MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE WORK ENGAGEMENT ON HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to propose a model for examining the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and the performance of Employee with employee work engagement as a mediator in public Hospitals in Niger State, Nigeria. The current research utilises existing literature about the major concepts in the study, such as employee engagement at work, human resource management practice as well as employee performance. In line with the current literature, it was indicated that human resource management practices in the form of selection and recruitment, reward system, training and development, staff welfare and human resource planning have significant impacts on Employee work engagement and employee performance. The literature review shows a potential mediation of work engagement on the relationship between human resource practice as well as employee performance. In line with the preceding, the paper recommends that an empirical investigation should be undertaken on the effect of HRM practice on employee performance through the mediating effect of work engagement in public hospitals in Niger State, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Employees are the backbone of any company and its most precious asset. They have the power to build or break an organization and have a negative impact on how it runs. The accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives is significantly influenced by employee performance. Organisation whether service or manufacturing, cannot achieve its objectives successfully without the concerted effort of employees (Obiekwe, Zeb-Obipi, & Ejo-Orusa, 2019; Al Masud, 2021). The ability of any organization to achieve and maintain a competitive edge through cost reduction, the quality of the goods and services offered, and higher organizational efficiency that will result in increased profitability is correlated with efficient employee performance (Ogbu & Oaya, 2018). The subject of employee performance is a worldwide phenomenon, and organisations are making an effort to engage employees that can satisfactorily carry out their primary responsibilities and also voluntarily and willingly carry out, extra- roles that could add value to the organisations (Onodugo, Chukwu, Anyadiegwu, Ilo and Anioke, 2019). To accomplish their objectives, deliver the specialized goods and services they specialize in, and ultimately gain a competitive advantage, organizations need high performing personnel. Task-specific and contextual performances are the two categories for performance. The execution of obligations and tasks listed in a job description is task performance (Markus, 2019).

Every country in the world aspires to ensure the optimum performance of medical doctors and other health personnel is achieved. This is because the performance of hospital personnel will determine the general well-being of the populace, which will subsequently reflect on their productivity (Krijgsheld, Tummers, & Scheepers, 2022). However, the issue of the performance of hospital personnel is a worldwide phenomenon. Between 2014 and 2020,

pandemics like the Ebola virus, Corona virus, and Zika virus have affected the health sector globally and constitute a serious danger to its performance (World Health Organisation, 2020). In Africa, skills and unavailability of health facilities hamper the performance of the health personnel. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020), Africa has the worst ratio of doctor to patients, number of hospital beds per 1000 patients, and requisite gadgets and equipment which negatively affect the task performance of doctors in the entire Continent. This has resulted in the citizens spending billions of dollars on medical trips to Europe, America, Asia and other continents in the world (Abubakar *et al.,* 2018).

In Nigeria, Medical Care System faces many shortcomings that hamper the performance of medical personnel. Among the 191 Member States of the World Health Organization, Nigeria's overall health system performance was ranked 187th in 2015 (Jabeen *et al.,* 2021). As a result, various reforms were formulated in order to revamp the Sector. According to Oleribe, Oladipo, Ishola and Taylor-Robinson (2018) some of the shortcomings noted in health care in Nigeria include poor welfare, strikes, and poor infrastructure. Similarly, Ephraim-Emmanuel, Adigwe, Oyeghe, & Ogaji, (2018) opined that, facilities and equipment which predict the standard of health care service delivery are grossly inadequate in Nigerian hospitals. This will however affect the performance of employees in the sector.

The existing issues with public hospitals are being made worse by the small annual funding that the government allots to the total healthcare system. According to Guardian (2020), Nigerian budgetary allocation to health was 4.34% in 2020. This amount is far less than the agreed percentage by African Union (AU) which was 15%. This has brought about more challenges in the health system such as inadequate skilled manpower, drugs and amenities (Adam & Nwaogwugwu, 2021). More so, Oxford Business Group (OXG) revealed High prevalence of infectious diseases, rising non-communicable disease incidence, low public funding, and high rates of child and maternal mortality among the horrendous difficulties bedeviling the performance of the sectors.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO, 2019), although Nigeria has comparatively higher number of Human Resource for Health (HRH) than some countries in Africa, the number is still below the required personnel needed to effectively deliver quality health service. According to Federal Ministry of Health as reported by Vanguard (2020) the ratio of doctors to patients is 4 doctors to 10,000 patients and 16.1 midwives as well as nurses to 10,000 patients. This indicates a staggering gap away from the recommended ratio by WHO of 1 doctor to 600.

