INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEES' WORK ENGAGEMENT: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO UNLOCKING THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITIES' EMPLOYEES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Building the capacity of higher education employees is essential for achieving quality academic output and student success. Educational institutions, therefore, must regularly implement quality capacity-building programs. This study examines the relationship between institutional practices and employee work engagement. A descriptive survey research design was used. A sample of 190 lecturers was purposively selected from the 2,339 lecturers at the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria. The researchers developed and used a questionnaire entitled the "Institutional Practice and Employees Work Engagement Questionnaire" (IPEWEQ), which had a correlation coefficient of 0.74. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the null hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that institutional practices, such as a supportive leadership style, collaboration, and a supportive work environment, significantly boost employee work engagement in Nigerian universities. The results further revealed a significant relationship between manpower training and development and employee work engagement at UNILAG. The study concludes that employees must have a supportive environment, job resources, support, and a conducive work environment to foster work engagement. Based on these findings, it is recommended that employees be exposed to various capacity-building programs that will develop and strengthen their skills, instincts, and teaching abilities.

Introduction

Work is an important aspect of life, and how an individual perceives it influences their life inside and outside of work. Employment does not guarantee employee work engagement or alignment with the employer's ideology or principles. Work engagement, also called employee engagement, has become a widely researched area of human resource management due to its importance in contemporary organizational and institutional practices. This importance stems from the major role employees play

as antecedents to institutional outcomes, such as employee productivity, turnover, competitive advantage, reduced absenteeism, and improved adaptability to organizational change. Humans are active participants in all institutional activities, acting as planners, actors, and key figures in realizing institutional goals and objectives. These goals are unattainable without active employee involvement, even with sophisticated tools. Therefore, institutions and organizations view employees as valuable assets whose skills, knowledge, and abilities can be utilized to sustain global competitiveness if they are work-engaged.

Scholars like Shuck and Wollard (2010) have spurred discussions about the meaning and roles of employee work engagement, including its definition, importance, and strategic interventions from a Human Resource Development (HRD) perspective. Numerous theoretical and empirical studies on institutional practices to enhance work engagement and its consequences have been conducted. However, there seems to be limited empirical literature on how institutional practices and employee work engagement can shape the future of higher education in Nigeria. Kim & Had (2019) explain that human resource development involves identifying, nurturing, managing, and utilizing employees' abilities to help the institution achieve its objectives. Human resource management encompasses practices to ensure institutions have an effective workforce to meet operational needs.

The human resources development management office is responsible for this function, creating the right climate for employees to develop their full potential and contribute to the institution's goals, mission, vision, and core values (Kim & Had, 2019). Human resource departments also incorporate training in soft skills, communication, and teamwork to increase worker engagement.

The relationship between institutional practices and employee work engagement is well-documented. Joanna (2017), for example, emphasized the positive relationship between work engagement and developmental practices. Since then, work engagement has received increasing attention in academia and organizations, as work-engaged employees positively contribute to society, institutions, and the economy. There is a growing awareness that work engagement is pivotal to institutional success and performance. Harold, Shiju & Bahdin (2020) indicate a strong basis for the effects of institutional practices and antecedents on university employee engagement and commitment, including job and role characteristics, career mobility, job challenges, job level, role conflict, role ambiguity, autonomy, and working hours.

Okebiorun & Ige (2018) point out that successful organizations see employee engagement as an important factor that affects and contributes to their successful performance. Organizations cannot improve the world of work without engaging employees. Baumruk (2006) explains that organizations with higher engagement levels tend to have lower employee turnover, higher productivity, higher total shareholder returns, and better financial performance. Gallup (2006) suggests three types of employee engagement: engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged. The latter are most concerned with the employer brand, often sharing their discontent.

Okebiorun & Ige (2018) reiterate that employees determine an organization's success. No matter how good organizational policies, programs, goals, objectives, and vision statements are, they are executed by employees. Engaging employees helps institutions

(universities) achieve their mission, execute strategies, and generate outcomes. Work engagement is positively related to various organizational and employee outcomes, such as productivity, turnover, job involvement, job satisfaction, health, and well-being (Okebiorun & Ige, 2018). Organizations want their personnel to perform optimally, contribute their abilities, and consistently improve. Employees also need improvement in their duties. Employee development is a necessary function of personnel management to maintain and improve employee performance (Harold *et al*., 2020).

Twenty-first-century institutions expect employees to be proactive, take responsibility for their professional development, and be engaged and job-involved. Robert-Smith and Markwick (2009) highlight seven key drivers of employee work engagement: the nature of work; meaningful and purposeful work; development opportunities; effective recognition and reward; assertive relationship quality; communication; and inspiring leadership.

