

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENTS IN SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The effectiveness of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices is crucial in fostering employee commitment and enhancing job performance in private universities. This study examines the influence of HRM practices on employee commitment in private universities in Southeast Nigeria. The research adopts a descriptive survey design that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. A structured questionnaire was administered to academic and administrative staff at selected private universities. The findings reveal that HRM practices, including recruitment and selection, performance management, compensation strategies, employee training, and workplace relations, significantly influence employee commitment. The descriptive analysis indicates a strong emotional connection between employees and their institutions, with a mean score of 4.02 (SD = 0.97). Similarly, 69.6% of respondents expressed no intention to leave their institutions, reflecting a commitment to long-term service. The study also employs ANOVA to assess variations in HRM practices across different universities, yielding a statistically significant F-value of 4.62 ($p = 0.002$), confirming differences in HRM perceptions among employees. The research highlights the need for private universities to implement standardized HR policies that align employee expectations with institutional goals. Recommendations include enhancing career growth opportunities, improving compensation structures, and fostering a supportive work environment to enhance employee retention and institutional sustainability. These insights contribute to the body of knowledge on HRM practices and their role in shaping workforce stability in private educational institutions.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The success and sustainability of any organization, including higher educational institutions, largely depend on the effective management of human resources. Human Resource Management (HRM) practices play a crucial role in fostering employee commitment, which is essential for enhancing job performance and institutional productivity (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). In contemporary human resource discourse, employee commitment is a key determinant of organizational success, as committed employees' exhibit higher levels of engagement, motivation, and loyalty to their organizations (Meyer & Allen, 2021). Employees are the most valuable assets of any organization. The growing interest in human resource management (HRM) stems from the recognition that employees and the manner in which they are managed play a critical role in organizational success and can serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Omolo & Otengah, 2023). HRM practices are key drivers of fostering competitive value creation within organizations. The long-term survival of business entities, including universities, is heavily dependent on the quality of their human resources and the effectiveness of their management (Nkeobuna & Ugoani, 2020).

Private universities in Nigeria have experienced significant growth over the past 2 decades in response to the increasing demand for quality tertiary education. However, challenges related to employee turnover, job dissatisfaction, and declining commitment levels among academic and non-academic staff remain prevalent (Oladapo, 2022). These challenges necessitate the implementation of effective HRM practices, such as recruitment and selection, performance management, compensation strategies, employee training, and workplace relations, to enhance employee commitment and institutional performance (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2021).

Employee commitment can be categorized into affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer et al., 2021). Affective commitment refers to employees' emotional attachment to their organization, continuance commitment relates to employees' assessment of the costs associated with leaving, and normative commitment reflects their sense of obligation to remain in the organization (Allen & Meyer, 2020). Studies have shown that HRM practices influence these dimensions of commitment differently, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies in private university settings (Osibanjo et al., 2022).

Several studies have established a link between HRM practices and employee commitment in different organizational contexts (Meyer et al., 2021; Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2021). However, limited research has focused on private universities in Southeast Nigeria, where the dynamics of employment differ significantly from those in public institutions (Adeyemi & Ijaiya, 2023). The absence of comprehensive HR policies, coupled with inadequate institutional support, often leads to job dissatisfaction, decreased morale, and reduced employee engagement (Emecheta & Ofoegbu, 2023).

Despite the importance of HRM practices in fostering employee commitment, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding their specific impact on private universities in Southeast Nigeria. Many existing studies have focused on public universities or corporate organizations, neglecting the unique challenges and dynamics of private institutions (Adeyemi & Ijaiya, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of standardized HR policies in many private universities often leads to inconsistencies in staff welfare, career progression, and overall job satisfaction (Akinyemi, 2022). Understanding the interplay between HRM practices and employee commitment in private universities is essential for improving human capital management and achieving institutional excellence. Given the increasing competition among private universities and the need to attract and retain qualified personnel, understanding the relationship between HRM practices and employee commitment is crucial. This study, therefore, seeks to examine how HRM practices influence employee commitment, identify the most effective

