# Employee Relations Practice and Staff Productivity in Select Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria

**By**

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## Abstract

This study explored the dynamics of employee relations in select federal universities in the South-South area of Nigeria. Three objectives were set among which were to: identify the benefits of employee relations practices in two federal universities and examine the relevance of employee relations practices to the performance of the staff of the Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt. The study was anchored on systems theory. It adopted a survey research design. From a total population of 6,668, a sample of 400 was determined using the Taro Yamane sample size formula. The study employed a purposive sampling technique and used a well-structured questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The findings reveal that: the benefits received by the staff of the University of Port Harcourt and the Federal University Otuoke in employee relations practices were monthly salary, insurance, promotion and increment in salary. It was also found that the use of memos, social events, informal communication and letters were the major strategies the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University of Otuoke adopted to improve employee relationships and productivity. Furthermore, it was discovered that involvement of staff in management decisions was the most significant contributory factor to staff productivity as it boost staff self-confidence and performance. It was therefore concluded that there is high productivity at the Federal University, Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt emanating from the employee relations practices and strategies incorporated by both institutions. The study recommends that:

the two universities should sustain the current employee relations strategies they have in place while identifying and incorporating other novel strategies such as improved communication flow to sustain and raise the present level of staff morale and productivity.

**Keywords: Employee Relations: Employee Relations Strategies: Employee Productivity: Employees:**

## Introduction

The success of any organisation depends on the various facets that make up the organisation, including human resources. The nature of the relationships people have at work is fundamental to the effectiveness of an organisation. More so, the combination of various human resources in all parts of an organisation into relatively fixed relationships and defined patterns of social relations also determines an organisation's performance. Therefore, organisations have to create a work environment that makes work interesting and flexible, championed to motivate and develop employees (Dauda, 2010). The changing nature of the workflow of any organisation makes it vital for both employers and employees to constantly evaluate the relevance and achievement of the organisation's vision at all times (Oguwa, 2011).

Employees are among an organisation's most valuable assets, that act as a central point in its success (Nebolisa, Egobueze, &Nwaoburu, 2021; Amessa, & Drakeb, 2018). A positive synergy between employees and employers in an organisation puts it on the pedestal for accomplishment, and to achieve this, effective employee relations are required. Employee relations simply defined is the relationship between employees and employers. It entails all communication processes between an organisation and its internal public, including the contractual, emotional, physical and practical relationship between employers and employees.

Employee relations is the relationship between workers and their organisations, managers and their organisations and governmental agencies concerned with the workplace and employment generally. Similarly, Rose (2008) agrees that employee relations is the regulation of the relationship between the employer and employee, both collectively and individually, and the determination of both substantive and

procedural issues at industrial and organisational levels. Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) explains that employee relations is a broad term that incorporates many issues from collective bargaining, negotiations, and employment legislation to more recent considerations such as work-life balance, equal opportunities and managing diversity. It involves dealing with employment practices, terms and conditions of employment, issues arising from employment, providing employees with a voice and communicating with employees (Drucker, 2019; Armstrong, 2018). Employee relations comprises of the human resource management activities associated with the movement of employees within an organisation such as promotion, transfer, demotion, resignation, discharge, layoff, and retirement among others.

Conventionally, employee relations are driven by changes in government, technology, demography, management and changes in organisational ownership. It is also structure driven by changes in social institutions, and economic and political trends. The concept of employee relations explores the belief that employers and employees are entwined by mutual understanding and ways both parties can benefit from this mutual understanding and goodwill. Most organisations have realized that their success is dependent on good management of their employees' relations. This is because, just as the employees, who are seen as the most important resource of every organisation, will have to be committed to tasks assigned, to ensure high productivity, it is also imperative for the employer to ensure that the service environment is beneficial and favourable, to enable the employees to give their best.