These further lead to extreme brain drain among the medical doctors to Europe, America, Asia and in some cases to other African countries. According to Nigerian Medical and Dental Council in 2021 out of 72,000 registered doctors with the council only about 35,000 practiced in Nigeria. In the same vein Guardian (2021) finding shows that about 2000 medical doctors leave Nigeria annually to other countries. According to Guardian report, this trend if allowed to continue will result in deficit of about over 50,000 doctors and over 137,000 nurses by 2030. Also, in 2021 Saudi Arabia initiated a recruitment exercise to employ 500 Nigerian medical doctors where 2000 attended the screening exercise (Punch, 2021). Hence, most of medical workers will quit their job and move to foreign countries when an opportunity is obtained (Adeniran, Oluwale, & Ojo, 2021). The Nigerian brain drain necessitated colossal medical tourism abroad. According to Abubakar et al. (2018), Nigerians spend more than US $1 billion annually to seek for medical attention abroad.

World Bank (2020) reported that there are 0.5 beds in hospitals per 1000 patients in Nigeria which is far behind the mean of 1.0 hospital beds for every 1000 patients in other nations of sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the job load on the remaining medical doctors is overwhelming which aggravated stress among them (Shanthini and Gajenderan, 2021). More so, inadequate managerial skills and knowledge is reported in Nigerian hospitals at all levels (Okonkwu, Ekpeyoung, Ndep & Nja, 2020) hence affecting the performance of the medical

personnel. However, these prompted the need for the current research so as to improve the work performance of medical personnel in Nigerian public hospitals.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's health sector underperformed compared to other nations in 2019 (Chukwuma & Adaku, Guardian Online News 30th December, 2019, 12.57am). In comparison to other African nations and other developed nations, it is stated that Nigeria falls far short of providing better and quality healthcare for its inhabitants. This is in light of the Presidential Summit on Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which took place in 2014 and was hosted by Nigeria. At this summit, it was acknowledged that health is a fundamental human right and that it is the duty of the government to protect the health of its population. The summit also acknowledged other problems that prevent the proper implementation of the UHC in Nigeria, such as a lack of and unequal allocation of human resources for health.

Additionally, Nigeria's healthcare system and citizens' condition of health are in a terrible situation (Ephraim-Emmanuel *et al.,* 2018). Indicators of health status are below average for sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, one of the highest rates in the world is for infant mortality, which is 115 deaths per 1,000 live births, under-5 mortality, which is 205 deaths per 1,000 live births, and maternal mortality, which is 948 deaths per 100,000 live births (range: 339 to 1,716 deaths per 100,000 live births) (WHO, 2020). Due to their subpar performance, medical professionals urgently need to work on improving their task performance in order to meet the nation's healthcare concerns.

The following findings are cause for concern: Nigeria's Primary Health Care (PHC) system has low productivity and provider competency (Ogunseye, 2020). The effectiveness and quality of services provided at PHC centers are questioned (WHO, 2018; Sharifi, Hosseini, Mohammadpour, 2021; Ogunseye, 2020), and service delivery at PHC centers is hampered by health professionals' absenteeism and bad professional behavior (Ogunseye, 2020).