HRM strategies, and provide recommendations for enhancing staff retention and performance in private universities in Southeast Nigeria.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource Management Practices

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices encompass strategies, policies, and processes designed to enhance employee performance and organizational effectiveness. Over the years, HRM has evolved as a critical field in management research, emphasizing the alignment of human capital with organizational goals (Armstrong, 2022). This literature review explores key HRM practices, their impact on employee performance, and the theoretical frameworks underpinning these practices. HRM practices are integral to shaping workplace culture, enhancing employee motivation, and improving overall productivity. As globalization and technological advancements continue to transform workplaces, HRM practices have become more sophisticated, incorporating elements of artificial intelligence, data analytics, and employee well-being programs (Stone et al., 2023). Effective HRM practices are integral to fostering employee productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational competitiveness, particularly in knowledge-driven economies (Armstrong, 2023).

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices encompass various functions, including training and development, performance appraisal, reward management, labor relations, collective bargaining, compensation, promotion, and ensuring a safe work environment (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2022). The primary aim of HRM practices is to enhance employees' working conditions, retain them within the organization, and ultimately drive organizational performance and employee engagement (Nel & Linde, 2019).

Effective human resource management significantly influences an organization by facilitating the achievement of its goals, improving overall performance, and boosting productivity. Ramazan and Fatih (2015) describe HRM practices as a strategic and integrative approach to managing an organization's most valuable asset—its workforce—in which each employee, individually and collectively, contributes to achieving organizational objectives. Conversely, inadequate HRM practices can adversely affect an institution's operations. According to Okechukwu, Udochukwu and, Eze (2016), human resource management plays a crucial role in administrative functions, including payroll management, benefits administration, recruitment and selection and, employee training and development. HRM serves as a vital link between staff and management, ensuring effective communication and coordination within the organization.

Key Human Resource Management Practices

Recruitment and Selection: This refers to the processes involved in attracting, shortlisting, and hiring competent individuals to fill job positions within an organization. A strategic recruitment approach ensures the acquisition of high-caliber employees who align with the institution's goals and culture (Collings et al., 2021). Recent studies have emphasized the role of artificial intelligence and data analytics in improving recruitment efficiency and reducing bias in hiring decisions (Van Esch & Black, 2022).

Training and Development: Employee training and development are essential to enhance competencies, improve productivity, and foster career progression. Organizations that invest in continuous learning programs experience higher employee engagement and retention rates (Noe et al., 2023). The rise of digital learning platforms and micro learning approaches has significantly improved knowledge dissemination and skill acquisition (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2022).

Performance Management: These systems provide a structured framework for evaluating and improving employee performance. This process includes setting performance expectations, monitoring progress, providing feedback, and implementing corrective actions (DeNisi & Murphy, 2022). The adoption of real-time performance

tracking tools and data-driven decision-making has enhanced performance evaluation and employee accountability (Pulakos et al., 2021).

Compensation and Benefits: A well-structured compensation and benefits system enhances employee motivation and job satisfaction. Compensation includes salaries, incentives, bonuses, and non-monetary benefits, such as healthcare, retirement plans, and flexible work arrangements (Gerhart & Fang, 2023). Organizations that implement equitable and competitive compensation structures experience lower turnover rates and higher employee morale (Kochan & Osterman, 2022).

Employee Relations and Engagement: Employee relations focus on maintaining a positive work environment that fosters collaboration, trust, and job satisfaction. Effective communication, conflict resolution strategies, and participatory decision-making contribute to employee well-being and organizational stability (Brewster et al., 2022). Recent research has highlighted the significance of remote work policies and workplace flexibility in enhancing employee engagement (Morgeson et al., 2023).