Employee relations have their roots in the Industrial Revolution which came from massive economic and social changes (Ogunsanwo & Kazeem, 2019). These changes gave rise to low wages, long working hours, and tedious work, including abusive supervisory practices which led to violent strike actions, high employee turnover, and threat of social instability. Industrial relations was designed at the end of the 19th century as a middle ground between classical economics and Marxism on the premise of Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb's Industrial Democracy.

Furthermore, the approach behind the creation of industrial relations is to create a strong problem-solving orientation that rejected solutions to labour problems from both the classical economists and the Marxist solution of class revolution. Employee relations was pioneered by John Commons in 1920, following the creation of the first academic industrial relations program at the University of Wisconsin in the United States of America.

Creating a healthy employee relation in an organisation is essential for the achievement of organisational goals, which lies in an organisation's strength to develop strategies for strong employee relationships. Employee relations strategies define the intentions of the organisation's objectives such as stating what needs to be done and what needs to be changed in how it manages its relationships with employees. These strategies include motivating employees, allowing them to participate in decision-making processes, and creating an opportunity for the free flow of information in the organisation, which creates some level of responsibility in employees to the organisation, thereby, making them more efficient, motivated, and productive. These and more appear to be lacking among employees of the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke. These have resulted in low productivity, protests, student demonstrations and industrial action in most cases. For instance, the disagreement between the Federal Government of Nigeria and University workers has left students to spend over 10 years in programmes of four years.

An organisation's effectiveness depends on its ability to constantly improve the performance of members and maintain the human potential that serves as the backbone of the organisation. Employee performance depends on various factors but the most important factor is training, which enhances the capabilities of employees (Raja, Furqan & Khan, 2011). Consequently, the improvement of employees' performance is a shared initiative of the employee and the employer to upgrade existing skills and knowledge of employees, which in turn increases competency and over time enhances productivity. To increase productivity, an organisation requires innovation and dedication, as employees, who are the most important resources would need to be developed for the task ahead, towards the achievement of the organisation's goal. For organisations to develop their employees, managers and supervisors would have the confidence to delegate

authority to their subordinates, but when subordinates are not properly developed, it would be difficult for the authority to be delegated to them by their superiors. The foundation of employee development starts with the way they communicate with one another within the organisation (internal communication).

However, interpersonal communication among employees in institutions like the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke is what determines employee relations hence we can say that interpersonal communication is the bedrock for organisational productivity. It is important to state here that units within an organisation can communicate as a group (group communication) but the synergy comes from the agreements between persons to achieve set goals in particular order. While group communication can set the agenda, interpersonal communication defines employee relations to a great extent and sets the pace for an advantageous impact within the organisation (Tersoo, Celestine & Ishongi, 2018). Sometimes, there seems to be disagreement among workers of the University of Port Harcourt and Otuoke. This has resulted in conflict, protest, destruction of students, and property and death and closure for the institutions. The employee practices adopted in these institutions have been established the light of this, the study seeks to assess how employee relations affect the productivity of select Federal Universities, particularly, the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke, in south-south Nigeria.

**Statement of the Problem**

Human resources are considered the most important asset of an organisation. However, very few organisations can fully harness their potential as many strive to improve service delivery through functional employee strategies. Employee role plays significant roles in fostering productivity in every organisation. Workers in different institutions of higher learning demonstrate a certain level of productivity based on the relationship between them and the management regarding welfare packages. With the relentless and rapid change in universities, management has a role in maintaining employee relations, such as the crucial role of sustaining morale, enhancing productivity, and helping staff at all institutional levels cope with the rapid changes.

This is because employees find it difficult to adjust in some circumstances, they may find it hard to be productive. This inability to adapt could lead to dissatisfaction on the part of employees, who may want to leave the organisation, and the employer, who will launch a search for recruits to fill up the vacant position. Although the Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt belong to academic cooperation and agree with other institutions, at home and abroad to expand teaching, professional training, and research activities in some faculties, this cooperation seems not to have covered all levels of employees. Also, these institutions under study appear not to have allowed the staff to benefit from certain gratifications like leave, salary increments, and regular promotion, among others provided for staff motivation. However, this scheme seems to be dysfunctional as some members of staff believe that only a selected few benefit from such opportunities.