The low health workforce density in Nigeria (1.95 per 1,000) and under the 2.3 per 1,000 average density for Africa (Ogunseye, 2020). One issue PHC in Nigeria faces is a lack of labor (Aluko, Anthea, & Marie Modeste, 2019; Oleribe, Momoh, Uzochukwu, Mbofana, Adebiyi, Barbera, Williams, & Taylor-Robinson, 2019). Many health professionals lack the necessary training and tools to carry out their duties (Aluko *et al.,* 2019; Oleribe *et al.,* 2019). PHC centers were understaffed in certain cases due to improper distribution and deployment of health workers, while others were overstaffed, which increased absenteeism, redundancy, and system inefficiency (Oleribe *et al.,* 2019; Aluko *et al.,* 2019; Ogunseye, 2020; Sharifi *et al.,* 2021). The bane of underperformance in the Nigerian PHC system is the non-use of productivity development methods (Oleribe *et al.,* 2019), weak incentive structure, inadequate planning affects health workers' ineffectiveness (Oleribe *et al.,* 2019; Aluko *et al.,* 2019),

Some of the causes of low performance in Niger State health facilities include, the poor attitude of the health workers e.g. the percentage of skilled birth attendants stood at 50.3%, the populace is then inclined to patronize traditional and private health facilities than the public health facilities (Niger State Health Sector, 2019). Infants and under 5 mortality rates are 69 and 149 deaths per 1000 live births respectively. Maternal mortality stood at 196/100,000 in 2017 (Niger State Health Sector, 2019) which is an unfavourable maternal health outcome. These statistics stressed the need for this study. Several studies on how to influence the performance of physicians were conducted with various findings (e.g. Ehioghae, Madukoma, & Unegbu, 2020; Nwosu, Ossai, Mba, Anikwe, Ewah, Obande, & Achor, 2020; Ogundeji *et al.,* 2021; Umar, Babandi, Suleiman, Umar, Olorukooba, & Ahmad, 2021).

Importantly, several number of research were carried in order to improve task performance through human resource practice such studies include Gunawan *et al.* (2020); Ashmond (2022). The interaction that exists between human resource management practice and task performance was significant empirically. Studies in this regard include that of Lim and Nurazwa (2021) shows positive relationship between HRM practice and work engagement

(Urbini, Chirumbolo, Giorgi, Caracuzzo, and Callea, 2021). However, the interaction that exists between HRM practices and task performance were of negative relationship.

Therefore, one of the major uniqueness of the current study is an attempt to introduce a mediator on the interaction that exists between HRM practice as well as employee performance. Unlike the above-mentioned studies, the present study will be significant by introducing a mediator on how HRM practices and employee performance relate to one another. Furthermore, the present study will make a methodological contribution with regard to the sample of the study. The study will use a sample of employees of hospitals, unlike previous studies that were carried out in manufacturing industries (Urbini *et al.,* 2021). Structured questionnaire, consisting of questions relating to the 3 variables of research was self-administered to cover all ranks of employees performing directly related health schedules; the medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses and laboratory scientists etc.

Finally, the present study will fill a contextual gap by using the context in Niger State located within North Central, Nigeria, as opposed to earlier research that were conducted in other parts of the world; Asia, Europe. This is likely to have an impact on the outcome due to the disparities in level of development.

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent do recruitment and selection affect employee performance in public hospitals in Niger State?
2. To what extent do training and Development affect employee performance in public hospitals in Niger State?
3. To what extent do Reward systems affect employee performance in public hospitals in Niger State?
4. To what extent does Human resource planning affect employee performance in public hospitals in Niger State?
5. To what extent does staff welfare affect employee performance in public hospitals in Niger State?
6. To what extent do recruitment and selection affect employee work engagement in public hospitals in Niger State?
7. To what extent do training and Development affect employee work engagement in public hospitals in Niger State?
8. To what extent reward systems affect employee work engagement in public hospitals in Niger State?
9. To what extent do Human resource planning affect employee work engagement in public hospitals in Niger State?
10. To what extent does staff welfare affect employee work engagement in public hospitals in Niger State?
11. To what extent does employee engagement mediate the relationship between Human resource practices and employee performance in public hospitals in Niger State?

2. Literature Review

In this current study, the concept of employee performance, employee engagement and Human Resource Practice is presented and reviewed.

