



Human Resource Management Practices and Staff Performance: A Way Forward for Higher Institutions in Bayelsa State

Doye Angela Igbinedion

School of Education

Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education

Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

doyeigbinedion@hotmail.co.uk

Abstract

This study examined human resource management practices and employee performance in higher institutions in Bayelsa State. Two (2) research questions were raised. A sample size of 150 employees, made up of academic and non-academic employees, was drawn, using the convenience sampling technique. A modified 4-point Likert Scale Questionnaire titled 'Human Resource Management in Higher Institutions' was used in data collection. Statistical tool for data analysis were the mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that human resource management practices in higher institutions in Bayelsa State rewards employees according to their contributions to overall performance; emerging staff issues are not promptly addressed by management; human resource management (HRM) practices do not promote a continuous and harmonious work relationship between management and staff; HRM do not attract, develop and retain high quality personnel for improved performance; staff participation in decision making has improved employees performance, amongst others. It was recommended that higher institutions in Bayelsa State adopt HRM practices that not only attract but also develop and retain high quality personnel for a competitive advantage; swift response of management to emerging staff issues; adoption of employee-centred leadership styles to promote an harmonious and continuous work relationship and work environment, for motivation of staff and subsequently, improved performance of institutions.

Keywords: Human Resource, Management, Practices, Employee Performance, Institutional Performance, Higher Institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The work organization is essentially a network of relationships between people, in pursuit of their common goals. Members have to make provisions to sustain their membership, deploy and adapt their knowledge, skills and competencies; and meet their intrinsic and extrinsic needs. This is the bedrock of Human Resource Management (Cole, 2015). In the last decade, HRM practices have become a conjectural lens for understanding network of relationships in the work organizations. Storey (1995) in Armstrong (2009) defined Human Resource Management, (HRM) as a “distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve a competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques”. Grimshaw and Rubbery (2007) simply defined HRM as “how organizations manage their workforce.” Armstrong (2009) also defined HRM as “a strategic, integrated and coherent approach to the employment, development and well-being of the people working in organizations”.

Human Resource Management deals with employees’ behavioural dimensions to realizing organizational objectives at the workplace. A good HRM system and practice keeps an eye on organizational performance level (Khilji, 2001). It provides support signal to the top management ahead of time, to select and hire the most suitable personnel, train them in line with the organizational performance requirements in achieving goals. In as much as the personnel in an organization are an essential part of achieving organizational goals, HRM practices can also be considered as an important aspect of an organization’s success. HRM aims at increasing organizational effectiveness and capabilities, by making the best use of available personnel resources. Armstrong (2009), also emphasized HRM is an ethical dimension which is concerned with management’s exercise of its social responsibilities, as it concerns the rights and needs of her work force. Effective HRM practices are considered as an assurance of sustainable performance and survival of organizations. Effective HRM practices are as important to higher institutions as they are to corporate organizations. Each organization has different sets of personnel hence, behavioural dynamics, depending on the institutions’ size, type, importance of structure, administrative leadership styles, motivational techniques and organizational communication (Odunlami & Omodan, 2017).

The workforce in higher institutions is also made up of different people who act, think and feel differently. This defines institutional structures, performance measurement, responses to institutional changes and many more. An appropriate human resource management culture can modify individual employee’s behaviour. Recent trends exist in laying greater emphasis on organizational development and imbibing favourable behavioural dynamics in each individual. It also involves fostering a team spirit and motivation so that the organizational objectives are achieved. There is a need for commitment on the part of the management that should be continuous and incremental in nature to engender positive behavioural dynamic.

Uchendu, Anijaobi and Nkama (2013), opined that the willingness of employees of higher institutions to work effectively with their management depend largely on the nature of the management’s behaviour. They further explained that an autocratic leadership style does not support creativity, effective communication, high morale, trust and unilateral decision making. It rather promotes a hostile work environment, where workers are not happy. Indices of behavioural dynamics according to Uchenna et al. (2013) include management leadership style, motivation and organizational conflict. With the right mix of these, workers develop a sense of belonging and have a high morale and disposition to work. Human Resource management

practices in organizations are crucial to having the right work force for goal attainment. Standing on this premise, human resource management practices in higher institutions should embrace a leadership style that promotes motivation of workers and discourages organizational conflicts, taking into consideration its behavioural dynamics. If lecturers are unhappy, frustrated, uninspired and ill-motivated, then the nation's educational system is doomed as educational objectives are most likely, not to be achieved.

