

Strategic Human Resource Management Practices and Performance In Nigerian Public Universities

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Abstract

In recent times, the declining standard in Nigerian universities has generated much concern and the need to adopt strategic approach in managing the universities' human resources, as a way of improving performance and raising the standard, has become imperative. The objective of this paper was to examine factors that influence the adoption of SHRM practices in public universities in Nigeria and also to evaluate the impact of SHRM practices on the performance of the universities. 220 respondents from eight (8) public universities were surveyed and both descriptive and inferential statistical tools were applied to analyse the generated data and test the hypothesis of the study. Findings revealed that the adoption of SHRM practices were influenced by factors such as funding of the universities, governing council decisions, degree of awareness of universities' mission and vision by staff especially the HR department, and knowledge of the benefits of SHRM practices. Findings also revealed that the universities applying SHRM practices have benefited by way of attracting more research grants, increased scholarly publications, more international collaborations, and awards of excellence for research breakthroughs. The study recommended the adoption of the strategic approach to HR management in Nigerian universities to foster improved performance aimed at raising the declining standard.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Management Practices, Performance, Public Universities, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Academic institutions, especially universities, are the sources of a nation's knowledgeable human resources and are solely responsible for educating and developing the intellect of nations (Malik *et al*, 2010). Human resources have also been recognized as most critical of the varied factors contributing to the attainment of organizational objectives (Dudeja, 2000). Universities as training and research institution therefore, need employees who are well trained and motivated so that they are committed to their work of conducting research and training for the development of the nations (Lew, 2009).

Strategic human resources management (SHRM) involves integrating the use of personnel practices into the strategic planning process, thereby enabling an organisation to better achieve its goals and objectives. Truss and Gratton (2006) defined SHRM as the linking of human resources with strategic goals and objectives in order to improve business performance and develop organizational culture that foster innovation, flexibility and competitive advantage. It means accepting and involving the human resource function as a strategic partner in the formulation and implementation of the company's strategies through human resource activities such as recruiting, selecting, training and rewarding personnel.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Universities have been influenced by social, economic and political developments, such as democratization, diversification, decentralization and budget constraints. These developments have reinforced the trend in academic institutions to adopt organizational forms, technologies, management instruments and values that are commonly found in the private business sector (Smeenk *et al*, 2006). Furthermore, there has been increasing pressure on public organizations to improve the quality of service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness in the utilization of resources, as emphasized in the New Public Management Reform (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). As one of the public organizations, universities have experienced great changes. Managerialism and entrepreneurialism concepts have increasingly been applied to university management. The ideology of university as a corporate actor has increasingly gained importance in systematic coordination in recent years (De Boer *et al*, 2007). This has therefore brought the need for continuous evaluation of performance in universities.

A major challenge facing Nigerian universities today is financial constraint. Budgetary statistics has indicated a remarkable drop in government subvention to the education sector as against the UNESCO benchmark for developing countries, leading to infrastructural deficiencies as well as grossly inadequate facilities for teaching and research, which is the centre point of university performance (Ajadi, 2010). Incessant strike actions by different unions in public universities as a result of non-fulfilment of various agreements entered into by the government has also become a thing of concern for the general public, considering its effect on students and the

public at large. The resultant effect of the relatively low compensation, and unfavourable working condition, is a dearth of experienced academics, as many have migrated to other climes where the conditions are much more favourable (Ojokuku, 2013). How to retain and maintain the existing workforce, as well as increase their performance levels, is a challenge for the institutions.

Earlier studies like Adeyeye (2009) and Ayanda and Sani (2011), addressed the impact of size, ownership type, and age on SHRM practices in some public and private universities in Nigeria. The present study examined the impact of some driving factors on the adoption of SHRM practices and also the impact of SHRM on performance in Nigerian public universities. It was hypothesized that the adoption of SHRM practices will have no effect on the performance of the selected public universities.