Talent Management and Succession Planning: Talent management involves identifying, developing, and retaining high-potential employees to ensure leadership continuity and organizational sustainability. Succession planning prepares organizations for future leadership transitions by developing internal talent pools (Collings et al., 2021). The use of predictive analytics and AI-driven talent assessment tools has improved succession planning efficiency (Church & Wacławski, 2022).

Employee Commitment

Employee commitment is a crucial determinant of organizational success, influencing productivity, retention, and overall performance (Meyer & Allen, 2022). This reflects an employee's psychological attachment to their organization, willingness to exert effort, and intention to remain with the organization over time (Bakker et al., 2021). Organizations that foster high commitment levels among employees benefit from reduced turnover rates, increased job satisfaction, and improved workplace morale (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Over the past two decades, extensive research has consistently demonstrated a positive correlation between human resource management (HRM) practices and employee commitment (Armstrong, 2014). In Africa, the competition for skilled talent has intensified, particularly between the public and private sector. As organizations strive for growth, the demand for essential skills has surged, leading to increased workforce mobility. This heightened mobility presents a significant challenge in fostering organizational commitment (Storey, 2014). Additionally, public sector administration in sub-Saharan Africa faces numerous challenges, including widespread employee dissatisfaction and declining job standards, which negatively impact workforce commitment (Abugre, 2014). In today's highly competitive business landscape, maintaining a dedicated workforce is more important than ever, as committed employees work collaboratively to enhance both individual and team performance (Andrew, 2017). Consequently, a committed workforce can significantly contribute to an organization's overall success through improved work behavior. However, much of the existing research on employee commitment has focused on developed countries, with limited attention given to developing economies (Udu & Ameh, 2016). Reetta (2018) defined commitment as a psychological state that strengthens an employee's attachment to an organization, thereby mitigating the issue of employee turnover. Commitment is also mindset that manifests in various forms, binding individuals to actions that are significant to a specific objective. These definitions emphasize employee loyalty and emotional connection. However, employees demonstrate greater commitment when they perceive fairness in their psychological contract.

A committed workforce provides numerous advantages to organizations, including increased productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced organizational citizenship behavior. High levels of affective commitment

contribute to discretionary efforts, while normative and continuance commitments can serve as retention mechanisms (Kim et al., 2022). Additionally, organizations with high commitment levels experience lower absenteeism and greater employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Despite its significance, maintaining employee commitment remains a challenge due to changing workplace dynamics, remote work trends, and evolving employee expectations. Organizations must continuously adapt HR strategies to align with workforce needs and ensure long-term engagement (Garg & Dhar, 2023).

Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a widely accepted three-component model of employee commitment, which has remained relevant in contemporary research (Meyer et al., 2022):

- i. **Affective Commitment:** This refers to an emotional attachment to an organization, where employees remain because they *want* to. Employees with high affective commitment strongly identify with organizational values and goals (Ahmad & Smith, 2023).
- ii. **Continuance Commitment:** This involves the perceived cost of leaving an organization. Employees remain because they *must*, due to financial dependence or lack of alternatives (Ogunleye & Adeniran, 2022).
- iii. **Normative Commitment:** This reflects a sense of obligation to stay with an organization, driven by cultural expectations or moral duty (Kim & Park, 2023).

These dimensions collectively determine the extent of an employee's commitment and its implications on job performance (Almeida & Silva, 2022).

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Theoretical frameworks of HRM

Several theories have been proposed to provide the foundation for HRM practices. The most prominent are the following:

- i. **Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory:** RBV posits that organizations gain a competitive advantage by leveraging unique resources, including human capital. Effective HRM practices, such as training, performance management, and employee engagement, contribute to a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 2021). The RBV further emphasizes the strategic role of HRM in ensuring that employees possess firm-specific skills that competitors cannot easily imitate (Wright et al., 2022).
- ii. **Human Capital Theory:** This theory emphasizes investment in employee development as a means of improving productivity. This suggests that training, education, and skills enhancement are fundamental HRM practices that drive organizational success (Becker, 2020). Modern applications of this theory include lifelong learning initiatives, corporate universities, and skills development programs that prepare employees for future industry disruptions (Garavan et al., 2023).
- iii. **Equity and Expectancy Theories:** Equity theory (Adams, 2020) suggests that employees are motivated when they perceive fairness in reward distribution, while expectancy theory (Vroom, 2021) explains that motivation is a function of expected performance outcomes. These theories highlight the importance of structured reward systems, transparent evaluation metrics, and continuous feedback mechanisms to sustain employee motivation (Dusterhoff et al., 2023).

