



**CONCEPTUALISING HUMAN RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE  
PERFORMANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS IN NORTHEAST, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aims to propose a model for examining the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and the Employee performance with employee commitment as a mediator in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) of Northeast, Nigeria. The study utilises existing literature about the major concepts in the study, such as employee commitment, human resource management practice as well as employee performance. In line with the current literature, it was indicated that human resource management practices in the form of selection and recruitment, training and development, and compensation and rewards, have significant impacts on Employee commitment and employee performance. The literature review shows a potential mediation of employee commitment on the relationship between human resource practice as well as employee performance. In line with the preceding, the paper recommends that an empirical investigation should be undertaken on the effect of HRM practice on employee performance through the mediating effect of employee commitment of higher educational institutions in northeast, Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Human Resource, Management Practices, Employee Performance, Higher Educational, Institutions, Northeast, Nigeria

**Introduction**

Employees are the backbone of any services or manufacturing organisation. They are considered as the most valuable asset as success or failure of any organisation is mainly supported by their performance (Okoli *et al.*, 2020). Performance has been a key issue for organizations, and it is incontestable that higher educational institutions (HEIs) ought to make it a top priority (Hussaini *et al.*, 2020). Employee performance is the result of the thought and energy of an employee for the work he does, such as

ideas for solving a problem, innovation of a new product or service, and an invention of more efficient work procedures (Elisa *et al.*, 2022). Given the importance of promoting academic performance, employees of HEIs can play a vital role in enhancing university performance in areas like academic research, university reputation, community development, and teaching quality (Aladwan *et al.*, 2015). Employee commitment is the fundamental human resource management construct related to employee turnover, satisfaction, and organizational performance (Mac and Shirley, 2015). Ebeh (2021) found that organisations value employees' commitment as it reduces withdrawal behaviour (such as lateness, absenteeism, and turnover) and affects overall organisational performance.

The concept of higher education in Nigeria is often used interchangeably with tertiary education, institutions of higher learning and post-secondary education which are largely conceived to mean Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (Jacob *et al.*, 2021). Higher education is a crucial aspect of education that contributes significantly to economic growth and development through Teaching, Research and Community Services (Hussaini *et al.*, 2020). The performance of any university system depends, to a large extent, upon how its employees are rewarded, utilized and provided with an adequate and conducive environment to perform their duties (Okoli *et al.*, 2020). University education develops persons with academic and mental attitudes, which will aid in the development of high-level labour to manage the economy of a country (Moqbel and Amirah, 2022). Along with changes in the strategic environment, universities must restructure and reorient toward human resource management (HRM) practices as the main driving force for the creation of added value to face increasing competition (Elisa *et al.*, 2022).

The constructs of HRM practices such as Recruitment/Selection, Training/development and Rewards/Compensation are strategies used to boost the commitment and performance of employees in HEIs (Aladwan *et al.*, 2015). Studies have shown that employees with low commitment lead to bad employee performance, while high organizational commitment can lead to lower absenteeism and higher business performance (Mac and Shirley, 2015). Ismail *et al.* (2021) argued that researching HRM practice and employee performance is imperative to solidify the existing body of knowledge in the research field as some researchers found little or no association between human resource management (HRM) practices and employee performance. Moreover, most of the studies on HRM practices and employee performance focused on the Western context, and limited research is conducted in the non-Western context; as such, the findings may not apply to

Nigeria. It is pertinent to examine the role of HRM practices in achieving employee performance using organisational commitment as a mediator in Northeast, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite implementing HRM practices to motivate and retain employees, there is a general atmosphere of discontent pervading the entire labour scene and employees of Nigerian higher educational institutions in dissatisfaction (Ojokuku, 2013). It has been observed that the government, public, and parents are complaining about the low level of students' academic performance. They are pointing an accusing finger at several factors, such as the management's inability to manage human resources effectively.

A significant challenge facing Nigerian universities today is a financial constraint because, since the year 1999, the budgetary allocation to education has been between 4-10%. In the year 2022, the funding to the education sector was 7.2% (N1.18 trillion) against the indicated 26 % of the UNESCO national budget benchmark for education in developing countries, leading to infrastructural deficiencies as well as grossly inadequate facilities for teaching and research. The three primary functions of university academics are teaching, research and community service, which require current journals and textbooks, functional libraries and laboratories, internet facilities, and adequate research grants of which lack of availability makes the job difficult for the employees (Ojokuku and Akanbi, 2015). According to Ekechi and Umar (2020), the performance of university employees seems to be characterised by lateness to work by non-academic staff, academic staff lateness to the lecture theatre, incessant absence from lecture rooms, poor instructional delivery, non-attendance of research conferences, work truancy by non-academic staff and poor community service rendering. Many reasons may be attributed to these derelictions of employees' service delivery, but this study examined employee performance due to underfunding of the universities which led to continuous poor employee performance.