2. Origin of Strategic Human Resource Management

Significant attention has been directed towards human resource management, which many have seen as representing a distinct approach to managing people (Guest, 1997). Interestingly, although researchers have highlighted the holistic nature of HRM, much of the initial research into the concept focused on a limited range of issues and has been criticized as ‘micro analytic’ (Delery and Doty, 1996). However, in the last decade, researchers have sought to show the importance of HRM in influencing organizational performance and it is on this premise that the current interest in SHRM has developed.

Human Resource Management discipline has witnessed a great deal of change over the past decades and these changes represent two major transformations. The first is the transformation from being the field of personnel management to being the field of human resource management. The second is the transformation from the field of HRM to the field of strategic human resource management (Schuler, Randall, Jackson and Susan, 2007). The first transformation fostered the recognition that people are an important asset in organizations and can be managed systematically. The second transformation is based upon the recognition that, in addition to aligning human resource policies and practices with each other, they need to be linked with the needs of the organization. Given that these needs are reflected in the strategies of the firm, this transformation of “human resource management” came to be known as “strategic human resource management” (Caliskan, 2010).

2.1 Concept of Strategic Human Resource Management

The field of HR strategy differs from traditional HR management in two important ways. First, SHRM focuses on organizational performance rather than individual performance. Second, it also emphasizes the role of HR management systems as solutions to business problems rather than individual HR management practices in isolation (Becker and Huselid, 2006). Strategy is about building sustainable competitive advantage that in turn creates above-average performance.

Strategic Human Resource Management is rooted in fundamental concepts in strategy, which essentially is about how to achieve firm profitability. According to Harrison (2005), core research in strategy is concerned with identifying both the external and internal factors that enable firms to shape a competitive advantage and achieve superior performance. To achieve superior performance, firms need to create cost efficiencies that enable them to operate on lean margins or alternatively differentiate themselves so as to charge price premiums.

SHRM covers the overall human resource strategies adopted by business units and companies and tries to measure their impacts on performance. Early in the development of HR field, the emphasis was often focused on ensuring that employees had the ability and motivation to achieve established organizational goals, and that there were sufficient workers with particular skills available to meet organizational needs. With the introduction of SHRM this focus shifted toward one of human capital contribution strategic capabilities, and an organization’s competitive performance. (Lengnick-Hall *et al* 2009). This shift signaled a dramatic change in the role and influences of human resource professionals and adjusted the lens used to capture the expectations of human resource activities within organizations.

SHRM is concerned with two forms of resources. The first is an organization’s human capital – the knowledge, skills, and abilities of its employees. The second resource is an organization’s systems – that serve to support the development of human capital. To select the appropriate cost efficient bundle that will help employees perform best is the challenge with this resource, (Walsh *et al*, 2010). Millmore *et al* (2007) opined that although there is some validity in the argument that SHRM did not arrive unannounced, there is no doubt that many of the changes that occurred in the external environment in which organizations operate had a profound influence upon the way in which managers viewed the importance of, and managed their employees. Strategic HRM is a process that involves the use of overarching approaches to the development of HR strategies, which are integrated vertically with the business strategy and horizontally with one another.

2.2 Theoretical Approach to Strategic Human Resource Management

Critics have argued that the field of Strategic Human Resource Management lacks a coherent theoretical framework. However, Delery and Shaw (2001) identified three categories of researchers and the perspectives that they have adopted in theorizing SHRM. They tagged the first group of researchers 'Universalists' largely because of the interest in identifying 'best practice' SHRM policies. These researchers posit that human resource practices are always better than others and that all organizations should adopt these best practices. It is within this perspective of theorizing in SHRM that the present interest in developing 'high performance work practices' is located. Thus, the assumption is that the adoption of certain SHRM policies is likely to result in increased organizational performance.

The second strand of theorizing comprises those researchers adopting a 'contingency' approach. In keeping with the early foundation of the contingency perspective within organizational theory, these researchers argued that the success of human resource management policies is contingent upon the achievement of a match between human resource policies and other aspects of the organization.

The third group of SHRM theorists was identified as adopting a 'configurational' approach. This approach is more complex and consists of researchers who seek to identify configurations, or unique pattern of factors, they are posited to be maximally effective. This category of researchers are also said to approach their subject from a more theoretical perspective and many of the phenomena they identified may not necessarily be empirically observable. This approach argued that SHRM is concerned with the pattern of planned human resource deployment and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals.