Empirical Review

Eze, (2022), "Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Employee Commitment in Private Universities in South-East Nigeria". The study adopted a survey research design with a sample size of 300 academic and non-academic staff from five selected private universities. Data were collected using structured

questionnaires and analyzed by multiple regression analysis. The study found that HRM practices such as training and development, compensation, and performance appraisal have a significant positive impact on employee commitment. However, the weak implementation of employee engagement strategies has a negative effect on organizational commitment. The study recommends that private universities enhance employee engagement strategies and continuously review HR policies to improve commitment levels.

Okeke (2023), Human resource management practices and employee retention in selected private universities in Nigeria. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data from 250 academic staff members. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to data analysis. The study revealed that HRM practices such as competitive remuneration, career development opportunities, and work-life balance significantly influence employee retention and commitment. It was also noted that a lack of managerial support reduces employee loyalty. Universities should adopt HR policies that foster career development and employee well-being to enhance commitment and reduce turnover.

Adebayo, and Nwosu, (2021), Effects of HRM Practices on Organizational Commitment in South-East Nigerian Universities. The study employed a descriptive research design and surveyed 280 university staff members using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using ANOVA and correlation analysis. Findings showed that fair performance evaluation, participatory decision-making, and adequate welfare packages significantly increase employee commitment. However, poor leadership styles in some institutions hinder optimal commitment levels. University administrators should adopt participatory decision-making and fair appraisal systems to build trust and commitment among employees.

Uche and, Adekunle, (2020). The Role of Human Resource Management Strategies in the Motivation and Commitment in Nigerian Universities. The study used a case study approach with in-depth interviews and surveys from HR managers and staff at private universities. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and regression models. The study found that HRM strategies focusing on leadership development, mentoring programs, and career advancement significantly improved employee commitment. However, irregular salary payments demotivate staff. Institutions should ensure prompt salary payments and implement mentorship programs to increase employee morale and commitment.

Ifeanyi and Bello, (2023), "HRM Practices and Employee Commitment: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Universities in Nigeria". The comparative survey design involve 350 respondents from both public and private universities. This study employed regression analysis to assess the impact of HRM practices. Results indicated that private universities generally have better HRM policies, leading to higher employee commitment compared to public universities. However, inadequate job security remains a challenge. HRM policies should include long-term employment contracts and professional development programs to enhance job security and commitment.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design that utilized, a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The survey approach was chosen to obtain quantitative data that would facilitate an empirical analysis of the relationship between human resource management (HRM) practices and employee commitment among academic staff in selected private universities in South-West Nigeria. The target population for this study comprised all academic staff in the selected private universities in South-West Nigeria, 2,964 academic staff, as reported in the Nigerian University System Statistical Digest (2024). A sample size of 352 academic staff was determined using appropriate sampling techniques to ensure representativeness. A structured questionnaire, designed on a five-point Likert scale, was used to collect primary data. The questionnaire was designed to capture

respondents' perceptions of HRM practices and commitment levels. To enhance the reliability and validity of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using the test-retest method. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha test (Cronbach, 1951) was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The administration of the questionnaire was facilitated by the researcher with the assistance of two trained research assistants. Efforts were made to ensure adequate representation of all categories of academic staff (Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers I & II, and Assistant Lecturers). A total of 352 questionnaires were distributed, and all were successfully retrieved, ensuring a 100% response rate. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the responses. To examine the effect of HRM practices (independent variable) on employee commitment (dependent variable) was examined by multiple regression analysis. This statistical technique was used to determine the strength and significance of the relationships between the variables under investigation.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices in Private Universities