The above necessitates rethinking quality promotion in the nation's education sector. Inadequate finance is linked to organisational commitment and performance. It must be emphasized that effective HRM Practices take cognizance of all the components of an employee's commitments and performance. Thus, pursuing a deeper understanding of how commitment and performance develop is critical and warrants empirical investigation. This study aims to investigate the relationship between HRM Practices and Employee Performance in HEIs in Northeast Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study will be to:

1. Investigate the relationship between Recruitment/Selection and employee performance of HEIs in Northeast Nigeria.
2. Investigate the relationship between Training/Development and employee performance of HEIs in Northeast Nigeria
3. Investigate the relationship between Compensations/Rewards and employee performance of HEIs in Northeast Nigeria
4. Investigate the mediating relationship of employee commitment between HRM practices and employee performance in HEIs in Northeast Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Employee Performance**

Slavković, *et al.* (2018) pointed out that one of the most critical factors that increase a firm's performance is the employees' performance. Wehrmeyer (2017) posited that employees' performance enables the organisation to choose the quantity and quality of labour achieved, decide the competitive advantage gap, set the gap in goals achievement, and enhance the decision-making process. Employee performance is a significant predictor of effective knowledge delivery which facilitates entrepreneurship development and skill acquisition (Hussaini *et al.*, 2020). The employee performance in Nigerian universities is a major component that determines the goals achievement of teaching, research, and community service (Ekechi and Umar, 2020). Employee performance represents the achievement of specific tasks (Rumasukun *et al.*, 2015). According to Mone and London (2018), employee performance is defined as the job-related activities expected of a worker and how well those activities are executed. Mahfouz *et al.* (2021) defined employee performance as the limits of employees to direct occupation effectively and convey the best results. Therefore, this study will conceptualise employee performance as executing employees' roles and responsibilities within the required timeline, achieving work tasks, and responding to students' desires.

Pradhan and Jena (2017) argued that employee performance comprises explicit job behaviours that involve essential task responsibilities assigned as a part of the job description to be accomplished by the employee in a stipulated time. Hussaini *et al.* (2020) state that some of the measures to assess employee performance include:- managers' assessment, peer assessment, team assessment, self-assessment, 360 degrees or "full-circle" assessment, management by objective (MBO) etc.

### **Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices**

HRM Practices provide a suitable basis with a competitive advantage for organisational performance (Fihla and Chinyamurindi, 2018). The HRM function has

become one of the most important jobs responsible for achieving competitive positions within the context of growth, expansion, creativity and customer service as it leads to improving employees' skills, and provides opportunities for creativity (Khamayseh 2021). HRM practices play a vital role in attaining objectives set by organizations, especially in the service sector (Babagana, 2014). HRM practices in universities lead to high-quality performance and create competition between employees (Khamayseh, 2021).

Barnes and Adam (2018) defined HRM practices as a means through which an organisation's human resources personnel develop its staff's by developing extensive training courses and motivational programs. HRM refers to policies developed to maximize organizational integration, employees' commitment, flexibility, and quality of work (Tabouli *et al.*, 2016). HRM is a process that focuses on getting the best output from employees by focusing on the policies, practices, and systems that influence employee performance (Tabiu and Nura, 2013).

In higher education, Aboramadan *et al.* (2019) state that HRM practices should focus on assessing, improving, and instilling human resources skills, knowledge and capabilities. Tabiu and Nura (2013) state that there is no agreement on what constitutes HRM practices, let alone prescribed set of them. Researchers have proposed countless varied lists of practices over the years, as there is no agreement on what or which practice qualifies as an aspect of HRM. Conversely, this study focuses on three practices (Selection and Recruitment, Training and Development and Compensations and Rewards) in its analysis based on their recurrence in the literature reviewed, significance, and measurability.