Similarly, staff on temporary appointments and those on contracts seem not to be satisfied with irregularities associated with their appointments and renewals. Those employed suffered a lack of promotion, implementation new minimum wage, poor working conditions, increment of salary and other incentives of motivation. These affect employee productivity, either negatively and make them not perform maximally in the institutions. Studies done around employee relations practices have not looked at the staff productivity of workers at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke. It is on this basis, that the study, seeks to examine how the employee relations of the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke affect the productivity of their staff.

**Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The study examines employee relations practices and how such practices affected the productivity University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the benefits of employee relations practices of Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt;
2. identify employee relations strategy of the Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt;

3. examine the relevance of employee relations practices to the performance of the staff of the Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt;

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the benefits of employee relations practices at Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt?
2. What are the key employee relations strategies of Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt?
3. To what extent are employee relations practices relevant to the performance of the staff at Federal University Otuoke and University of Port Harcourt?

**Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study was limited to employee relations of select federal universities, including the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke in South-South Nigeria. The study relied on the institutions for information needed for the completion of the study. It focuses on all the workers of the two institutions, University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke who are available within the period of the study. Ideologically, the study focuses on the how the employee relations practice among workers of University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke lead to the productivity of the institutions.

**Empirical Review**

In a related study, Onifade, Opele and Okafor (2018) investigated communication as an effective tool for employee performance in Unilever Nigeria Plc. The objectives of the study were to: ascertain the relationship between effective communication, completeness and employee performance and to determine of communication Unilever Nigeria Plc adopted for its employees. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design with a total population of 142 workers who serve as the respondents. The simple random sampling technique was employed. The data gathered were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result of the study revealed that there was a significant

relationship between effective communication and employee performance. It was therefore recommended that organizations should endeavour to make effective communication an essential strategy in achieving high employee performance. The study is related to the present, both studies deal with communication as an effective tool for employee improvement. The previous study focused on communication as an effective tool for employee performance in Unilever Nigeria Plc while the current study focuses on employee practice and staff productivity at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University, Otuoke.

Ayofe and Akinbo (2022) studied interpersonal relationships and employee performance in selected Nigerian banks. The study aimed to determine the connection between interpersonal relationships and employee performance. The study adopted a descriptive research survey and used 168 (one hundred and sixty-eight) employees of Guaranty Trust Bank as a sample. The researchers adopted a structured questionnaire as the instrument of data collection.

The result showed that the three measures of interpersonal relationship are commonly rated high by the respondents with an average mean of 4.07 for effective communication, 4.02 for team building and social support has 4.04 mean. It further revealed that the rise in effective communication within the organization improves the performance of the employee within the threshold of 68%. Findings also revealed that high-quality interpersonal relationship improves the work performance of the employee through improved communication, motivation, teamwork, assisting each other and improvement in the performance of employees. The study recommended that Guaranty Trust Bank should adopt the dimension of interpersonal relationships used for the study as strategies for improving their level of performance. The study is related to the present because they deal with employees' interpersonal relationships and organizational growth. The previous focus on interpersonal relationships and employee performance in selected Nigerian banks while the current study focuses on employee practice and staff productivity in the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University, Otuoke

Dugguh and Ayaga (2014) examined job satisfaction and employee performance in organizations. The objective of the study was to trace the relationship between

job satisfaction and employee performance in Nigeria. The study adopted a library research method. The results of the study revealed that several factors, achievement, recognition, responsibility, pay, and work conditions have a positive influence on employee performance in organizations. It recommended that managers should use those factors that impact employees' performance to make them happy, and better their wellbeing and the environment. The study is similar to the current study in that deal with employees' satisfaction in organisations. The previous study focused on job satisfaction and employee performance in organizations while the current study focuses on employee practice and staff productivity at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University, Otuoke.