Derek *et al* (2008) identified three theoretical approaches to strategic human resource management. The first is founded on the concept that there is 'one best way' of managing human resources in order to improve business performance. The second focuses on the need to align employment policies and practice with the requirements of business strategy in order that the latter will be achieved and the business will be successful. This second approach is based on the assumption that different types of human resource strategies will be suitable for different types of business strategies. The third, which is a more recent approach, is derived from the resource-based view of the firm, and the perceived value of human capital. This view focuses on the quality of the human resources available to the organization and their ability to learn and adapt more quickly than their competitors.

Another set of popular theoretical models being applied to SHRM research is the use of cybernetic systems models. Cybernetic models vary in their treatment of the system. Some models focus on closed systems (much like the behavioral perspective) that seek to set up mechanisms to buffer the technological core from the environment. Other models treat systems as being open to exchange with their environment. Open systems models are based on the general systems models and holds that organizations can be described as input, throughput, output systems involved in transactions with a surrounding environment.

2.3 Strategic Human Resource Management Practices

Delery and Doty (1996) identified seven practices that have been consistently considered strategic HRM practices. These practices include; internal career opportunities, formal training systems, results-oriented appraisals, employment security, participation, job descriptions, and profit sharing. This approach has come to be known as the "best practices" or universalistic approach. Within the best practices approach to strategic HRM, the first practice, internal career opportunities, refers to the organizational preference for hiring primarily from within. Second, training systems refers to whether organizations provide extensive training opportunities for their employees or whether they depend on selection and socialization processes to obtain required skills. Third, appraisals are conceptualized in terms of outcome-based performance ratings and the extent to which subordinate views are taken into account in these ratings. Fourth, employment security reflects the degree to which employees feel secure about continued employment in their jobs. Although formalized employment security is generally on the decline, organizations may have either an implicit or an explicit policy. Fifth, employee participation, both in terms of taking part in decision making and having opportunities to communicate suggestions for improvement, has emerged as a strategic HRM practice. Sixth, job description refers to the extent jobs are tightly and clearly defined so that employees know what is expected of them. Finally, profit sharing reflects the concern for overall organizational performance on a sustainable basis.

2.4 The Concept of Performance in Universities

Gupta (1980) believed that performance should be defined as the outcomes of work because they provide the strongest linkage to the strategic goals of the organisation, customer satisfaction and economic contributions.

Wang (2010) also opined that performance measurement in universities focuses much on output and outcome measurements which are unable to grab the whole process of university academic activities from input, process to output to outcome. Universities are not guided by principles of profit maximization solely as most organizations do in private sector. They may have no priorities in mind in terms of aggressive resources seeking, cost reduction and profit generation. Instead, universities may try to maintain a stable status of operating and by that they slowly achieve organizational objectives. Thus, the performance of universities can be measured by the extent to which each university functions are maintained towards the university goals.

Cross and Lynch (1992) developed a performance pyramid model to measure organisational performance at different hierarchical levels, from which a similar pyramidal performance measurement framework to capture the performance of universities was developed as shown below