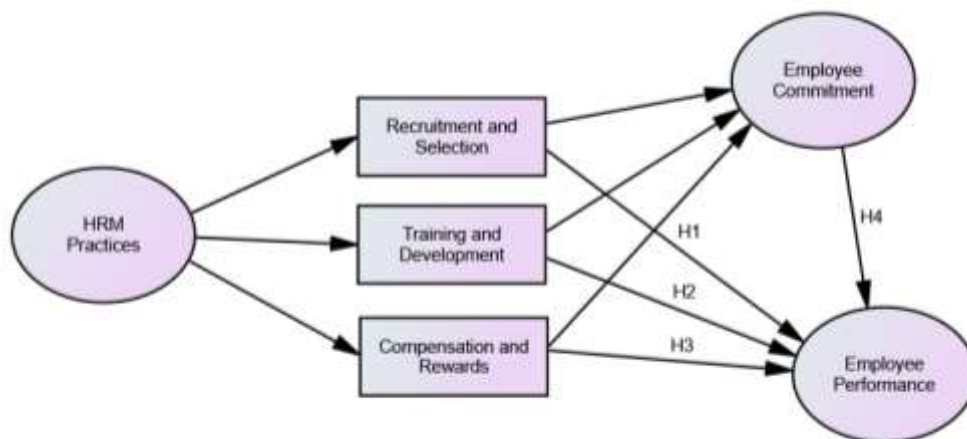
### **Employee Commitment**

Employee commitment has become one of the most widely explored themes as it has significant implications on job performance, turnover, and organizational performance (Porkodi *et al.*, 2014). No company can achieve top performance unless each employee is dedicated to the business's goals (Ekundayo and Oluyeye, 2020). Highly committed employees have reduced absenteeism, work longer hours, and are more likely to work harder and perform better (Meilani and Hariandja, 2019). Employees who are dedicated to their jobs are less likely to quit or seek other opportunities (Schulz *et al.*, 2017). Devoted and well-qualified employees need less supervision because they recognize the importance of aligning their goals with those of the company (Moreira-Mero *et al.*, 2020). Employee commitment is defined as a person's psychological involvement in an organization (Chasanah *et al.*, 2020). Employee commitment is a psychological condition that connects an employee to an

organization, hence minimizing employee turnover (Ikanyon and Agber, 2020). Employee commitment was defined by Yao *et al.* (2019) as an attitude that expresses a psychological union between the individual and their organization.

Allen and Meyer (1990) created a three-dimensional employee commitment measure (Affective, Continuous and Normative Commitment), which will be used to conceptualise employee commitment in this study as it have been tested on Western samples, this study will extend their multidimensional construct to a Nigerian context. The prevailing view is that western-derived and tested arguments cannot be used to explain and understand organisational problems in developing African countries (Obiezekwem, 2020).

### Conceptual Framework



The HRM practices are measured using Selection and Recruitment, Training and Development, and Rewards and Compensations. It is expected that Selection and Recruitment, Training and Development, and Rewards and Compensations will significantly impact employee commitment and performance. These perspectives imply that an HRM practice can help employees advance their careers and achieve long-term goals by providing enough remuneration and assistance (Asiamah *et al.*, 2018). Reward in the form of income encourages employees by enabling them to satisfy their security, safety, and prestige needs. The capacity of a person to further his education on the job to progress his career is determined by the amount of employment income. Development (a scholarship package) that supports workers' educational endeavours might be part of an organization's motivating program. Employee commitment and performance are likely to rise with a clear and unbiased selection and recruitment, training and development, and rewarding employees when they perform their duties. Therefore the analysis of the impact of HRM

practices on employee performance mediating the role of employee commitment to higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Northeast Nigeria is not yet being investigated. As a result, this study aims to make a conceptual contribution by reducing the research gap, as no such study has examined HRM practices concerning employee performance by mediating the role of employee commitment in the study area.

### **Human Resource Management Practices and Employee Performance**

Saleem and Amin (2013) found that human resource practices (recruitment, training, performance appraisal, career planning, employee participation, job definition, and compensation) have a significant positive relationship with university performance. Tabiu and Nura (2013) established that all five of the six human resource (HRM) practices and activities showed significant influence and impact on employee job performance; the only exception was the reward. Babagana (2014) revealed that HR practices have impact on the lecturers' performances. While lecturers wholly embraced the HR practices, they were critical of the reward systems and employees' appraisal practices. Jouda *et al.* (2016) reported that HRM Practices (recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and incentives, and performance appraisal) are positively related to employee performance.

Jibrin-Bida *et al.* (2017) signified a positive effect of recruitment and selection, training and development, and succession planning on employee performance, except the compensation-employee performance relationship and performance appraisal-employee performance relationship. Hashim (2019) revealed a statistically significant relationship between HRM practices and lecturers' job performance in Nigerian Universities. Amin and Mahmood (2020) found that recruitment and selection practices and networking behaviour have a significant relationship towards employee performance. Arinaitwe *et al.* (2021) revealed that training and promotion had a positive and significant influence on the job performance of academic staff. Nevertheless, the impact of performance appraisal on academic staff's job performance was insignificant.