Solomon, Hashim, Mehdi and Akintunde (2012) studied employee motivation and organizational performance in multi-national companies and incentives for organizational employees to be satisfied. This has been acknowledged to be a controversial and widely debated topic. The study aimed to investigate the relationship effects of employee motivation on organizational performance has elicited a debate among personal management professionals and academic researchers. The study adopted a survey research design with a total of 100 staff of Cadbury Nig. Plc. It used a questionnaire as the instrument of data collection.

The study revealed that the provision of adequate motivation by Cadbury Nigeria Plc. Communication improvement enhances employee productivity and has a positive correlation with employee productivity. The study is similar to the present study since they deal with employees' satisfaction in organisations. The previous however focused on employee motivation and organizational performance in multi-national companies while the current study focuses on employee practice and staff productivity in the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University, Otuoke.

Abah and Nwokwu (2016) studied workplace motivation and employee productivity in Nigerian public organisations: A study of The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). Motivation has been variously seen over time as the most vital tool, yet overlooked means of turning on the workers to give their best to attain organizational goals as well as achieve job satisfaction at the workplace. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of workplace

motivation on employee performance in Nigerian public organizations with special attention on the South Eastern Federal Radio Corporation. The objectives were to: identify factors that motivate staff of FRCN in South Eastern Nigeria; find out the strengths of the motivating factors in enhancing job satisfaction among employees of FRCN in South Eastern Nigeria and examine the relationship between motivation and productivity in the FRCN South Eastern Nigeria. To achieve the above objective, the content analytical technique was adopted to carefully review the works of renowned authors on the subject matter.

The result of the study revealed that there exists a positive relationship between motivation and enhanced employee productivity. The study recommends that appropriate motivational techniques that could satisfy the peculiar needs of the workforce should be provided. The study is similar to the present study since they deal with communication as a motivation for employee productivity in public organisations in Nigeria. Although, the previous study focused on workplace motivation and employee productivity in The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) while the current study focuses on employee practice and staff productivity in the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University, Otuoke.

**Theoretical Framework**

These studies are anchored on the systems theory.

**The Systems Theory**

The first call for a general system theory came from Ludwing VonBeertalanffy's research in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1868, he published "General System Theory: Foundation, Development, Applications External Link. The goal of this book was to outline certain basic laws that can be applied to a wide variety of scientific fields. From his perspective, the cyclical interaction or relationship between individual components within a complex system- where each one is influenced by and causes an effect on the system- can be used to reveal crucial information across various settings. Following this thought process, Bertanffy reasoned there ought to be universal guidelines or principles that are applied across science and within educational settings to unify further certain fields. A system can be defined as a summation of elements that individually establish relationships with each other

while interacting with their environment, both as individuals and as a group (Ohiagu, 2019).

The systems theory is used to describe a group of objects that work together to produce results and this group of objects could be a single organism, an organisation or a society.

**Research Methodology**

The research design used for this study was the survey design. This is because survey research involves selecting and studying samples chosen from a population to discover the relative incidence, distribution, and interrelations of sociological and physiological variables. The survey design was chosen for this study because it elicited the opinions of the respondents concerning the topic of the study. The population of the study is 6,686 staff of University of Federal University, Otuoke and University of Port Harcourt. The population comprised four thousand seven hundred and seventeen (4,717) academic and non-academic staff of the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport-Office of the Registrar, 2023) and one thousand nine hundred and sixty-nine (1,969) academic and non-academic staff of Federal University Otuoke (FUO-Office of the Registrar, 2023). The sample for the study is 400. The sample size was drawn from the total number of staff at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke. The Taro Yamane sampling method was employed to extract the sample size from the population of six thousand six hundred eighty-six (6686).

**Results and Findings**

A total of four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Out of this number, three hundred and ninety-eight (398) copies of the questionnaire representing 99.5% response rate were retrieved and found useful while two (2) copies representing a 0.5% response rate were not properly filled and were discarded as a result.