With the reoccurring conflicts in higher institutions in Bayelsa state, it seems human resource management practices adopted by management of higher institutions in Bayelsa State do not impact on the instincts of employees to perform their job with utmost zeal thereby affecting overall institution's effectiveness and output. This appears to be the reason why Chukwuka (2013) in his study concluded that cooperative behaviour has a great influence on employees' productivity. Based on the foregoing, the current study intends proffering a way forward for human resource management practices in higher institutions for improved staff performance. This study is however limited to higher institutions in Bayelsa State.

Human Resource Management Practices and Performance

Human resource management refers to the management of human capital – employees who contribute to the achievement of business goals. Personnel are the focal point in HRM. It is concerned with the motivation and development of members of an organization, with fair and equitable treatment as well as their efficiency and effectiveness in providing goods and services. (Cole, 2005). Cole further reiterated that “fair and equitable treatment” symbolizes the “respect”, “integrity” and “fairness” that must be accorded workers by management.

Several human resource functions and practices help managers attract and retain employees, operate within the boundaries of state and federal laws, and plan for future organizational needs. Some companies have a dedicated human resources department, while others rely on one person to carry out these responsibilities. Whichever approach is employed, Guest, Michie, Sweeney, Conway and Metochic (2000), strongly uphold the opinion that HRM is essentially concerned with achieving results through full and effective utilization of human resources. However, this can only be achieved through a set of appropriate practices resulting in high quality, flexible and committed employees. Boxall and Purcell, (2003) in Armstrong (2009), opines that “human resource practices feed in as an ingredient in the workplace and through various mechanisms, feeds out as improved performance.”

Based on findings from his research, Vroom (1964), concluded that performance is a function of ability and motivation. This was further expanded by Boxall and Purcell (2003) to include the opportunity to participate. Thus performance in organizations is a function of Ability, Motivation and Opportunity to participate, which is referred to as the AMO Framework. Based on the AMO framework, HRM practices that impact positively on performance include:

- Attracting, developing and retaining high quality people in the organization;
- Talent management to meet present and future needs of the organization;
- Managing knowledge and intellectual capital;
- Encouraging employee relations which encourages commitment and cooperation;
- Making the organization a great place to work by managing diversities, work/life balance and many more;

- Reward management by valuing people in accordance with their contribution to the organization;
- Developing performance management through employees empowerment – risk taking, establishing trust between management and team members;
- Autonomy and flexibility of job and work design
- Enlargement of skill base and development of competency level of work force; and
- Developing a positive and balanced psychological contract for a continuous, harmonious relationship between employees and management (Armstrong, 2009, p. 144)

Wilson (2012) however grouped these practices into five (5) which are recruitment and placement; staff training and development; performance appraisal; compensations and benefits, and employee relations. Human resource managers have the responsibility of managing these activities in an effective, legal, fair and consistent manner. Employees engaged by organizations who believe in their potential performance can only perform maximally when performance difficulties are minimized by management (George & Jones, 1996). Several researchers, Aurthur (1992), Guest et al. (2000), Thompson (2002), Pureel et al. (2003) amongst others, have established there is a link between HRM practices and performance. A greater use of HR practices is associated with higher level of employee commitment and contribution and is in turn linked to higher levels of productivity and quality of services (Guest, Michie, Sseehan, Conway & Metochic, 2000).

Tertiary institutions are essentially established to “develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; contribute to natural development through high level relevant manpower training...” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). No doubt, tertiary institutions contribute immensely to the survival of nations through the services they render. This is more so with the alarming increase in admissions in Nigeria. Tertiary institutions otherwise known as higher institutions comprise of all educational institutions that offer educational services to students after their secondary education such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, etc. These institutions are people enterprises, the quality of the people working in the sector, the way they work with each other and what they achieve will, over time, mean the difference between institutional success and failure (Anyangwe, 2012)

Human Resource managers have a role to play in the long-term success of these institutions. Lammy (2009) in Anyanwe (2012), opined that a flexible, adaptable and strategic human resource management will be vital in enabling institutions to tackle emerging challenges head-on. Higher institutions are constantly faced with wide-ranging changes in human resource activities such as the evolving staff roles, pay structures as in the case of the new minimum wage in Nigeria, changes in industrial relations with staff and development and many more. HRM practices must deal with these changes as they emerge for efficiency and effectiveness.

