

## **TALENT MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF AIRPORTS IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA**

**<sup>1</sup>Chiekezie Obianuju Mary (PhD) and Ikwuka Promise Chiagozie**

**Email:** [om.chiekezie@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:om.chiekezie@unizik.edu.ng) / [promiseikwuka2014@gmail.com](mailto:promiseikwuka2014@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

This study examined talent Management and operational efficiency of airports in South-East Nigeria. It ascertained the relationship between talent management and operational efficiency of airports in South-East, Nigeria. A correlational research design was employed. Two research questions provided direction for the study, and two hypotheses were tested. The study was anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory propounded by Edith Penrose. The population of the study comprised 508 employees in the three international airports in South-East, Nigeria. The sample size for the study was 102 employees. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain data from two airports, while the accidental sampling technique was used to obtain data from the employees sighted at the point of data collection. The Talent Management Questionnaire (TMQ) and the Operational Efficiency of Airports Questionnaire (OEAQ) were used to collect data and were validated by three experts. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics to answer the research questions and Pearson's Moment Correlation Coefficient to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that a high positive and significant relationship exists between talent training and the service quality of airports. The findings of the study further indicated that a high positive and significant relationship exists between the use of a reward system and environmental issues in airports. It was concluded that talent management is positively related to the operational efficiency of airports. Based on this conclusion, it was recommended that airport management and owners of airlines need to continually expose employees to training through conferences and workshops to ensure service quality at airports.

### **Introduction**

The aviation industry in Nigeria is experiencing significant growth, with an increasing number of domestic and international flights (Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria [FAAN], 2021). This growth necessitates a strategic

<sup>1</sup> Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

approach to talent management, ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the necessary skills to meet evolving industry standards and customer expectations. The operational efficiency of airports captures the extent to which airports function to the satisfaction of their customers. In the views of Ustael and Ulutas (2022), operational efficiency entails meeting the expectations of passengers and personnel in matters of passengers' embarkation, disembarkation, maintenance of aircraft, and baggage handling. Similarly, Bezerra and Gomes (2018) point out that airport operational efficiency incorporates service quality (passengers' perceptions and satisfaction, service assessment, simulation models of airport operations), economic aspects (impact of non-aeronautical revenues), safety performance, security issues as well as environmental issues (undesirable outputs of the airport processes). Hence, employees who possess improved talent may foster the service quality improvement of airport operations. Essentially, talent management is a vital activity that enables an industry to have the right employees with the requisite competence and expertise to meet the immediate and ultimate needs of its customers. Talent management is expected to have the right employees in the right positions for optimum performance in the airport industry. In other words, when the right persons are placed in the wrong positions, capacity-building is compromised, and the logical consequence will be organizational inefficiency. Wellins, Smith and Erker (2019) pointed out that selection, development and sequencing are all facets of talent management. In other words, an employee is first employed, then developed, before being placed in a position that suits their skills and expertise. Moreover, talent management strategies capture talent acquisition, training, reward systems and career management (Owino, 2022).

Largely, the operational efficiency of airports in South-East Nigeria is a matter of importance. In South-East Nigeria, where airports are pivotal to economic development and connectivity, effective talent management practices may be essential for optimizing operations and delivering high-quality services. The increasing complexity of airport operations necessitates a workforce that is not only skilled but also engaged and motivated (Brewster, Chung, & Sparrow, 2016). This is so, given that an inefficient airport does not seem to attract passengers.

Sadly, airports in this region face unique challenges, such as inadequate infrastructure, fluctuating passenger demand, and the need for stringent security measures. These challenges underscore the importance of having a well-trained and competent workforce capable of adapting to dynamic operational demands (Akanbi & Ojo, 2020). A cursory look at the airports in South-East Nigeria revealed that there is insufficient operational efficiency in matters of passengers' embarkation and disembarkation, maintenance of aircraft, baggage handling, as well as safety and security issues. This indicates that employees appear not to be operating optimally to the satisfaction of the passengers. This has raised questions about the possible causes. Thus, developing talent management frameworks tailored to the specific needs of airports in South-East Nigeria can enhance operational efficiency by reducing turnover rates, improving service delivery, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Ogunyemi & Adetunji, 2022). Although there are several causes of operational inefficiency at the airport, the study is interested in ascertaining the association between talent management and operational efficiency in South-East Nigeria. Hence, the broad objective of the study is to ascertain the relationship between talent management and operational efficiency of airports in South-East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the relationship between talent training and service quality of airports in South-East Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the relationship between the use of reward systems and physical work environmental issues of airports in South-East Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between talent training and the service quality of airports in South-East Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between the use of a reward system and the physical work environmental issues of airports in South-East Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. There is no significant relationship between talent training and service quality of airports in South-East Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between the use of a reward system and physical work environmental issues of airports in South-East Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Training**