## 4.1 Presentation and Analysis

**Table 4.1.1 The benefits of employee relations practices in UNIPORT AND Otuoke**

| Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | ∑ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) I receive benefits like pensions, health care training, and annual holidays apart from my salary. | 113 (452) | 119 (357) | 57 (114) | 109 (109) | 398 | 1,032 | 2.6 | Agreed |
| b). Insurance of my life and property are among the benefits I receive in my workplace | 196 (784) | 139 (417) | 30 (60) | 33 (33) | 398 | 1,294 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| c) Promotion is the benefits I receive from my workplace. | 231 (924) | 111 (333) | 16 (32) | 40 (40) | 398 | 1,329 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| d) Increment in salary is the major benefit I receive from my workplace | 22 (88) | 290 870) | 71 (142) | 15 (15) | 398 | 1,115 | 2.8 | Agreed |

The results in Table 4.1.1 indicated that the benefits received by the staff of the University of Port Harcourt and the Federal University Otuoke in practice employee relations were monthly salary, insurance, promotion and increment in salary.

**Table 4.1.2 Employee relations strategies in UNIPORT AND Otuoke**

| Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | ∑ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) The employee relations strategy adopted is a memo | 186 (744) | 78 (234) | 109 (218) | 25 (25) | 398 | 1,221 | 3.1 | Agreed |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| b) The employee relations strategy used in my workplace is letters. | 17 (68) | 5 (15) | 173 (346) | 203 (203) | 398 | 632 | 1.6 | Disagreed |
| c) The strategy adopted in my workplace to maintain employee relationships is informal communication | 320 (1,280) | 68 (204) | 0 (0) | 10 (10) | 398 | 1,494 | 3.8 | Agreed |
| d)Organising events and social interactions is among the strategies adopted in my workplace | 166 (664) | 142 (426) | 43 (86) | 47 (47) | 398 | 1,223 | 3.1 | Agreed |

The results in Table 4.1.2 show that the use of memos, organising social events, informal communication and letters were the major strategies the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University adopted to improve employee relationships and productivity.

**Table 4.1.3: Relevance of Employee Relations Practices to staff performance**

| Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | ∑ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) My department head considers my decision before | 64 (256) | 248 (744) | 44 (88) | 42 (42) | 398 | 1,130 | 2.8 | Agreed |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| making any important decisions concerning my job. | | | | | | | | |
| b) I am granted permission when I need to attend to issues of concern. | 118 (472) | 178 (534) | 92 (184) | 10 (10) | 398 | 1,200 | 3.0 | Agreed |
| c) Management allows me to handle more responsibilities and inspires me to do better at my job. | 241 (964) | 94 (282) | 29 (58) | 34 (34) | 398 | 1,338 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| d) My supervisor inspires me to come up with new and better ways of doing things to make my job better. | 136 (544) | 101 (303) | 61 (122) | 100 (100) | 398 | 1,069 | 2.7 | Agreed |
| e) I have benefited from employee relations strategies like training, rewards, recommendations, teamwork, and holidays at the University. | 217 (868) | 148 (444) | 21 (42) | 12 (12) | 398 | 1,366 | 3.4 | Agreed |

The data in Table 4.1.3 show that the extent of employee relations practice relevant to the performance of staff at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke is high.

**Table 4.1.4 How Employee Relations Practices Influence Staff Productivity**

| Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | ∑ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a) I am motivated by the goals, training and rewards to give my best on the job. | 233 (932) | 152 (456) | 6 (12) | 7 (7) | 398 | 1,407 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| b) The fact that my opinion is heard and considered by my supervisor motivates me to be more productive. | 170 (680) | 102 (306) | 69 (138) | 57 (57) | 398 | 1,181 | 2.9 | Agreed |
| c) The fairness shown to staff by University management has impacted my work positively. | 90 (360) | 271 (813) | 31 (61) | 6 (6) | 398 | 1,241 | 3.1 | Agreed |
| d) I am always happy to be at the office because I want to do my best for the University. | 129 (516) | 188 (564) | 19 (38) | 62 (62) | 398 | 1,180 | 3.0 | Agreed |
| e) I have contributed greatly to | 69 (276) | 209 (627) | 37 (74) | 83 (83) | 398 | 1060 | 2.7 | Agreed |