There are numerous theories and perspectives on the link between HRM and performance. This study is hinged on:

- **Resource-Based Perspective:** This perspective upholds the view that competitive advantage can be achieved through the acquisition of valuable resources in organizations. This includes hiring of human (personnel) resources. It is believed that HRM should aim at building personnel to enable them exhibit desired behaviour that will create the competitive advantage needed for excellent performance.

- **AMO and KSA Perspective:** The AMO upholds the view that employees' ability can be influenced to motivate them by also offering them the opportunity to participate in achieving organizational goals. Employee performance is not only affected by his abilities, skills or knowledge, but also on the motivation from the organization and provision of platforms to participate in the organization... This is similar to the KSA perspectives which also upholds the view that increasing employees' Knowledge, Skills and Abilities, empowers and consequently, result in organizations achieving their goals and improving on their performance.

Researchers have not come up with a single HRM practice for organizational performance, but most researches note that creating a competitive edge in organizations through people, requires focusing on HRM practices. However, it is argued by Savaneviciene and Stankeviciute (2012) that the AMO framework gives a more logical link between HRM and performance. They opined there is a direct influence on the employee's skills, motivation and empowerment and also provides a framework for best practice prescriptions. The AMO framework factors that affect the level of individual performance are Ability, Motivation and Opportunity to participate.

- **Ability** is an individual's capabilities and competencies. It includes behavioural competencies (personal qualities, experiences, characteristics, etc.) and technical competencies (knowledge and skills). How well personnel talents, knowledge and intellectual capital are managed, determines largely the level of employees' and organization's performance.
- **Motivation** as defined by George and Jones (1996) as the psychological force that determines the direction of behaviour, effort and level of performance. HRM practices such as attracting, developing and retaining high quality people in the organization; encouraging employee relations which encourages commitment and cooperation; making the organization a great place to work by managing diversities, work/life balance; reward management by valuing people in accordance with their contribution to the organization; developing performance management through employees empowerment – risk taking, establishing trust between management and team members; and developing a positive and balanced psychological contract for a continuous, harmonious relationship between employees and management are motivational HRM practices (Armstrong, 2009).
- **Opportunity to participate** gives employees platforms to be involved in activities that will contribute positively to performance. HRM practices should provide employees greater autonomy and flexibility of job and work design; and enlargement of skill base for development of competency level of work force.

The AMO framework unlike the autocratic inclined HRM practices, promote performance in organizations through the adoption of practices that recognizes employee's skills, motivate and also provide employees with different platforms to actively participate and contribute to the overall performance of the organization. Higher institutions like other organizations, can adopt either:

- Autocratic inclined HRM practices which inhibits employees' commitment, contribution and level of performance; or

- AMO which is employee centred as they are designed to directly influence employees' performance through the provision of the right platforms for employees to operate and contribute to achieving organizational goals.

The employee centered human resource management practices plays an important role in the achievement of institutional goals and objectives by creating a climate that would influence employees' attitudes, and behaviour in higher institutions of learning. This involves empowering employees and engaging them towards improving work outcomes (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). Behavioural dynamics as a key factor in determining organizational success has been studied extensively in the past century in the field of management field. It fosters a climate of trust, nurtures employees' confidence, and encourages individual development (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Human resource management practices therefore have great effect on higher institutions behaviour making reference to both the written and unwritten norms as it affects authorities and employees' relationship in terms of commitment and discipline in the institution environment. Institutional culture such as, belief, values, traditions, patterns of behaviour, designates the organizational norms perceived to be part of institution social milieu which will either directly or indirectly influence employee's relationship and teaching-learning effectiveness of employees (Omodan, Kolawole & Fakunle, 2016).

Educational institutions need a committed work force whose effectiveness largely depends on the way they feel about the job and their attitude towards the institution. Harold and Shiju (2012) strongly uphold the view that teachers with strong commitment level are highly interested and wholeheartedly committed to the success of the institution. They further reiterated that HRM is a prerequisite to improving the commitment of a workforce which in turn contributes to institutional growth and achievement of its goals. According to Allui and Sahni (2016), human capital may be the only sustainable competitive advantage that an organization has in the ever changing, globalized world. The ever-changing nature of work especially in technological, organizational and competitive developments has meant organizations will always struggle to attract and retain an adequate supply of qualified employees from the labour market." Anchoring on motivation as a HRM practice, Shahzadi, Javed, Pirzada, Nasreen and Khanam (2014) insists that organizations in this dynamic globalized world are continually trying to develop and motivate their employees to help achieve enhanced performance with various HR applications and practices. Kuvus and Dusvik (2009) in Shahzadi et al. (2014) opined that the motivated employees are more oriented towards autonomy and are more self-driven, highly engaged, involved in work and jobs and are more willing to take responsibilities.

