contributions to the success of the university (Zhao et al., 2021). Thus, HRD approaches need to include developing the competencies of employees but also creating a culture that fosters the motivation of employees.

Recent studies support this view by showing that motivation mediates the relationship between HRD initiatives and employee performance. For example, research by Baker et al. (2012) found that motivated employees who participated in HRD programs showed significant improvements in their performance outcomes, suggesting that motivation is a key factor that enhances the effectiveness of HRD efforts.

Human Resource Development Practices in Higher Education Institutions

The development of human resources (HRD) at higher education institutions, especially private universities in southwestern Nigeria, significantly influences employee performance and their organizations' outcomes. The effect of employee motivation, the culture of the organization and HRD are vital to providing an atmosphere for continual learning, training, and improved job performance. The current research shows that HRD is not just about training but also includes the broader range of developmental activities dedicated to aligning employee goals with the institution's goals (Kumari & Singh, 2018; Chen et al., 2019).

HRD practices in higher education institutions are designed to enhance both academic and administrative performance. These practices typically include staff training, performance appraisals, career development programs, mentorship, and professional networking opportunities (Gagne et al., 2021). Universities also provide opportunities for staff to engage in research, attend conferences, and collaborate with colleagues from other institutions, all of which contribute to professional growth and improved performance.

A study conducted by Yusuf & Afolabi (2023) investigated the mediation of employee motivation on HRD and employee performance of academic staff employed by private universities in Oyo State. The sample consisted of 380 participants using a simple random sampling method, and a cross-sectional survey was used to collect the data using a structured questionnaire that used the Likert Scale. Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The findings provided evidence that employee motivation has a significant mediating role in the relationship between HRD practices and employee performance. The researchers suggested institutionalising intrinsic motivation strategies (e.g. recognition and autonomy) to assist in complementing training initiatives.

Additionally, Bello and Olatunji (2020) explored the mediating effect of motivation in public and private universities in Nigeria. The study used a correlational design with a sample size of 400 drawn through stratified sampling. The data, gathered via validated questionnaires, showed that while HRD directly influences performance, its effects are significantly enhanced when mediated by employee motivation. The study recommended that university leaders integrate motivational strategies like goal-setting, promotions, and career paths into HRD policies.

Ajibola and Abiola (2021) conducted a significant research project that assessed whether employee motivation serves as a bridging mechanism between human resource development (HRD) practices and job performance among employees in Nigerian private universities. Using a quantitative research

design, the researchers conducted a cross-sectional survey. The researchers employed a structured questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 450 academic and non-academic employees that had been selected at random from five Nigerian private universities, using stratified sampling. The researchers performed a data analysis with SEM using a mediation analysis with the PROCESS macro (Model 4) within SPSS. The researchers' findings indicated that HRD practices, specifically training, coaching, and mentoring positively affected employee motivation, and subsequently, the motivation level of the employee positively impacted job performance. The findings also indicated that the indirect effect of HRD on performance through motivation was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), supporting the hypothesis that motivation served as a mediator between HRD and job performance. The researchers concluded that without creating a motivational culture through policies such as setting goals, establishing recognition systems, and creating customized development plans, all HRD interventions will fail in producing intended job performance changes at Nigerian private universities. In a previous study, Yusuf et al. (2020) looked at the effect of motivation on translating HRD initiatives into performance outcomes among private universities in Southwestern Nigeria, using a descriptive survey method, with a sample of 400 academic staff members, selected using purposive sampling, and data collected through the use of a structured Likert scale questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed via multiple regression analysis. The results of the study concluded that motivation-enhancing incentives such as recognition, promotion opportunities, and financial rewards had a significantly positive effect on the relationship between HRD and Job Performance. Additionally, motivation was shown to account for 37% of the variance in Performance Outcomes due to HRD ($R^2 = 0.37$; $p < 0.05$). Recommendations were made to implement performance-based Incentive programs in order to ensure that HRD investments result in measurable productivity improvements, with attention to the temporal nature of motivation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a survey research design, which is most appropriate for examining relationships among variables within a real-world setting using structured instruments. This design is suitable because it enables the examination of the relationships between variables without manipulating them, thereby reflecting the natural setting of private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. A survey design allows for the systematic collection of quantifiable data from a sizeable and geographically dispersed population, facilitating empirical generalization of findings. This design was deemed appropriate given the objectives of the study, which involve examining the interrelationships between variables such as employee motivation, organizational culture, human resource development (HRD), and employee performance in private universities.