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|---|
| management decisions for high performance. |

The data in Table 4.1.4 show that the employee relations practices at Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt have a significant influence on staff productivity.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question 1: What are the major employee relations practices at the Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt?**

The study investigated employee relations practice and staff productivity at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke and found that the benefits received by the staff of the University of Port Harcourt and the Federal University Otuoke in employee relations practices were monthly salary, insurance, promotion and increment in salary. These incentives serve as motivating factors that can spur the employees to work efficiently for better results for both universities. The result conforms with Kayii and Dagogo's (2017) assertion that pay packages and job satisfaction share a significant relationship, such that when employees are placed in good work conditions, they become more satisfied with their jobs and more productive for the organisation. Again, it is more profitable for organizations to put in place appropriate employee-retention strategies such as good organisation's image, staff participation in decision-making, enhanced and regular salary packages, and humane treatment of employees as strategies for organizational performance (Gberevbie, 2010). Similarly, Armstrong (2012) agrees with this by stating that the feeling of satisfaction and happiness arises from the work itself and the work environment. Therefore, the welfare of staff transits to job satisfaction, which increases efficiency in the discharge of duties on the part of employees. Abah and Nwokwu (2016) found that there exists a positive relationship between motivation and enhanced employee productivity.

The result is also in line with Rea's (2015) view that keeping employees informed about the happenings in an organisation gives them a feeling of importance, prompting them to do more for the organisation. In conformity with the result,

Onifade *et al* (2018) assert that communication is the essence of an organisation, minimising misunderstanding which can cause conflict within the organisation. In agreement with Onifade *et al.* (2018) assertion, Salako (2016) describes communication as the essence of an organisation. Effective communication helps an organisation meet its set goals and enhance and sustain productivity. Communication ensures that employees work in cooperation to bring about performance, and strengthens the relationship between management and employees. Also, in line with the result, Salako (2016) asserts that communication is a vital tool to the success of every organisation as its effectiveness determines the rise or collapse of the organisation.

Similarly, results from Table 4.1.1 show that the employees at Federal University Otuoke and University of Port Harcourt understand the deliverables of their jobs hence there is a cordial relationship between the academic and non-academic staff in the institutions. However, not all the staff know the right decisions to make in some situations that may arise in the course of work as a few staff indicated they have been queried for not doing the right things. Meanwhile, items 4 and 5 in Table 4.1.1 show that employees are rewarded for performing their jobs properly and thus feel the management is fair to them during interactions. This was confirmed with mean scores of 3.1 and 2.7 respectively. The finding validates Obiekwe Zeb-Obipi, and Ejo-Orusa (2019) assertion that developing employees improve their competencies and overall performance. Staff participation in strategic development programmes aid in their development as professionals who can confidently carry out their given activities, hence boosting productivity. Staff development encompasses all efforts an organisation must make to improve the skill set of those on its payroll and it begins with effective organisational communication. The success of an organisation depends greatly on the development of its staff. This is in tandem with Raja, Furqan & Khan (2011) study that training must be provided to organisational employees to improve organisational performance since employee performance is dependent on such to strengthen their capabilities.

The overall findings for research question one show that respondents attested that Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt employees benefit from employee relations practices in place which have encouraged staff to

discharge their duties. However, the inability of some respondents to make decisions that pertain to their duties goes to show the need for the management at Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt to adequately support training programmes which are significant in workforce development for productivity and organisational performance.