Empirical evidences of HRM Practices and Performance includes the studies of Delery and Doty (1996); Zhang and Li (2009); Frankel and Lee (2010), which concludes there is a positive link between HRM practices and performance in organizations. Findings from Smylie and Wenzel (2006) study indicate that the application of HRM practices will raise higher education effectiveness. In a different study, Bahrami (2013) also concluded that a positive correlation exists between HRM practices and intellectual capital performance taking into consideration, staffing, training, performance appraisal, compensation and participation. Based on the findings, it was concluded that HRM practices can enhance intangible assets of higher institutions.

Purpose of this study

Specifically, this study:

- Examine the status of human resource management practices in higher institutions in Bayelsa state; and
- Analyze the impact of human resource management practices on employees' level of performance in higher institutions in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the status of human resource management practices in higher institutions in Bayelsa state?
- What is the impact of human resource management practices on employees' level of performance?

METHODOLOGY

The population of this study is made up of all employees of higher institutions in Bayelsa State. A sample size of 150 employees, made up of 75 academic staff and 75 non-academic staff was drawn from 3 institutions – Niger Delta University, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education and University of Africa, using the convenience sampling technique. A questionnaire titled “Human Resource Management in Higher Institutions”, structured on a modified 4 point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used in data collection. A total of 102 valid questionnaire was retrieved. The mean and standard deviation (SD) were used to answer research questions. Basis for the acceptance of a questionnaire item is on standard deviation scores as follows: 00.00 – 1.00 = very low; 1.01–2.00 = low; 2.01-3.00 = high; and 3.01–4.00 = very high. Results are presented in tables.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the status of human resource management practices in higher institutions in Bayelsa state?

Table 1: Status of HRM Practices in Higher Institutions in Bayelsa State

Statements	N=102	SA	A	D	SD	Mean=2.5	SD	Decision
1. HRM promptly responds to emerging staff issues this institution.	21	33	30	18	2.56	1.23	Low	
2.HRM practices in this institution promotes a great work environment for employees	11	23	42	25	2.18	2.20	High	
3.HRM practices in this school rewards employees according to their contributions to overall performance	28	40	20	14	2.80	2.54	High	
4. HRM practices here promotes a continuous and harmonious work relationship between management and staff	19	28	39	16	2.50	1.78	Low	

5. HRM practices here are employee centred	21	11	38	32	2.53	2.06	High
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Table 1 shows the status of HRM practices in higher institutions in Bayelsa State. HRM practices in higher institutions in Bayelsa State are employee centred with a Standard Deviation (SD) of 2.06 which signifies high employee centered practices; HRM practices also promote a great work environment for employees with a standard deviation of 2.20; HRM practices rewards employees according to their contributions to overall performance with a standard deviation of 2.54. Results also show a low score on prompt response of HRM practices to emerging staff issues and also a low score on promoting a continuous and harmonious work relationship between management and staff.

Research question 2: What is the impact of human resource management practices on employees' level of performance?

Table 2: Impact of human resource management practices on employee's level of performance in higher institutions in Bayelsa State

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean=2.50	SD	Decision
6. Management prompt payment of salaries and other allowances to employees in this institution, impacts positively on staff performance	18	27	40	17	2.45	1.83	Low
7. HRM practices here allows for flexibility and autonomy of job and work design, thereby improves staff performance.	20	32	30	20	2.51	1.22	Low
8. HRM practices in this institution attracts, develops and retains high quality personnel for improved performance.	17	21	35	29	2.25	1.93	Low
9. I carry out my tasks because I am obliged to do so.	11	30	47	14	2.08	2.86	High
10. Staff participation in decision making especially on academic matters, has improved performance in my institution.	11	35	37	19	2.37	2.16	High