To reduce employee work disengagement, Joanna (2017) suggests understanding the workforce during HR strategy formulation. Reilly (2012) proposes asking the following questions about the workforce: what motivates them to come to work; what motivates them to perform; what hinders their effectiveness; are they engaged; do they understand the big picture; and is their potential harnessed?

Anitha (2014) reports that employee work engagement can be increased through human resource practices, such as training and development programs for soft skills, communication, and teamwork. These programs create learning opportunities and increase the value of work engagement. Memon, Salleh & Baharom (2016) posit a relationship between manpower development programs and employee work engagement, noting that manpower development plays a vital role in fostering positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. They indicate that training satisfaction and performance appraisal satisfaction are key drivers of employee engagement. Other practices, such as job influence, involvement, communication, coaching, and development activities, concern not only ability but also employee careers. Manpower development programs must be aligned with worker and institutional needs for employees to be work-engaged.

The institution's working environment also plays a major role in worker collaboration. Low work engagement has been linked to boring and non-interactive work environments (Memon et al., 2016). Parkinson (2023) notes that interactions among coworkers contribute to emotions and engagement. A collaborative environment can boost relationships that support meaningfulness, psychological safety, and availability aspects of personal engagement.

Robert-Smith & Markwick (2000) identify benefits and outcomes an institution and individual derive from work engagement: organizational outcome, customer loyalty, employee orientation, employee productivity, advocacy, manager self-efficacy, organizational performance, profits, and successful organizational change. These can be achieved through clarifying employee outcomes and a healthy, well-being-promoting environment. Anitha (2014) stresses that a good working environment significantly influences employee engagement, which in turn significantly impacts employee performance and institutional effectiveness.

The importance of enhancing employee engagement is highlighted by extensive literature revealing its positive impacts on employee retention, job performance, reduced absenteeism, and employee outcomes (Reilly, 2012). Scholars like Reilly (2012), Anitha (2014), and Kim & Han (2019) have shown that employees become disengaged when they misunderstand their roles, lack adequate training, have roles that don't fit their skills, have unbalanced lives, are not stimulated by their roles, and are micromanaged. Parkinson (2023) suggests that the following factors contribute to poor institutional practices:

i.   Failure to set clear goals
ii.   Mismatched job requirements and skills
iii.   Insufficient coaching and feedback
iv.   Limited promotion and development opportunities
v.   Lack of recognition and motivation
vi.   Unbalanced work and personal life
vii.   Lack of trust in senior management
viii.   Safety concerns

These factors can lead to poor institutional practices and low work engagement. When employees are not engaged, problems such as decreased productivity, high turnover, low morale, and job dissatisfaction can arise (Parkinson, 2023). Neglecting institutional practices that boost employee work engagement can significantly reduce institutional output and hinder the achievement of goals and objectives.

Employee work engagement can be increased through institutional practices such as training and manpower development programs. Opportunities for employees to update and upgrade their skills through professional continuing education can also increase their engagement (Reilly, 2012). University employees must be trained and developed to be energetic, dedicated, committed, and work-engaged. Institutions must assess and improve their practices to create an enabling environment for employee engagement.

Institutional practices are the established norms, policies, procedures, and behaviors within an organization (Harold et al., 2020). These practices shape how work is conducted, decisions are made, and interactions occur. Ikon & Chukwu (2017) suggest that institutional practices encompass various aspects, including organizational culture, supportive leadership styles, communication processes, employee development initiatives, performance management systems, mentoring, coaching, attachment, HR improvement, manpower training, and development. These practices are often formalized to guide and regulate individual behavior, reflecting the organization's values, goals, and priorities, and shaping the work environment and employee experience. Effective institutional practices promote efficiency, fairness, collaboration, and employee engagement, increasing belonging and work engagement. Institutional practices contribute to overall institutional success.

Joanna (2017) observes that institutional practices significantly impact worker engagement. These practices can positively influence engagement when there are clear expectations, a supportive environment, development opportunities, feedback, recognition, autonomy, empowerment, and work-life balance. When institutional practices provide clear expectations and goals, employees have a better understanding of what is expected, fostering purpose and direction, increasing engagement, fairness,

and equity. Mokaya & Kipyegon (2014) assert that work engagement involves creating opportunities for employees to connect with their managers, colleagues, and organization. Engaged employees are active, set goals, and feel competent in achieving them. They are intrinsically motivated, find work enjoyable, and are kind, cooperative, and competent in delivering services.

Ikon & Chukwu (2017) note that employee engagement involves beneficial variables for both the organization and the employee, including employee voice, commitment, involvement, organizational citizenship behavior, and job satisfaction. Studies like Ikon & Chukwu (2017), Joanna (2017), and Harold et al. (2020) studies have explored the drivers of employee work engagement. Institutional practices, such as a supportive leadership style, manpower training and development, collaboration, and a supportive environment, can impact employee engagement levels in universities (Ikon & Chukwu, 2017). By implementing effective institutional practices, institutions can create a positive workplace culture that fosters productivity, satisfaction, and overall well-being.