**Research Question 2: What are the key employee relations strategies of Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt?**

The study observed that the use of memos, social events, informal communication and letters were the major strategies the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University adopted to improve employee relationships and productivity. The foregoing finding corroborates the findings of Rea (2015) and others. Rea (2015) posited that issues affecting employees, including management's plans and how those plans affect their jobs should be addressed to make them feel engaged and important in the organisation. This is because when management withholds information, employees may tend to breed mistrust in the leadership, thereby damaging employee confidence and effectiveness. However, the management of the two Universities have not done enough to carry all the employees along as some employees indicated that their decisions were not considered before important decisions concerning their jobs are made. This was deduced from the findings on table 4.1.3 where 86 respondents indicated this. In light of this result, it can be deduced that these employees at the university are not satisfied with this approach by management. Even though these employees do not make up the majority, their concerns are important for achieving total productivity. In the long run, this could lead to rebellion, chaos, and confusion among employees and the management as the number can increase.

Similarly, results show that both institutions use memos as a way to relate with staff members. Majority of the respondents from both universities agree that letters are not part of the employee relations strategies in the institutions while on their jobs. A weighted mean score of 1.6 was achieved, showing rejection. Also, items on table 4.1.2 shows that there is a cordial relationship between the academic and non-academic staff of the Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt through informal communication, memos and social events. This shows that the management of both universities, to an extent, encourages healthy-

friendly relations among the staff. The result is in line with McClelland's (2000) Acquired Needs Theory which states that employees who need affiliation are driven into seeking friendly and warm relations with others to gain love and acceptance since they are more productive based on social interactions. Furthermore, the result elucidates the core benefits of horizontal communication as highlighted by Goldhaber (2003) who notes that communication between colleagues enhances task management to achieve the overall organisational goals.

More so, these rewards could have also led to their commitment to the success of the institutions, increasing their confidence in their jobs. This conforms to Ingram's (2009) position that recognising and rewarding employees' contributions boosts the morale of employees and sets a standard for others. Rewards bring the benefit of strong reinforcement of desired behaviour and set an example to other employees to exhibit a desired behaviour that aligns with organisational values and goals.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents in both institutions agreed that the universities' management is fair to staff during interactions with them. This claim is supported by a weighted mean score of 3.1 in Table 4.1.4. By showing fairness during interactions, both managements could foster teamwork and dedication, bringing about desired organisational performance and results. This process could also give the management of both institutions the data they require to ensure staff productivity such as grey areas that need revitalisation, data for decision-making, information on the progress of projects, and details on emerging issues. Communication improvement enhances employee productivity and has a positive correlation between employee productivity (Solomon, *et al*, 2012).

An overview of the findings concerning research question two shows that both universities under study have employee relations strategies that are used to encourage staff productivity. Some of these include reward systems, disciplinary committees, staff welfare, and participation. Evidence showed that these strategies, to an extent, have encouraged employees to give their best for the success of the institutions they work for. Findings also indicated that both institutions have aligned themselves with the assertion by Bajaj *et al* (2013) that an effective employer-employee relationship increases employees' sense of energy, devotion, and trust in an organisation.

**Research Question 3: To what extent are employee relations practices relevant to the performance of the staff at Federal University Otuoke and University of Port Harcourt?**

It was observed the extent of employee relations practice relevant to the performance of staff at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Otuoke is high. The result showed that employee relations practices at Federal University, Otuoke, and the University of Port Harcourt are relevant to employees. The majority of the respondents from both institutions indicated that their departmental heads consider their inputs before making important decisions concerning their jobs. Allowing employees to participate in organisational activities allows them to participate and contribute to decision processes that affect them. This delegates more authority and responsibility to them, and in turn makes them more committed, motivated, and satisfied with their jobs. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Sofijanova and Zabijakin-Chatleska (2013). They found that employees taking part in the activities that affect their jobs fosters autonomy in work processes. The study of Ayofe and Akinbo (2022) revealed that the rise in effective communication within the organization improves the performance of the employee within the threshold of 68%. Findings also revealed that high-quality interpersonal relationship improves the work performance of the employee through improved communication, motivation, teamwork, assisting each other, and improvement in the performance of employees. Several factors, achievement, recognition, responsibility, pay, and work conditions have a positive influence on employee performance in organizations (Dugguh & Ayuga, 2014).