Employee training captures educational activities in an industry that are tailored towards the improvement of knowledge and skills of employees while providing information on modalities for the performance of certain tasks successfully (Campbell, 2019). In other words, training equips employees with the requisite competencies for discharging their statutory duties. Hameed and Waheed (2017) define training as an excellent way of broadening employees' knowledge bases. However, it is curious to note that in contemporary times, many businesses find the cost of training employees to be astronomically high. Employee training is beneficial to the organization both in the immediate and in the long term, making the cost a profitable venture.

#### **Reward System**

A reward system refers to anything that scales up the intensity of an employee's action and consequently, brings about the retention of employees in the organization (Zingheim & Schuster, 2015). In other words, a reward system is a motivational technique that gives an employee a reason to pledge unflinching loyalty to an organization. Triatmanto (2019) averred that a reward system can either be monetary, which encapsulates the motivation of employees by giving them finances or non-monetary, which is targeted at aiding to build feelings of confidence as well as satisfaction, which eventually increases their retention. Thus, to ensure employees' retention in their workplace, the implementation of a reward system is key.

#### **Airline Service Quality**

Airline service quality captures the level of satisfaction and experience that passengers receive on using the services of an airline company (Etim *et al.*, 2021; Etuk *et al.*, 2021). It covers several variables that contribute to the overall impression passengers have about their journey, from the moment they book their flights to the time they disembark at their destination. One critical facet of airline service quality is the booking process (Basil & Bassey, 2016). This encompasses the ease of booking tickets online or through other platforms, the transparency of pricing, and the availability of a variety of fare options to cater to various passengers' needs.

#### **Physical work environment**

The physical work environment significantly influences employee productivity, health, and overall job satisfaction. This is particularly important as physical discomfort can lead to absenteeism and decreased productivity (Baker & Williams, 2018). The physical work environment also encompasses psychological and social elements. A study by Mikkelsen Kines and Hvid (2016) observed that environments that foster social connections and provide personal space contribute to a positive workplace culture and employee retention. The design and layout of a workplace are crucial for promoting collaboration, efficiency, and employee well-being. A study by Gensler (2016) emphasizes that open office spaces, while intended to foster collaboration, can lead to increased noise levels and distractions, negatively impacting productivity.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory propounded by Edith Penrose in 1959. The focus of the theory is on firms' resource abilities to enhance their competitive advantage. In other words, the theory helps in understanding how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage through resource building as well as leveraging the existing resources (talent management). The theory argues that this competitive edge would cease to exist if the competitors could replicate the resource that provides the organization a competitive advantage, but this can only be feasible if the organization is bereft of a certain superiority. Having superior and adequate resources is a veritable element required to make organizations with a competitive edge over their competitors. Human capital sets the pace for the kind of competitive edge for organizations.

Resource-Based View theory is relevant to the present work because it places a premium on organizational performance that is derived from its capacity to acquire, assemble, exploit, and nurture a combination of resources, both tangible and intangible. These resources include talented employees and how they are attracted, developed and retained to augment organizational performance. It is also related to the current study as it captured the leveraging of the existing resources (talent management) to have a competitive edge, which is a fallout of operational efficiency.

### **Empirical Studies**

Saputri, Lorensa, and Asriani (2020) examined the impact of training on employee performance in Addis Ababa. The objective of the study was to determine the effect of training on the performance of employees. A survey research design was used in the study. The population of the study consisted of all 60 employees who had completed training, while the sample size for the study comprised 35 employees obtained via a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using questionnaires, literature review, and observation. Data analysis was carried out using simple linear regression. The findings of the study revealed that training had a profound effect on the performance of employees at the same time.

Mamy, Shabbir, and Hasan (2020) examined the influence of training on employee performance: A Study on the Garments Sector, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The objective of the study was to determine the influence of staff training on employee performance. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 170 employees, and a complete enumeration was employed, given the manageable population. A questionnaire was used for data collection, while mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. The findings of the study showed that there was a strong influence of staff training on employee performance.