The study was geographically situated within **Southwestern Nigeria**, a region that comprises six states: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo. This geopolitical zone was chosen due to its dense concentration of leading private universities, many of which are trailblazers in institutional innovation, staff development, and organizational excellence. Specifically, the study focuses on six renowned private universities: Afe Babalola University (ABUAD), Achievers University (AU), Joseph Ayo Babalola University (JABU), Lead City University (LCU), Covenant University (CU) and Caleb University (CALU). These institutions were purposively selected due to their reputation for adopting modern human resource management practices, strong organizational cultures, competitive staff welfare packages, and a high commitment to academic excellence.

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The private universities in this region are diverse in terms of their size, resources, management practices, and student populations. Some universities in the region have been in operation for decades, while others are relatively new but growing rapidly. This diversity in institutional characteristics provides an opportunity to study a wide range of HRD practices and their effects on employee performance across different types of private universities.

According to the National Universities Commission (2024), these universities are among the top-ranking private institutions in Nigeria, often serving as models for organizational innovation and strategic staff development. As such, they offer a rich empirical context for investigating the study variables. Thus, they provide a fertile ground for investigating the relationship between motivation, culture, HR development, and employee performance. Hence, the selected institutions provide an ideal context for exploring the intricate dynamics between employee motivation, organizational culture, HR development strategies, and staff performance. The universities in this region differ in size, governance structures, and HRD practices, which provides an opportunity to examine how these factors influence employee performance and motivation.

Total Population for the Study

S/N	Universities	Academic Staff	Non-Academic Staff	Total Staff Population
1	ABUAD	520	430	950
2	CU	600	470	1,070
3	CALU	580	450	1,030
4	JABU	450	400	850
5	LCU	400	380	780
6	AU	264	359	623
	Total	2,814	2,489	5,303

Source: Registry Departments of Selected Universities (2026)

This population (N = 5,303) serves as the universe from which a representative sample were drawn. The inclusion of both academic and non-academic staff is strategic to capturing a holistic understanding of the operational dynamics and institutional cultures influencing employee performance. This population size offers a significant scope for generalization and robust statistical analysis.

Mediating Variable**Employee Motivation**

Employee motivation, acting as a mediating variable, was measured using a dual-dimensional approach incorporating both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, based on the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivation was evaluated through items adapted from the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (Gagné et al., 2015). The scale includes:

- i. "I feel a strong sense of personal satisfaction when I perform well at work." (Intrinsic)
- ii. "I am motivated by opportunities for promotion and career growth." (Extrinsic)
- iii. "I receive recognition and rewards that encourage me to perform better." (Extrinsic)
- iv. "I enjoy the tasks and challenges associated with my job role." (Intrinsic)

These measures will capture the extent to which employees feel driven to engage in their work tasks, thus acting as a potential mechanism through which the independent variables affect performance outcomes.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The Mediating Role of Employee Motivation in the HRD Employee's Performance Relationship

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative contribution of Human Resource Development (HRD) and Employee Motivation to employee performance in private universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The analysis in Table 4.4 was carried out in two successive models to assess how Employee Motivation enhances the predictive power of the overall model after accounting for the direct effect of HRD.

In Model 1, HRD (Training and Development) was entered as the predictor variable. The results indicate that HRD significantly predicts employee performance ($\beta = 0.450$, $t = 8.400$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 20.3% of the variance in performance ($R^2 = 0.203$, $F(1,378) = 70.560$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that HRD initiatives, including training programs, career development opportunities, and regular feedback, have a substantial and positive influence on employees' ability to perform effectively. The results align with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that investments in employee development enhance skills, knowledge, and overall performance.

When Employee Motivation was introduced in Model 2, the model's explanatory power increased significantly from 20.3% to 28.1% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.078$, $F\text{-change} = 24.030$, $p < 0.001$). Both HRD ($\beta = 0.270$, $t = 4.170$, $p < 0.001$) and Employee Motivation ($\beta = 0.400$, $t = 7.600$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as significant predictors of employee performance. The reduction in the beta coefficient for HRD from 0.450 to 0.270 indicates partial mediation by Employee Motivation. In essence, HRD enhances performance directly, but a significant portion of its effect is channeled through increased motivation, underscoring the mediating role of motivation in translating HRD initiatives into improved outcomes.