More so, findings from table 4.1.3 shows that employees are granted permission when they need to attend to issues of concern. According to the findings in the study, this has increased their confidence in their various managements and encouraged them to work efficiently. The result is supported by the weighted mean score of 3.0. Respondents also agreed that the management in both institutions allow them to handle more responsibilities and inspires them to do better at their jobs. This claim is buttressed by the result in Table 4.1.3. Toeing the lines of the findings, Massenberg *et al* (2015) note that motivated employees are more engaged in their work, giving high quality. Taking into cognizance the need for achievement in McClelland's (1961) Acquired Needs Theory, Royle (2012)

thinks that an individual with this need will show a stronger desire to perform more tasks and at a more advanced level than their colleagues.

In the same vein, results showed that the majority of the respondents affirmed that their superiors inspired them to come up with new and better ways of doing things to make their jobs better. This finding conforms to Bertalanffy's (2001) synergy component of the Systems Theory which states that an organisation allows employees to work together, thereby coming up with new ideas and initiatives that could spur them into becoming productive. Findings in Table 4.1.3 also indicate that Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt come up with staff development strategies like trainings, rewards and holiday programmes to upskill their employees. By doing this, the institutions allow employees access and benefit from available opportunities for advancement in the organisation. Developmental programmes such as training, awards, and recognition tend to satisfy the psychological needs of employees, giving them opportunities for individual growth, advanced roles, and confidence to do more for themselves and the organisation. It also allows employees to gather knowledge and skills needed for the job they do for effective performance and high productivity. Obiekwe *et al* (2019) agree with this by stating that employee development improves the competencies and overall performance of employees to perform their assigned tasks confidently.

A summary of the findings concerning research question three shows that employee relations practices at Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt are relevant to the performance of the staff. Practices such as training, welfare, employee teamwork, and participation, among others, are successful at influencing staff members to be more productive in discharging their duties. This result correlates with Bertalanffy's (1968) Interdependence Component of the Systems Theory which states that employees rely on managers and organisations they work for to provide guidance, training, and assistance on the job to achieve high productivity. Also, in agreement with the findings, Obiekwe *et al* (2019) maintain that when employees are allowed to be part of the creation and implementation of decisions that directly affect them, they judiciously carry them out, bearing in mind that it is their own, having been involved from the beginning.

The study found that:

1. The benefits received by the staff of the University of Port Harcourt and the Federal University Otuoke in employee relations practices were monthly salary, insurance, promotion and increment in salary;
2. The use of memos, social events, informal communication and letters were the major strategies the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University adopted to improve employee relationships and productivity;
3. The extent of employee relations practice, relevant to the performance of staff at the University of Port Harcourt and Federal University Ouoke is high;

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive correlation between employee relations and employee productivity. This conclusion implies that to a large extent, there is high productivity at the Federal University, Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt emanating from the employee relations practices and strategies incorporated by both institutions. It can be concluded that effective communication, employee reward and recognition, developmental programmes and incentives among other benefits have encouraged staff in both universities. However, putting into consideration the barriers to successful employee relations practices at Federal University Otuoke and University of Port Harcourt such as not listening to ideas of staff members, disciplinary actions such as salary cuts, disrespect from management and colleagues, and attachment to more responsibilities without rewards are likely to trigger low productivity in employees who may lose confidence in their jobs. Therefore, it is safe to say that employee relations practices enhance the performance of staff at Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt thereby increasing productivity in both institutions. Also, inadequate employee relations practices would demotivate the employees, hence, resulting in low productivity.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:

i. Major employee relations practices of Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt for employee motivation should be sustained.

ii. The employee relations strategies of both universities should be intensified, and development programmes should be initiated more regularly as such programmes will help to improve the quality of staff at Federal University Otuoke and the University of Port Harcourt, making them better employees who would be able to take responsibilities whenever the need arises.

iii. From the findings, it is shown that the employee relations practices and strategies of the university have greatly improved performance and productivity. Therefore, these practices and strategies should be heightened for more outstanding and remarkable performance.

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