Institutional practices, such as a supportive leadership style and a supportive environment, can influence employee engagement levels. Leadership styles can also influence employee attitudes toward work (Joanna, 2017). Effective institutional practices create a positive workplace culture that encourages productivity, satisfaction, and well-being. A strong leader-worker relationship affects worker engagement. Mariappanadar (2018) suggests that workers who experience supportive leaders have higher engagement. Supportive leadership styles are individually important predictors of employee engagement.

Problem of the Study

Employees are crucial to institutional success. Even with excellent institutional practices, policies, programs, goals, objectives, and vision statements, success is unlikely if employees are disengaged. Conversely, high-quality institutional output can increase employee work engagement. Therefore, institutional practices alone may not be sufficient for future success if employees are disengaged. As Parkinson (2023) notes, disengaged employees can create problems within an institution. Institutional practices such as supportive leadership, manpower training, collaboration, and a positive work environment should be used to integrate employees into the work culture and facilitate successful task completion. However, these practices appear to be underprioritized in many Nigerian universities, leading to consequences such as decreased productivity, high turnover rates, low morale, low employee engagement, and job dissatisfaction. This can hinder the achievement of institutional goals and lead to poor outcomes in productivity and overall success. This study, therefore, investigates how institutional practices influence employee work engagement in Nigerian universities.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the Nexus between institutional practices and employees' work engagement. Specifically, the study sought to:

i.   investigate the perceived influence of institutional practices such as supportive leadership style on employees' work engagement in in the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria;

ii.   examine the perceived influence of manpower training and development programmes on employees' work engagement in UNILAG; and

iii.   examine the perceived influence of institutional practices such as collaboration and a supportive environment on workers' engagement level at UNILAG.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

i.   What is the perceived influence of institutional practices such as supportive leadership style on employees' work engagement in the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria?

ii.   What is the perceived influence of manpower training and development programmes on employees' work engagement in UNILAG?

iii.   What is the perceived influence of institutional practices such as collaboration and a supportive environment have on workers' engagement in UNILAG?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were raised to guide the study:

H_{01}:   Institutional practices such as a supportive leadership style will not significantly boost employees' work engagement in the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria

H_{02}:   There will be no significant relationship between manpower training and development programmes on employees' work engagement in UNILAG

H_{03}:   Institutional practices such as collaboration and a supportive environment will not significantly influence workers' engagement level in UNILAG

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of 1,386 academic and non-academic staff at the University of Lagos (University of Lagos, Registry Unit, 2024). The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, resulting in a total of 190 respondents. Stratified sampling, based on the 12 faculties at the University of Lagos, was used. Simple random sampling was used to select five faculties from the 12: Education, Science, Arts, Environmental Sciences, and Social Sciences. Purposive sampling was then used to select 38 staff members from each of the five faculties, resulting in a total sample size of 190.

Data were collected using an 18-item self-designed questionnaire entitled the "Institutional Practices and Employees Work Engagement Questionnaire (IPEWEQ)." Face and content validity were established by four experts in the Department of Adult Education and Educational Management, University of Lagos. Section A of the questionnaire collected participants' biodata, while Section B used a modified four-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were

used to answer the research questions, while ANOVA, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, and regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses. All analyses were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Questions 1: What is the perceived influence of institutional practices such as supportive leadership style on employees' work engagement in the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria?

Table 1:   **Descriptive Statistics on institutional practices and employees' work engagement**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Institutional practices and Employees work engagement	190	7.00	20.00	49.8624	.40821	2.94772
Valid N (listwise)	190					

Table 1 shows that the estimated mean (7+20)/2 = 13.50 and the calculated mean is 49.8624. The calculated mean is higher than the estimated mean. This implies that the supportive leadership style will greatly boost employee work engagement in Universities in Nigeria. Therefore, institutional practices such as a supportive leadership style have about a 50% boost on employees' work engagement in Universities in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: what is the perceived influence of manpower training and development programmes on employees' work engagement in UNILAG?

Table 2:   **Descriptive Statistics on manpower training/development and employee work engagement**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistics	Std. Error	Statistic
Manpower training/development and employee work engagement	190	9.00	30.00	29.3825	2.47125	3.5800
Valid N (listwise)	190					

Table 2 shows that the estimated mean (9+30)/2 = 19.50 and the calculated mean is 29.3825. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. This implies that manpower training and development will enhance employees' work engagement in Universities in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What is the perceived influence of institutional practices such as collaboration and a supportive environment have on workers' engagement in UNILAG?