Malek (2021) found that there is a positive relationship between the application of Human Resource policies and performance. The University of Juba should hire people based on their competency, according to the findings of this study. It was also revealed that the University does not provide training to its staff on every new technology that is introduced. Omune and Nyang'au (2021) found that green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green compensation and reward and green employee relations had a significant effect on employee

performance. Shiferaw (2022) found that lack of skills, knowledge, and experiences, identifying gaps that need training, and lack of performance appraisal are the main factors affecting HRM practices and employees' performances in the university. Thus, the selected HRM practices have a negative impact on employees' commitment, punctuality, trust, and deliverables in both quality and quantity. It is also indicated that the practices have also impacted the productivity of the university. Thus, there are significant relations between training, performance appraisal, and commitment. Alkhalailah and Mjlae (2023) revealed that there is a positive effect of human resources practices (management planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation, and performance evaluation) on employee performance at Al-Balqa Applied University.

However, Kolawole (2020) evaluated the HRM Practices and Academic staff turnover in Public Higher Institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study found a strong negative correlation between HRM practices and academic staff turnover in State higher institutions which was not statistically significant.

### **Human Resources Management Practices, Employee Commitment and Employee Performance**

Nawal *et al.* (2021) found that HRM practices did not have a significant direct positive effect on organisational performance. Moreover, service innovation and organisational commitment positively affected performance and fully mediated the relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance. In Pakistan, Ijaz Khan *et al.* (2021) found that work engagement and affective organisational commitment have a partially mediating relationship with human resource management practices and job performance.

### **Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

SET is based on George Homans' 1961 study. The theory postulates that human connections are established through subjective cost-benefit analysis and evaluating alternatives. This proposition implies that whether or not employees see job gains as acceptable impacts their relationship with their employers. Good job gains are at least matched with the employee's quota contribution (Qaisar and Muhamad, 2021). According to the SET, all human connections are formed through idiosyncratic cost-benefit assessment and different assessments. The essence of this idea is what incentives/benefits an employee obtains from a specific relationship, and what expenses he or she pays to receive those rewards (Ijaz Khan *et al.*, 2021). SET refers to the outcome of the exchange relationship between the employee and the organisation; as the exchange becomes more favourable from the individual's point



of view, their commitment to the organization increases (Gombe and Danladi, 2019).

The assumptions of the SET state that the actions of individuals are motivated by the organization's treatment of them, with the expectation that such treatment should bring returns. Employees working in organisations with high social exchange will reciprocate through discretionary effort and display positive work-related attitudes and behaviours (Qaisar and Muhamad, 2021). As a result, the higher the degree of job happiness and motivation, the more employment benefits surpass quotas contributed because work motivation and satisfaction are drivers of employee performance and organisational commitment, which are influenced by HRM practices (Mends-brew and Asiamah, 2018). In this way, HRM practices create high-quality exchange relationships that lead to a productive work environment and mind-set (Qaisar and Muhamad, 2021).

In selecting a theory to underpin this study, it is essential to reiterate that the main aim of this study is to investigate the effect of HRM practices on employee performance using organisational commitment as a mediator in HEIs in Northeast Nigeria. With this aim in mind, three criteria were set in selecting the most appropriate theory: 1) the theory had to make a definitive prediction on the impact of HRM practices on employee performance in HEIs, 2) the assumptions of the theory had to be realistic in the real world, and 3) the theory had to have been validated empirically in different contexts. Based on these three criteria, the Social Exchange Theory (SET) met all three criteria and was thus the most appropriate theory for this study. The formation of effective relationships between the management of HEIs and their employees is based upon the social exchange theory, which views the relationship as a process of resource exchange governed by the norm of reciprocity, encompassing both on-going conferment of benefits and continual re-balancing of expectations and obligations (Ikyanyon and Agber, 2020).

First, the Social exchange theory (SET) refers to the outcome of the exchange relationship between the employee and the organization; as the exchange becomes more favourable from the employee's point of view, their job commitment and performance to the organization increases (Gombe and Danladi, 2019). Second, Employees reciprocate their employer based on the extent to which they perceive obligations to them have been fulfilled; the more the employer fulfils obligations and meets expectations, the more employees feel secure and satisfied and consequently obligated to reciprocate (Ikyanyon and Agber, 2020). Lastly, the theory proved that it could be used in different environments and applied to employees in various industries (Gombe and Danladi, 2019).

## Conclusion

The study discussed on the mediating impact of employee commitment on the relationship that exist between Human Resource Management Practices as well as employee performance among employees higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Northeast, Nigeria. The subject of employee performance is a worldwide phenomenon, and its importance cannot be overemphasized, therefore organisations are making effort to engage employees that can satisfactorily carry out their primary responsibilities and also voluntarily and willingly carry out, extra roles that could add value to the organisations. The performance of academic and non-academic staff of HEIs influences the performances of both the students and the institutions. Based on the review carried out, it was proposed that employee commitment will play a substantial part in mediating the relationship that exist between Human Resource Management Practices and employee performance of HEIs in Northeast Nigeria. It was predicted that findings of this study would provide better explanation to the indirect and direct relationship that exist between Human Resource Management Practices as well as employee performance.

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