2.1 Employee Performance

The concept of job performance is that action and behavior that is the individual's control and serve the objectives of the organization (Sujatha & Krishnaveni, 2018). In other words, Anthonia and Ukoha (2018); Baba and Ghazali (2017) view employee performance as efficient and effective achievement of a particular target of the assigned task to an employee within a given period. Therefore, employee performance can be judged or evaluated as satisfactory or not based on the standard set. Similarly, Toh Pei and Sung (2017) maintained that it is possible to think of employee performance as a list of completed tasks or achieved by an employee or outcomes such as efficiency, sales growth, profit growth, satisfaction of customers, and or

quality improvement that can be completed within a given period. In the same way, Alromaihi and Alshomaihi (2017) maintained that understanding employee performance is very important as most establishments' major decisions rely on the employee's performance.

Employee performance is the most important driver of the overall success of the organisation and survival in terms of meeting all the required activities necessary for the proper functioning of the organisation (Sujatha & Krishnaveni, 2018; Alrajawy, Khalifa, & Isaac, 2018; Pawirosumarto, Sarjana & Gunawan, 2017). Any organization that supports investing in its workforce as an internal intervention will change the caliber of its human capital, which will have a substantial impact on the performance of the organization, according to Motshwane & Niekerk (2022). Additionally, a number of important interventions, including developmental programs, incentives, remuneration, and many others, are thought to have a substantial impact on how well workers perform at work (Ibrahim et al., 2017). From all the definitions of employee performance, one thing is common: employee performance is all about two things: manners and results (Toh Pei Sung, 2017).

2.2 Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices

Different definitions of human resource management (HRM) practices have been used. According to Opatha (2021), HRM is the adoption of certain functions and activities for utilizing employees efficiently and effectively in an organization to achieve its goals which include satisfying the key stakeholders to the possible extent and contributing positively to the natural environment. It involves formulation, implementation, and on-going maintenance of strategies, policies, procedures, rules, practices and systems of managing employees strategically, participatorily, and sustainably.

In order to ensure that a company's human capital helps it achieve its business objectives, HRM practices are conceptualized as a set of internally consistent policies and procedures (Otoo, 2019). In a similar vein, Dessler & Varkkey (2018) saw HRM practices as a collection of procedures used by organizations to manage their human resource needs by facilitating the development of firm-specific talents, complex social relationships, and organizational knowledge to maintain competitive advantage. The aforementioned factors lead to the conclusion that HRM practices are specific procedures, formal rules, and philosophies that are expected to be followed in order to recruit, train, inspire, and retain workers who will assure the organization's survival and success. There is mounting evidence that employing effective human resource management techniques can help create a staff of the highest caliber (O'Riordan, 2017; Opatha, 2021).

2.3. Concept of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement, according to Sun & Bunchapattanasakda (2019), is the degree of dedication and involvement that employees have for their employer. The level of involvement that employees experience within the organization will depend on their capacity to dedicate themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively. The motivation of engaged employees is directly correlated with their levels of performance at work (Budriene & Diskiene, 2020). According to Mone and London (2018), this area of employee engagement may be a major factor in encouraging high levels of employee performance. Organizations can gain competitive advantage in the market by investing in human capital as an organizational strategy. As a result, motivated workers are aware of their roles within an organization and actively participate in reaching organizational objectives. When differences affect how individuals define and describe their engagement in the organization, engagement can be difficult.

According to Budriene & Diskiene, (2020), happy employees are more likely to take part in initiatives to solve problems as they go about their everyday tasks in order to meet organizational objectives. Organizations must take advantage of employee commitments and direct their actions toward mutually beneficial goals for both the employees and the

organization. Healthcare managers must therefore encourage job-involvement tactics wherein staff members can learn components of their roles that motivate them to contribute to the achievement of the organization's goal.