Table 3: **Model Summary of collaboration and supportive environment on workers' engagement level in University of Lagos, Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.597[a]	.356	.748	1.68542

a. Predictors: (Constant), COLLABORATION AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Table 3 shows that the adjusted r-square is 0.748 with a standard error of 1.68542. This implies that collaboration and a supportive environment made a 74.8% impact on workers' engagement level in Universities in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: Institutional practices such as a supportive leadership style will not significantly boost employees' work engagement in the University of Lagos, Akoka-Yaba, Nigeria

Table 4: **(Instructional practices in employees' work engagement in Universities) ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	763.67	4	263.98	14.563	.000
Within Groups	1562.78	253	19.56		
Total	**2326.45**	**257**			

Significant at p>0.05

Table 4 shows that the one-way analysis of variance is $(F_{4, 253}) = 14.563$, p=0.000 between institutional practices such as supportive leadership style and employees' work engagement indicating that it is significant at 0.05. This implies that institutional practices such as a supportive leadership style will significantly boost employees' work engagement in Universities in Nigeria. Thus, reject the null hypothesis H_{01}.

H_{02}: There will be no significant relationship between manpower training and development and employees' work engagement in Universities in Nigeria

Table 5:   **Correlation Statistics on manpower training/development and employees' work engagement**

			manpower training/ development	employees' work engagement
manpower training/ development		Pearson Correlation	1	.432[**]
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	190	190
employees' work engagement		Pearson Correlation	.432[**]	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	190	190

Table 5 shows that the Pearson correlation value between manpower training/ development and employees' work engagement is 0.432 with a significant value of 0.000<0.05. This result implies that there is a significant relationship between manpower training and development and employees' work engagement in Universities in Nigeria. Hence, reject the null hypothesis Ho2.

Ho3:   Institutional practices such as collaboration and a supportive environment will not significantly influence workers' engagement level in UNILAG.

Table 6:   **Regression Statistics on Institutional practices and workers' engagement level**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	9.018	.654		13.796	.000
COLLABORATION	.034	.161	.338	3.212	.001
SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT	.472	.153	.421	3.090	.011

a.   Dependent   Variable: WORKER'S ENGAGEMENT

Table 6 indicates that the beta values of collaboration and supportive environment are 0.338 and 0.421 respectively. This implies that collaboration made 33.8% and supportive environment made 42.1% influence on workers' engagement level in Universities in Nigeria which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that Institutional practices such as collaboration, and a supportive environment will significantly influence workers' engagement level in Universities in Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study showed that institutional practices, such as a supportive leadership style, significantly boost employee work engagement at the University of Lagos, Akoka campus, Nigeria. Leaders who support and guide their subordinates foster work engagement within the organization. This result is supported by Joanna (2017), who emphasized the importance of human resource strategy formulation that allows employees to understand their workforce to reduce disengagement. This aligns with Mokaya & Kipyegon's (2014) assertion that work engagement involves creating

opportunities for employees to connect with their managers, colleagues, and the organization. Mariappanadar (2018) also supports this result, stating that employees who experience supportive leaders have higher engagement. Okebiorun & Ige (2018) corroborate this, adding that work engagement is positively related to various organizational and employee outcomes, such as productivity, turnover, job involvement, job satisfaction, health, and well-being. A healthy and safe work environment increases employee work engagement and productivity.

The second null hypothesis revealed a significant relationship between manpower training and development and employee work engagement at the University of Lagos, Akoka campus, Nigeria. When employees are equipped and knowledgeable about their tasks, expectations, and job procedures, they are more likely to be productive. This aligns with Memon et al.'s (2016) findings on the relationship between training satisfaction and employee work engagement, emphasizing training's vital role in fostering positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. This finding further agrees with Anitha's (2014) findings that training satisfaction and performance appraisal satisfaction are key drivers of employee engagement.

Hypothesis three reveals that institutional practices, such as collaboration and a supportive environment, significantly influence employee engagement levels in Nigerian universities. This finding aligns with Parkinson (2023), who demonstrated that interactions with coworkers contribute to employees' emotions and various aspects of engagement. A safe and conducive work environment fosters employee willingness and readiness to work. Employees are more eager to work in a less hazardous and resourceful environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that university employees should be exposed to different capacity-building programmes that will develop and strengthen their skills, instincts, and teaching abilities. Also, the management should do all the necessary to make sure that institutional practices that will influence employee productivity are implemented.

In the light of the above finding, the study recommended that:

1.   Employees should hold university management responsible for their disengagement behaviour and low productivity. Hence to avoid this, institutional policy that would drive employee engagement behaviour and increasing work output, should be the primary concern of the university management.
2.   Since the study considered institutional practices as a key variable, it may be worthwhile for universities to focus on their employee's development through management development programs and training for all category of employees irrespective of their background and their entering certificate into the job.
3.   Employees must have a supportive environment, job resources, support and conducive work environment necessary to induce their work engaged behaviour.
4.   The human resources department should have training plans designed to make the relevant jobs more attractive and fulfilling, thus increasing employees' level of work engagement.

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