Table 2 shows the impact of HRM practices on employees' performance in higher institutions in Bayelsa State. On prompt payment of salaries and allowances to employees, HRM practice has a low score, indicating a low impact on staff performance with a standard deviation of 1.83; HRM practices on flexibility and autonomy of job and work design has a low impact on employees' performance with a standard deviation of 1.22; HRM practices to attract, develop and retain high quality personnel for improved performance is low with a standard deviation of 1.93; HRM practice of staff participation in decision making especially on academic issues has an high impact on performance. Results also revealed that staff choose to carry out their tasks because they feel obliged.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings revealed that HRM practices of higher institutions in Bayelsa State are employee centred with high ratings on promotion of a great work environment for employees and rewarding employees according to their contributions. However rating on promotion of a

continuous and harmonious work relationship between management and staff is low. This may be due to leadership styles adopted by the different managements of these institutions at different times, as pointed out by Uchendu, Anijaobi and Nkama (2013). In their view, the willingness of employees to work effectively with management depends largely on the nature of management's leadership style. An autocratic leadership style promotes an hostile work environment rather than a great work environment that promotes an harmonious relationship between management and staff, as in the employee centred leadership style.

The HRM practice of rewarding employees according to their contribution to the overall performance of the institution, motivates employees to be self-driven, highly engaged and involved in their work. However findings also revealed that management do not promptly pay salaries and allowances due employees and this negatively impacts on their performance. The AMO framework seeks to directly motivate employees to boost performance. This practice recognizes that institutional goals can be achieved through the employees. This practice is also in line with Harold and Shiju (2012) assertion that HRM practices is a prerequisite to improving the commitment of a workforce which in turn contributes to institution's growth and achievement. Key to institution's achievement is the adoption of HRM practices that directly motivate employees to perform such as prompt payment of salaries, benefits, allowances and many more, due workers.

Staff participation in decision making, especially on academic issues, has a positive impact on their performance. Findings however, also reveal a low rating on practices that allow flexibility and autonomy in job designs and execution. According to George and Jones (1996), employees can perform maximally when performance difficulties are minimized by management. Faced with the wide-range of changes as a result of globalization, activities of staff have evolved over time. Employees should be supported to perform maximally thus the need for flexibility and autonomy in job designs and execution. There is also the issue of HRM practices not responding promptly to emerging staff issues. According to Anyangwe (2012) human resource managers should adopt flexible, adaptable and strategic HRM practices, vital in tackling emerging challenges. HRM practices are therefore expected to deal with changes as they emerge, bearing in mind performance difficulties must be minimized.

The study revealed employees in these educational institutions feel obliged to do their tasks. There is already a level of commitment on the part of employees which should be leveraged upon to boost performance. For sustainable institutions growth and relevance, HRM practices attract, develop and retain high quality personnel. However, ratings in Bayelsa state institutions on this are low. According to Storey (1995) in Armstrong (2009), organizations need a distinctive approach to employment. For a competitive advantage, there must be a strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce.

CONCLUSION

Although HRM practices are employee-centred in institutions in Bayelsa state, the ratings and findings show more can be done to improve, a notch higher. HRM practices that positively impacts on the performance of employees include, staff participation in decision making and the promotion of a good work environment by management. However, the work environment is determined by the leadership style adopted by the management of the institutions. An employee centred leadership style, adopts employee centred HRM practices, which has a higher tendency of motivating staff and promoting a great work environment for improved performance of employees.

HRM practices impact positively on employees' performance. However, the impact of HRM practices on employees' performance in higher institutions in Bayelsa State is low because of the adoption of HRM practices that do not fully motivate employees such as the following: The adoption of HRM job and work designs that do not give room for flexibility and autonomy in task execution; delays in payment of salaries, allowances and other staff benefits as at when due; the adoption of HRM practices that may attract, but not develop and retain high quality personnel for improved performance. Employees perform their tasks because they feel obliged to do so, not necessarily because they are motivated to do so.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The adoption of HRM practices that allows for flexibility and autonomy in tasks execution;
- Prompt payment of salaries, allowances and benefits due staff to boost performance;
- Adoption of HRM practices that not only hire employees, but develop and retain them for a competitive advantage;
- Swift response to emerging issues through HRM practices that addresses emerging staff Issues, for motivation and subsequently, improved performance of employees;
- The adoption of employee-centred leadership styles which will promote an harmonious work environment and relationship between management and staff, for improved performance.

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