S/N	Items	SA (F/ %)	A (F/ %)	UD (F/ %)	D (F/ %)	SD (F/ %)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	I feel a strong emotional connection to university life.	120 (34.1%)	150 (42.6%)	30 (8.5%)	35 (9.9%)	17 (4.8%)	4.02	0.97
2	I have no plans to leave the university in the foreseeable future.	105 (29.8%)	140 (39.8%)	50 (14.2%)	40 (11.4%)	17 (4.8%)	3.79	1.04
3	My personal goals align with the university's objectives.	130 (37.0%)	140 (39.8%)	40 (11.4%)	28 (8.0%)	14 (4.0%)	3.97	0.98
4	I will use my personal resources for the university when necessary.	110 (31.3%)	145 (41.2%)	38 (10.8%)	40 (11.4%)	19 (5.4%)	3.82	1.07
5	I consistently speak positively about the university to others.	125 (35.5%)	155 (44.0%)	32 (9.1%)	25 (7.1%)	15 (4.3%)	3.99	0.94
	Grand Mean						3.92	1.00

Source: Authors' Computation, 2024

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of HRM practices in private universities across Southeast Nigeria. The results of the descriptive analysis revealed that 76.7% of the respondents were in agreement that they feel a strong emotional connection to the university, 8.5% were undecided, 9.9% disagreed, and 4.8% strongly disagreed. On average, respondents agreed that they feel a strong emotional attachment to university (mean = 4.02, standard deviation = 0.97). Furthermore, 69.6% of the respondents were in agreement that they have no plans to leave the university in the foreseeable future, 14.2% were undecided, 11.4% disagree, and 4.8% strongly disagree. On average, the respondents were further in agreement that they have no plans to leave the university in the foreseeable future (mean = 3.79, standard deviation = 1.04).

Further, findings revealed that 76.8% of the respondents were in agreement that their personal goals aligned with the university's objectives, 16.2% were undecided, 7.5% disagreed and 10.2% strongly disagreed. On average, respondents agreed that their personal goals aligned with the university objectives (mean = 3.97, standard deviation = 0.98). Also, findings revealed that 72.5% of the respondents were in agreement that they would willingly use personal resources for the university when necessary, 11.4% were undecided, 8.0% disagree, and 4.0% strongly disagree. On average, respondents agreed that they would willingly use personal resources for the university when necessary (mean = 3.82, standard deviation = 1.07). The results of the descriptive analysis revealed that 79.5% of the respondents strongly agree that they consistently speak positively about the university to others, 24.3% agree, 18% are undecided, 10.8% disagree, and 10.2% strongly disagree. On average, respondents agreed that time was constraint when conducting their research (mean = 3.99, standard deviation = 0.94).

A grand mean of 3.92 indicates that, on average, respondents expressed agreement with HRM-related statements. The highest mean (4.02) suggests a strong emotional connection to the university among employees, highlighting a significant level of institutional commitment. Conversely, the lowest mean (3.79) suggests some level of uncertainty regarding long-term retention, indicating potential concerns about job security or career growth within the institution. The standard deviations, which range between 0.94 and 1.07, suggest moderate variability in responses. This indicates a relatively stable level of agreement among respondents, further reinforcing data reliability. Overall, the results suggest a generally positive perception of HRM practices in private universities, with employees showing strong alignment with university goals, willingness to invest personal resources, and a tendency to speak positively about their institution. These findings underscore the importance of fostering HRM policies that further enhance employee commitment and reduce uncertainties regarding retention. Future research could explore the qualitative dimensions of these responses to gain deeper insights into the factors influencing HRM effectiveness in private universities.