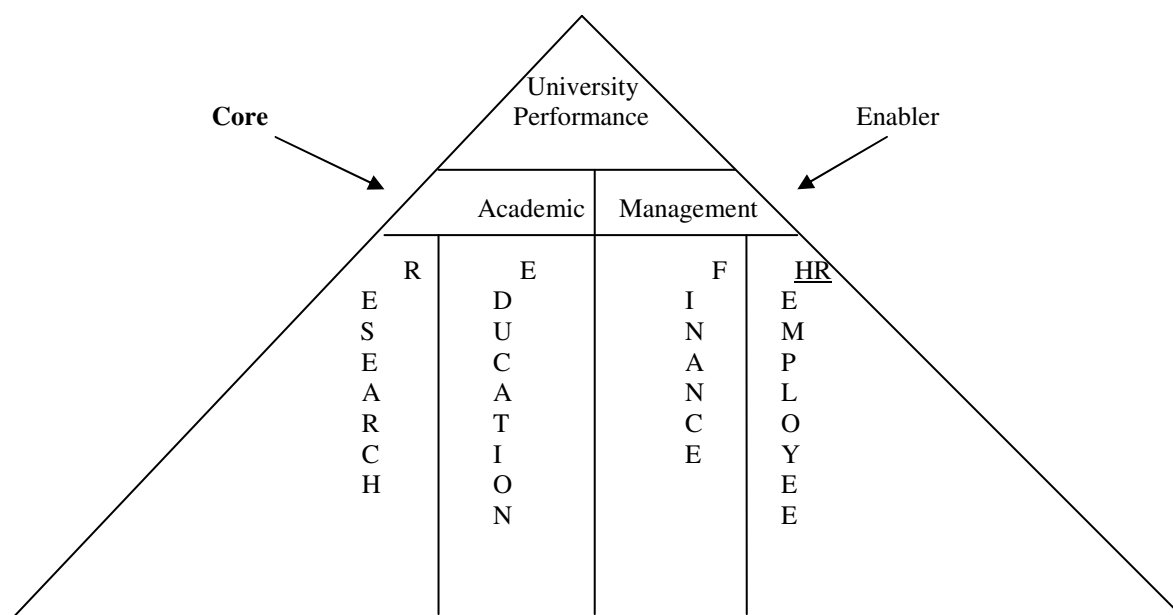


Figure 1: Performance Measurement Framework for Universities
 Source: Cross & Lynch (1992)

Going by the pyramid, universities have two main dimensions, academic and management functions, which are further divided into four sub-dimensions: research, education, finance and human resource, and it is from these dimensions that performance can be measured.

2.5 Empirical Studies on Strategic Human Resource Management

Ayanda and Sani (2011) in their evaluation of strategic human resource management (SHRM) Practices in Nigerian Universities analysed a multi-respondent survey of 29 government-owned universities and 15 private universities in Nigeria. The results of the study indicate an impressive moderate adoption of SHRM practices in the Nigerian university system; also, the extent of adoption is mostly a function of whether the university is government-owned or run by private investors. The results also showed that there is indeed a significant difference between the level of SHRM alignment, training and development, career planning system and employee participation in government-owned universities and private universities in Nigeria.

Richard and Johnson (2001) using a sample of banks, examined the impact of SHRM effectiveness (ratings of how effective a variety of human resource practices were performed) on a number of performance variables. They found that SHRM effectiveness was directly related to employee turnover, and the relationship between these measures and return on equity was stronger among banks with higher capital intensity.

Harris and Ogbonna (2001) tested the relationship between SHRM and performance as mediated by market orientation (defined as collecting, disseminating, and responding to intelligence about the market). Using a

sample of UK firms, the authors found a direct link between market orientation and performance, and in addition, demonstrated that the association between SHRM and performance is mediated by a firm's market orientation. SHRM can thus be seen as an antecedent to market orientation.

In another study, Gray and Shasky (2007) examined the impact of SHRM practices on the performance of State Governments agencies. The results show that when organizations employ such personnel practices as internal career ladders, formal training systems, results-oriented performance appraisal, employment security, employee voice and performance-based compensation, they are more able to achieve their organizational goals and objectives.

Dimba and K'Obonyo (2009) investigated the nature of the effect of SHRM practices on organizational performance. The study sought to determine whether the effect of human resource management practices on organizational performance is direct or indirect through employee motivation, and whether employee cultural orientations moderate the relationship between strategic human resource practices and employee motivation. Using regression analysis, the results indicate that all the variables of SHRM practices, except recruitment and selection were positive and significantly correlated with performance.

Law (2009) noted that employees play a strategic role in improving ratings in key areas like research quality, academic reputation of faculty, academic program quality, research contribution to society, preparation of tomorrow's leaders and quality of graduates. Having realized this, many universities are moving towards strategizing their HRM practices.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Operationally, SHRM means tightly aligning traditional human resource management practices such as recruitment, selection, training and development and rewards to an organisation's strategy (Huselid *et al*, 1997). It also means instituting policies and procedures that facilitate proficient strategy execution, using teams to leverage cross-functional knowledge and competencies, developing knowledge management capabilities that facilitate the leveraging of best practices and effective and efficient capture of economy of scope opportunities. Cybernetic systems model is the theoretical model that can be applied to universities.