Employee attachment to their job, job dread, and obligations to continue in their career are three important factors that determine organizational commitment, according to Singh and Gupta (2015). Managers may make sure they are in charge of a group of people that are enthusiastic about their work by utilizing the emotional commitment of their workforce. Passionate workers give their all to their jobs and push themselves to provide the greatest outcomes without concern for their jobs. According to Bucăţa, Virca, & Popescu (2022), organizational commitment, job participation, and job satisfaction are all related characteristics that support productive engagement at work. Best-in-class employees have a direct impact on how well an organization performs. When their efforts help the organization achieve its goals, employees are more likely to stay with the company. In order to maintain improved organizational outcomes, it would be advantageous for the organization to retain highly trained people.

2.4 Human Resource Management Practice and Employee Engagement

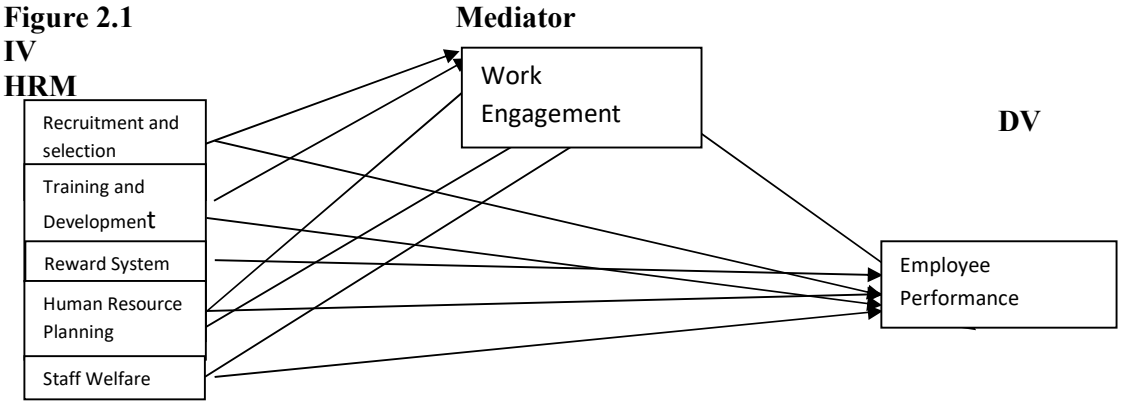
Good human resource management practice influences an essential employee work engagement in any establishment (Alzyoud, 2018). Any establishment that has effective training, compensation, development of career, and excellent policies will result in reciprocal action in terms of obtaining full employee work engagement (Saragih & Praseto, 2020). Similarly, Karam et al. (2017) opined that effective HR practice would positively impact employee job skills and provide adequate job resources to employees, thereby making them more engaged.

2.5 Social Exchange theory

The theory of social exchange opined that employees who perceive their establishment as consistently and fairly implementing Human Resource practices related to skill, motivation, and opportunity to enhance Human Resource practices and are given proper working conditions should have greater work engagement. It is a sociological and psychological theory that investigates how two parties interact socially and uses cost-benefit calculations to weigh risks and advantages. According to the theory, economic relationships arise when each party has assets that the other parties value (Roeckelein, 2018). According to social exchange theory, these calculations take place in intimate connections, friendships, working ties, and transitory relationships. One illustration is speaking with a customer at the register (Kendra, 2022). According to social exchange theory, if a relationship has larger costs than benefits, such as when a lot of time or money is invested but not returned, difficulties may result (Kendra, 2022).

Conceptual Frame Work

Figure 2.1



Source: Researcher

3. Conclusion

The present study discussed on the potential intermediating impact of work engagement on the interaction that exist between Human Resource Practice as well as employee performance among medical employees (hospital personnel) of public hospitals in Niger State, Nigeria. The subject of employee performance is a worldwide phenomenon, and its importance cannot be overemphasized, therefore organisations are making effort to engage employees that can satisfactorily carry out their primary responsibilities and also voluntarily and willingly carry out, extra roles that could add value to the organisations. The performance of hospital personnel influences the general well-being of the populace, which subsequently reflects on productivity. Based on the review carried out, it was proposed that work engagement will play a substantial part in mediating the interaction that exist between Human Resource Practice as well as employee performance among the medical employees in Niger State. It was predicted that findings of this study would provide better explanation to the indirect and direct relationship that exist between Human Resource Practice as well as employee performance.

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