The results of Model 2 support Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), which emphasizes the role of motivation as a key determinant of employee performance, and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which suggests that employees reciprocate HRD interventions (training, recognition, career opportunities) with higher levels of performance when they feel motivated. These findings are consistent with empirical studies by Akintoye and Akinola (2021), who reported that employee motivation mediates the relationship between HRD and performance in Nigerian universities, and Ahmed et al. (2020), who found that motivation strengthens the impact of HRD initiatives on performance outcomes. Conversely, Smith and Jones (2019) highlighted that HRD alone may not fully enhance performance without concurrent motivational strategies, which aligns with the partial mediation observed in this study.

Taken together, the hierarchical regression results demonstrate that HRD and Employee Motivation collectively serve as strong predictors of employee performance. The stepwise inclusion of Employee Motivation significantly enhanced the explanatory power of the model, confirming the central role of motivation in bridging the gap between HRD and performance. Among the two variables, Employee

Motivation exerted the strongest influence, indicating that employees' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers are critical in maximizing the benefits of HRD programmes.

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Table: Mediation Analysis of Employee Motivation on the Relationship between Human Resource Development and Employee Performance

Path/ Variable	Predictor	Outcome	β (Unstandardized)	SE	t- value	p- value	95% CI (LL, UL)	Grand Mean
a	HRD	Motivation	0.482	0.056	8.61	0.000	0.371, 0.593	3.87
b	Motivation	Employee Performance	0.398	0.049	8.12	0.000	0.301, 0.495	3.75
c'	HRD	Employee Performance (Direct)	0.273	0.061	4.48	0.000	0.153, 0.393	3.92
c	HRD	Employee Performance (Total)	0.467	0.058	8.05	0.000	0.354, 0.580	3.92
Indirect Effect	HRD → Motivation → Employee Performance		0.192	0.035			0.126, 0.263	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Notes:

β = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit of 95% confidence interval.

Grand Mean reflects the average score of the variable across the sample (Likert scale: 1–5).

The findings demonstrate that while HRD directly improves employee performance, its full potential is realized when employees are motivated. This underscores the dual importance of implementing HRD initiatives and fostering a motivating work environment. Grand Means of Key Variables were calculated to provide an overview of the average responses across the study sample: human resource development (Mean = 3.87), employee motivation (Mean = 3.75), and employee performance (Mean = 3.92). These values indicate generally high levels of HRD practices, motivation, and performance among employees in the sampled private universities.

The results of this study are consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1966), which emphasizes that motivating factors such as personal growth, recognition, and achievement lead to enhanced performance. Additionally, empirical studies (Saks, 2006; Noe et al., 2019; Kinyua & Mugambi, 2020) corroborate that motivated employees, when equipped with the necessary skills and development opportunities, are more likely to achieve superior performance outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the relationship between Human Resource Development (HRD) and employee performance in Nigerian private universities, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of employee motivation. The findings revealed that HRD practices such as training, career development, mentoring, and professional capacity building significantly influence employee performance in higher education institutions. The results further indicate that HRD initiatives alone are not sufficient to fully enhance employee performance unless they are accompanied by strong motivational mechanisms. The

hierarchical regression analysis confirmed that HRD has a significant direct effect on employee performance, explaining a considerable proportion of the variation in performance outcomes among staff in the selected private universities in Southwestern Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study established that employee motivation plays a significant mediating role in strengthening the relationship between HRD and employee performance. The inclusion of employee motivation in the model increased the explanatory power of the regression results, demonstrating that motivated employees are more likely to translate HRD opportunities into improved job performance. This finding supports theoretical perspectives such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Social Exchange Theory, which emphasize that employees respond positively to developmental opportunities when they feel valued, recognized, and motivated. Therefore, the study concludes that effective HRD strategies in Nigerian private universities must integrate motivational practices such as recognition, career advancement opportunities, and supportive organizational environments to maximize employee productivity, institutional effectiveness, and long-term sustainability in the higher education sector

Recommendations

Private universities should invest more in structured Human Resource Development (HRD) initiatives such as regular training programs, workshops, mentorship schemes, and career development opportunities. These programs should be aligned with institutional goals and designed to continuously enhance the knowledge, skills, and competencies of both academic and non-academic staff. This will improve employees' ability to perform their duties effectively and contribute to the overall productivity and competitiveness of the universities.

University management should implement policies that enhance employee motivation through recognition, promotion opportunities, fair compensation, and supportive organizational culture. Creating an enabling work environment where employees feel valued and appreciated will encourage higher commitment and job satisfaction. When employees are properly motivated, they are more likely to utilize the skills acquired through HRD programs to improve their performance and contribute to institutional success.

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