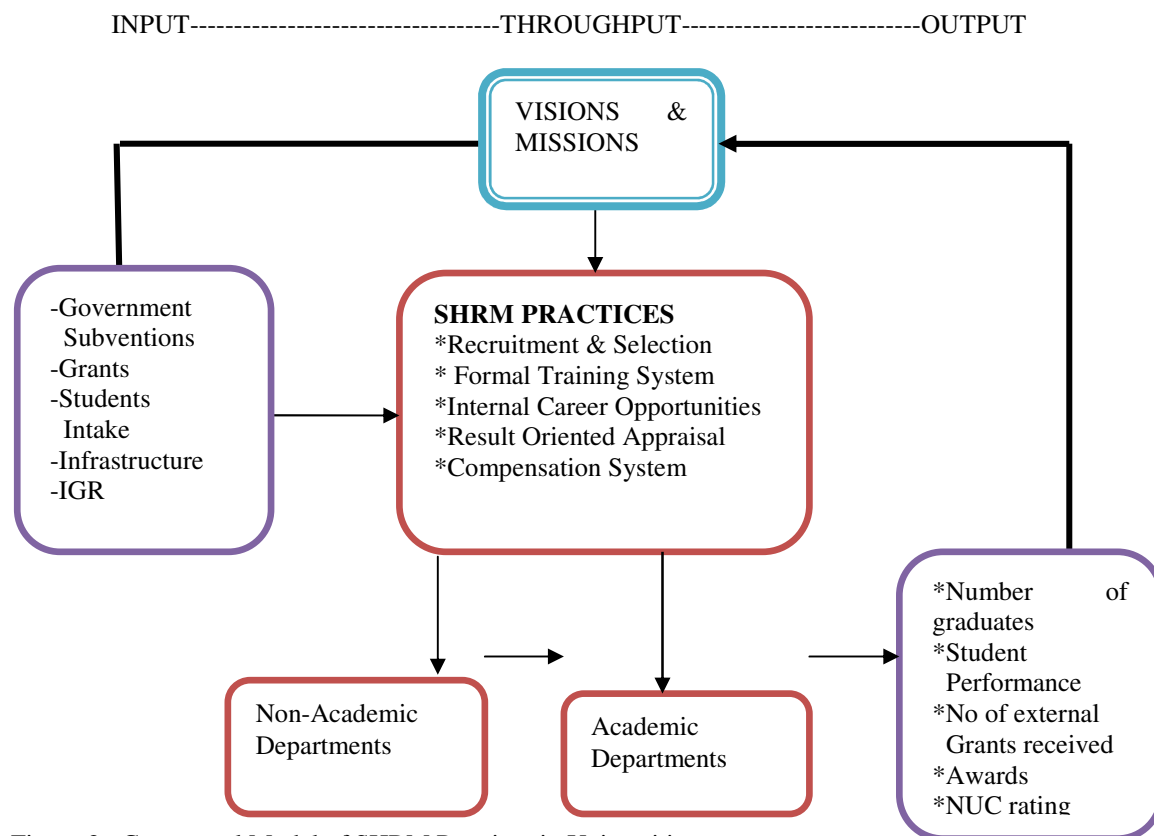


Figure 2: Conceptual Model of SHRM Practices in Universities

From the above figure, SHRM practices such as recruitment of staff, adequate training given to develop staff, appraisal, as well as necessary compensation, are the inputs. The throughput process can be characterised by the behaviour of the employees which is categorised under academic and non-academic departments, understanding of the university vision and mission, as well as the strategy of the institution, which may also be influenced by the overall performance. Finally, the outputs consist of the performance which is shown by the number and quality of graduates, awards of excellence, number of grants received by the university, and National Universities Commission (NUC) rating.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in selected public universities in south western Nigeria, with a total of fourteen (14) universities approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2014).