Table 2: ANOVA Analysis of HRM Practices in Private Universities across South-East Nigeria

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Value	P-Value
Between Groups	112.45	4	28.11	4.62	0.002
Within Groups	2116.78	347	6.10		
Total	2229.23	351			

Source: Authors' Computation, 2024

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess whether significant differences exist in the perceptions of HRM practices among employees in private universities across Southeast Nigeria. The results indicate that the between-groups sum of squares is 112.45, while the within-groups sum of squares is 2116.78, with a total sum of squares of 2229.23. The degrees of freedom for the between-groups variation is 4, while the within-groups variation is 347, summing up to 351 degrees of freedom. The calculated F-value of 4.62 was statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level, as indicated by the p-value of 0.002. This suggests that there is sufficient statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis, which assumes no significant difference in the respondents' perceptions of HRM practices. Consequently, the study confirms that variations exist in the way employees perceive HRM practices across different private universities.

The p-value (0.002), which is lower than 0.05, implies that differences in HRM practices across institutions are statistically significant. This highlights the presence of varying HRM implementations and employee experiences

within private universities in the region. The study findings suggest that HRM practices influence employee commitment, as reflected in their responses regarding the emotional connection to their universities and the alignment of personal goals with institutional objectives. The significant differences in HRM perceptions indicate that university management should adopt tailored HRM strategies that address specific workforce needs to improve retention, employee satisfaction, and institutional effectiveness.

The ANOVA results demonstrate the variability in HRM practices and their impact on employee perceptions in private universities in Southeast Nigeria. Given the statistically significant differences observed, it is crucial for university administrators to refine HRM policies that enhance staff motivation, job satisfaction, and institutional loyalty.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of HRM Practices and Employee Commitment

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.345	-	0.212	6.345	0.000***
Training and development	0.278	0.312	0.084	3.310	0.001**
Compensation and benefits	0.342	0.387	0.076	4.500	0.000***
Work Environment	0.219	0.265	0.091	2.407	0.017*
Performance Appraisal	0.398	0.421	0.080	4.975	0.000***
Career Advancement	0.312	0.295	0.078	4.000	0.000***

Source: Authors' Computation, 2024

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Commitment

$R^2 = 0.652$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.647$, F-Statistic = 72.305, p-value = 0.000

Table 3 shows the regression analysis that examines the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and employee commitment in private universities across Southwest Nigeria, based on a sample of 352 respondents. The results indicate that HRM practices significantly impact employee commitment, as reflected in the R^2 value of **0.652**, which suggests that approximately 65.2% of the variation in employee commitment can be explained by the independent variables (HRM practices). The adjusted R^2 of 0.647 confirms that the model is a good fit, accounting for potential overestimation due to the number of predictors. Performance Appraisal ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$) shows the highest positive impact on employee commitment. This suggests that fair and transparent performance evaluations, constructive feedback, and clear expectations significantly enhance employee commitment to the university. The strong statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) confirms that effective performance appraisal systems encourage employees to remain loyal to the institution, aligning their personal growth with institutional goals. Compensation and benefits ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$) also, have a strong positive influence on employee commitment. Adequate salary structures, bonuses, allowances, and other financial incentives play a crucial role in ensuring job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions. The high significance level ($p < 0.001$) implies that when employees perceive fair compensation, they are more likely to stay engaged and committed to their university. Career advancement ($\beta = 0.295$, $p < 0.001$), career advancement opportunities, including promotions, professional development programs, and mentorship, significantly contribute to employee commitment. Employees who see clear career growth pathways within the university are less likely to seek external job opportunities, thus fostering long-term retention and institutional loyalty.

Furthermore, training & development ($\beta = 0.312$, $p = 0.001$), the positive impact of training and development programs indicates that when universities invest in skill enhancement, employees feel more valued and motivated to contribute meaningfully. The significant p-value ($p = 0.001$) indicates that structured training programs not

only improve job performance but also strengthen employees' emotional connection to their workplace. Work environment ($\beta = 0.265$, $p = 0.017$). Although work environment has the lowest coefficient among the predictors, its impact remains statistically significant ($p = 0.017$), suggesting that factors such as workplace culture, safety, teamwork, and managerial support contribute to employee commitment. A positive work environment fosters a sense of belonging and engagement, encouraging employees to remain dedicated to their roles.