Emelianova (2019) examined the impact of the reward system on employee performance. The objective of the study was to determine the impacts of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards on employee performance. A specially designed online questionnaire with 91 responses was used to collect quantitative information, as was the case with a series of interviews with 8 respondents of senior management staff. Frequency analysis, integration analysis, and retrospective analysis were all used by the researcher. Additionally, using a manual thematic technique, the material acquired through individual interviews was evaluated and interpreted. The findings of the study showed that a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards improved employees' overall performance.

Daniel (2018) studied the influence of training on organizational performance within microfinance banks, where three banks were enlisted for the study in Abuja. The objectives of the study were to determine the influence of training on employee commitment as well as their performance. Survey research design was utilized for the study with a population of 1573. A Taro Yamane's formula was applied to select 304 respondents for the study. The questionnaire was the instrument for data collection, while hypotheses were tested using inferential techniques. The findings of the study established that training induced employee commitment to the goals of an organization and ultimately the performance

Waithira (2018) evaluated employee compensation strategy and their performance at Farm Concern International, Kenya. The objective of the study was to determine the impact of internal compensation on employee performance. Survey research design was used for the study. The study focused on FCI employees defined as senior, middle-class, and support staff. The population of the study comprised 152 FCI staff. No sampling was done as the population was of manageable size. Because of the small number of researchers, the census was adopted. The mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. The findings were that, for the first time, most employees were dissatisfied with their pay, and it was unclear whether the company's current salaries had improved employee performance.

Mwangi (2017) investigated the impact of training on employee performance: A case study of a Somalia NGO consortium in Nairobi. The objective of the study was to determine the link between training and employee performance. A survey research design was used for the study. The participants of the study included 67 international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) based in Nairobi that work in Somalia. Respondents were chosen using a stratified sampling technique depending on their work levels. A questionnaire was used to obtain primary data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Findings of the study showed that there was a statistically significant link between employee performance and training.

Gbande (2016) examined the effects of the payroll system on production in the Benue local government system. The objective of the study was to determine the effect of reward on firm production. Survey research design was used for the study. A questionnaire was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics of general and specific deviations were used to answer the questions. The findings of the study showed that the productivity of the local government system depended on the reward system. According to the findings, rewarding employees is important not only for increasing production but also for increasing employee job satisfaction.

A cursory look at the reviewed studies revealed that there is a paucity of research work in South-East, Nigeria, on talent management and operational efficiency of airports. More so, all the research reviewed was before 2024, indicating that current developments in the aviation sector on the issue of interest have not been captured.

## **Methodology**

**Research Design:** A Correlational research design was used for the study. The use of a correlational research design is deemed appropriate for the present study as it sought to explore the relationship between talent management and operational efficiency of airports.

**Sources of Data:** The Primary source of data was utilized. Specifically, two sets of questionnaires were used as sources of data. The employees of airports provided two sets of data for the study through a questionnaire. The first was titled 'Talent Management Questionnaire (TMQ) while the second was titled Operational Efficiency of Airports Questionnaire (OEAQ).

**Area of the Study:** The study was carried out in South-East, Nigeria. South-East is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. It is made up of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. It is bounded by Cross-River State on the East, Rivers State on the South, Delta State on the West (all in South-South geo-political zone), and Benue on the North (North Central geo-political zone)

**Population:** The Population of the study was made up of all the 508 employees in the three International Airports in South-East, Nigeria. These are Chinua Achebe International Airport, Anambra State, with 121 employees, Akanu Ibiam International Airport, Enugu State, with 213 employees and Sam Mbakwe International Airport, Imo State, with 174 employees.

**Sample and Sampling Techniques:** The sample size for the study was made up of 102 employees from two of the three International Airports in South-East, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain two

airports, while the accidental sampling technique was used to obtain data from the employees sighted at the point of data collection.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** Both the Talent Management Questionnaire (TMQ) and the Operational Efficiency of Airports Questionnaire (OEAQ) were the instruments used. The TMQ was divided into two clusters: one and two. Cluster one sought information on the talent training of employees and has five items. Cluster two sought information on the reward system for employees and has five items. The OEAQ was divided into two clusters: one and two. Cluster one sought information on the service quality of airports and has five items. Cluster two sought information on the physical work environment issues of airports and has five items. The construction of the items in the TMQ and OEAQ was such that the participants responded by choosing one of four response categories of Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2), and Strongly Disagree (SD=1) with numerical indices of 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively.

**Validity of the Instrument:** The two instruments, TMQ and OEAQ, were subjected to face and content validity by three experts. Two of these experts were from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and the other from Chinua Achebe International Airport, Umueri, Anambra State.