Based on the 2013 NUC ranking of the universities and year of establishment, a sample of eight (4 Federal and 4 state owned) universities were selected for the study. 220 respondents were randomly selected from among the academic and non-academic staff of the sampled universities, to which questionnaires were administered and 140 retrieved. The examined SHRM practices were Recruitment and Selection System, Internal Career Opportunities, Formal Training Systems, Appraisal, and Compensation System. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to analyse data generated.

4. Results and Discussion

i) Factors That Influence Adoption of SHRM Practices

It was revealed that governing council decision was the most common factor influencing adoption of SHRM practices in the Federal universities (weighted mean score (wms) = 2.98) while lack of adequate funding was identified as the major factor influencing the adoption of SHRM practices among the State universities (wms = 3.35). It was also revealed that lack of awareness of vision and mission of the university by HR department was an influencing factor in the Federal Universities (wms = 2.40) as well as in the State (wms = 2.40) universities. Lack of knowledge of the benefits of SHRM practices has more influence on State Universities (wms = 3.03) than Federal (wms = 2.47) Universities.

ii) Impact of SHRM Practices on the Performance of Public Universities

Findings revealed that most universities that made use of SHRM practices have been able to recruit skilled and knowledgeable people due to standardised recruitment and selection procedure. The use of SHRM had also led to increased opportunities for research grant as a result of increased publications. It has also brought more international connections to the universities and individuals through research and conference attendance, which has led to different awards for the universities and high rating by the National Universities Commission during its yearly assessment of performance of universities.

Ordinal regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis on impact of the adoption of SHRM practices on the performance of the selected universities. It was revealed that recruitment/selection system ($t = 21.553$), formal training system ($t = 14.497$), and Internal Career Opportunity ($t = 15.463$) were significantly related with the performance of the Federal universities more than State universities. The relationship is positive which implies that the effectiveness of any of these factors will result into high performance of the institution. These elements are key predictors of the performance in any given organization that must be practiced to achieve bountiful returns in both Federal and State universities. Therefore, the hypothesis that adoption of strategic human resource management practices has no significant impact on performance of the public universities was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on findings of the study, it can be concluded that governing council decisions and inadequate funding were the major factors that influenced the adoption of SHRM practices in federal and state owned universities, respectively. Lack of awareness of university vision and mission by the HR department was equally predominant in both the federal and state owned universities. Nevertheless, implementation of the SHRM practices had positive impact on those universities that were adopting them. The adoption of SHRM practices is thus recommended for the use of universities as part of measures to promote improved performance, aimed at raising the declining standard in Nigerian universities. Proper orientation and funding are also necessary prerequisites for the universities to be able to tap fully into the benefits of SHRM.

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Appendix

Table 1: Factors that Influence Adoption of SHRM Practices

	Federal wms	State wms
Lack of awareness of Mission & Vision of the university by human resource department	2.40	2.40
Lack of adequate knowledge of the practices	2.70	3.03
Lack of adequate training	2.90	3.27
Inadequate funding	2.90	3.35
Governing council decision	2.98	3.38

Source: Field Survey, 2014 *wms= weighted mean score

Table 2: Analysis of Impact of the Adoption of Strategic Human Resource Management Practices on Performance

Model	B	Std error	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Constant	4.700	1.102	18.198	0.000	
Recruitment					
/Selection System	2.615	0.563	21.553***	0.000	S
Formal Training					
System	1.8666	0.490	14.497***	0.000	S
Internal Career					
Opportunities	1.994	0.507	15.463***	0.000	S
Compensation					
System	0.481	0.433	1.236	0.266	NS
Result-oriented					
Appraisal	0.421	0.432	0.951	0.329	NS

S = Significant, NS = Not Significant

*** = Significant at 1%

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 3: Analysis of Benefits of SHRM Practices

	Weighted Mean Score (wms)	
	Federal	State
Increase in publications	3.30	2.25
International connections	3.45	2.45
Sufficient amount is allocated for research	3.18	2.30
It helps promote morale among staff for effective motivation of employee	3.43	3.15
Managerial ability to organize human resources effectively and efficiently has helped enhance our overall performance	3.38	3.28

Source: Field Survey, 2014

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