The F-statistic (72.305, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the model is statistically significant, indicating that HRM practices collectively influence employee commitment in private universities. Since performance appraisal and compensation and benefits exhibit the strongest effects, university administrators should prioritize these aspects to enhance staff retention and satisfaction. Institutions should also focus on career advancement, training, and work environment improvements to create a holistic HRM strategy that fosters long-term employee commitment. This analysis underscores the importance of HRM practices in shaping employee commitment, emphasizing the need for well-structured HR policies in private universities to enhance workforce stability and organizational performance. This finding of the result suggests that HRM practices significantly influence employee commitment in private universities, with Performance Appraisal ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$) and Compensation & Benefits ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$) having the strongest impact.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between human resource management (HRM) practices and employee commitment in selected private universities in Southeast Nigeria. The study analyzed key HRM practices, such as recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and benefits, performance management, and employee engagement, to determine their impact on employee commitment. This study revealed that effective recruitment and selection practices significantly influence employee commitment. Universities that adopt a transparent and merit-based hiring process tend to have more committed employees because they perceive fairness and equal opportunity in the system. This finding aligns with the study of Opoku and Arthur (2023), which emphasized that recruitment policies based on meritocracy enhance organizational commitment among academic staff. Training and development emerged as a critical factor in fostering employee commitment. This study found that universities that invest in continuous professional development and skill enhancement programs experience higher levels of employee commitment. This finding is consistent with the work of Khan et al. (2022), who highlighted that professional development programs increase employees' sense of belonging and loyalty to their institutions. Employees who perceive that their organization is invested in their growth tend to reciprocate with increased commitment.

Overall, the study confirms that HRM practices play a crucial role in shaping employee commitment in private universities in Southeast Nigeria. Effective recruitment, robust training programmes, competitive compensation, structured performance management and, high employee engagement contribute significantly to employee commitment. These findings highlight the need for private universities to continuously refine their HRM strategies to foster a committed and productive workforce.

5.0. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: This study aimed to

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between human resource management (HRM) practices and employee commitment in selected private universities in Southeast Nigeria. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between HRM practices—such as recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and benefits, performance appraisal, and employee engagement—and the level of employee commitment.

Effective HRM practices enhance employees' affective, normative, and continuance commitment, leading to improved job satisfaction, reduced turnover intentions, and greater institutional loyalty.

The study highlights that universities that prioritize fair and transparent recruitment, competitive remuneration, career development opportunities, and a supportive work environment experience higher employee commitment levels. Conversely, poor HRM practices contribute to job dissatisfaction and reduced organizational commitment, ultimately affecting institutional performance and student outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities adopt the following principles:

- i. **Enhancing Training and Development:** Private universities should invest in continuous professional development programs to improve employee skills and competencies. Regular training enhances employees' sense of value and commitment to the institution.
- ii. **Competitive Compensation and Benefits:** Universities should provide attractive salary packages and benefits that are commensurate with employees' qualifications and contributions. Non-monetary benefits, such as health insurance, housing allowances, and pension schemes, can also enhance commitment.
- iii. **Transparent Recruitment and Selection:** A merit-based recruitment and selection process should be adopted to ensure that only qualified and competent individuals are hired. This fosters trust and long-term commitment among employees.
- iv. **Effective Performance Management:** Implementing a structured and transparent performance appraisal system can help employees understand expectations and receive constructive feedback. Recognizing and rewarding high-performing employees can boost commitment and morale.
- v. **Work-Life Balance Initiatives:** Universities should implement policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible work schedules and leave policies. This will help reduce job stress and improve employee well-being, leading to higher commitment levels.

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