**Reliability of the Instrument:** The reliability of TMQ and OEAQ was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The internal consistency of the items in TMQ and OEAQ was determined using Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient values of 0.73 and 0.78 were obtained for TMQ and OEAQ, respectively. These values were considered adequate to confirm the TMQ and OEAQ as reliable, as they are consistent with the suggestion of Shrestha (2021) that the adequate threshold value for Cronbach's alpha should be >0.70.

**Method of Data Collection:** The administration of the TMQ and OEAQ was facilitated by the help of three research assistants who were briefed on the modalities for the administration after a letter of introduction to the airport management was tendered by the researcher. The research assistant's ensured on-the-spot retrieval of the TMQ and OEAQ after completion to avoid loss.

**Method of Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions. In taking decisions in research questions, Nwana (2007) suggestions were used. Thus:

- ±0.00 – 0.19 = Very low relationship
- ±0.20 – 0.39 = Low relationship
- ±0.40 – 0.59 = Moderate relationship
- ±0.60 – 0.79 = High relationship
- ±0.80 – 0.10 = Very high relationship.

Testing of hypotheses was done with the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. In taking decisions regarding the hypotheses, a null hypothesis was rejected if the probability value (p-value) is less than or equal to 0.05 significance level; if otherwise (p>0.05), the null hypothesis was not rejected.

**Results**

**Table 1:** Pearson r on the Relationship between Talent Training and Service Quality of Airports.

Source of Variation	N	R	p-value	Remark
Talent Training	52	0.780		
Service Quality of Airports			0.01	High Positive Relationship

Data in Table 1 shows that there is a high positive relationship between talent training and the service quality of airports. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r, which is 0.780. Furthermore, the

analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between talent training and the service quality of airports. The calculated  $r$  (0.780) has a  $P$ -value  $<0.05$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

**Table 2:** Pearson  $r$  on the Relationship between the Use of Reward Systems and Physical Work Environmental Issues of Airports.

Source of Variation	N	R	p-value	Remark
Use of the Reward System	52	0.614		
Environmental Issues			0.04	High Positive Relationship

Data in Table 2 shows that there is a high positive relationship existing between the use of reward systems and physical work environmental issues of airports. This is evident by the size of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient  $r$ , which is 0.614. Furthermore, the analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between the use of a reward system and the physical work environmental issues of airports. The calculated  $r$  (0.614) has a  $P$ -value  $<0.05$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

## Discussion

### Relationship between Talent Training and the Service Quality of Airports

The findings of the study revealed that a high positive and significant relationship existed between talent training and the service quality of airports. This brings to the fore the vitality of talent training in ensuring the service quality of airports. It goes to show that when employees are exposed to training during conferences, they are better equipped to discharge their statutory duties to the satisfaction of their customers. Consistent with the findings of the study is that of Emelianova (2019), who found that training had a profound effect on the performance of employees at the same time. This is an indication that training has a far-reaching effect on the performance of employees. The findings of the study further agree with Daniel (2018); Mamy, Shabbir, and Hasan (2020) that there was a strong influence of staff training on employee performance. Additionally, the findings of the study corroborate with Mwangi (2017) that there was a statistically significant link between employee performance and training.

### The Use of Reward Systems and Environmental Issues of Airports

The findings of the study indicated that a high positive and significant relationship existed between the use of the reward system and physical work environmental issues of airports. This is understandable given that employees require rewards to handle the undesirable outputs of the airport processes. In other words, a well-rewarded employee is motivated to give their best, which will lead to the achievement of organizational goals. The finding of the study agrees with those of Saputri, Lorensa, and Asriani (2020) that a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards improved employees' overall performance. In other words, rewards that would enhance the performance of employees ought to be far-reaching. Further agreeing with the findings of the current study, Gbande (2016) found that the productivity of the local government system depended on the reward system.

## Summary of the Findings

Based on the analysis of the data, the following findings were made:

1. A high and significant positive relationship exists between talent training and service quality at airports in South-Eastern Nigeria.
2. A high positive relationship exists between the use of reward systems and physical work environmental issues of airports in South-East, Nigeria.

## Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it was concluded that talent management is positively related to the operational efficiency of airports in South-Eastern Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

The study therefore made the following recommendation:

1. Airport management needs to continually expose employees to training through conferences to ensure service quality at airports.
2. Managers of airports need to ensure that employees are adequately rewarded to handle environmental issues at the airport

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