

Motivation, Training and Appraisal as Staff Management Levers for Service Delivery: Evidence from State Public Universities in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

Effective staff management is essential for enhancing service delivery in higher-education institutions, particularly as universities increasingly contribute to sustainable development agendas. This study aimed to examine how staff management strategies: specifically, staff motivation, training and development, and performance appraisal, are employed in two public universities in Rivers State and how they influence service delivery outcomes. Adopting a descriptive survey design, the research targeted the staff populations of the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education and the Rivers State University, with a stratified random sample of 400 respondents drawn from across academic, administrative and technical units. Data were collected via a self-structured instrument entitled the Staff Management Strategies and Service Delivery Questionnaire (SMSSDQ) and were analyzed using means, standard deviations and z-test statistics. The findings indicate that all three strategies: staff motivation, training and staff appraisal, had statistically significant positive relationships with service-delivery performance. In particular, higher levels of motivational practices and training programmes and more rigorous appraisal systems were associated with improved service delivery within these institutions. Based on these results, the study recommends that university management consistently implement inclusive, transparent and motivational staff-management practices to bolster service delivery and thereby support the broader goals of sustainable development in the higher-education sector. These insights offer practical implications for policy-makers and university leaders seeking to optimize staff-management frameworks and elevate institutional service performance.

Key Words: Staff Management Strategies, Staff Motivation, Staff Training, Staff Development, Performance Appraisal, Service Delivery, Public Universities

INTRODUCTION

Public universities are increasingly recognized as foundational pillars for national intellectual capacity building, innovation and sustainable societal development (Mafindi, 2024). Their core mission of delivering high-quality teaching, meaningful research and impactful community engagement depends significantly on the effectiveness of service delivery. Service delivery in this context refers to how efficiently and effectively universities perform their roles in education, research and community service (Agubosim et al., 2023). Central to achieving such service delivery is the management of staff- their mode of recruitment, training, motivation, appraisal and how they are generally supported in their roles. In higher-education settings, the concept of staff-management (also referred to as personnel or human-resource management) is concerned with aligning the workforce's capabilities and commitment to the institutional mission (Olaitan, 2025). Evidence from Nigerian higher-education institutions underscore that robust human-resource practices such as training and staff appraisal significantly relate to staff productivity (Ogunodeet al., 2024; Olaitan, 2025). However, despite this recognition, many public universities especially in sub-Saharan Africa continue to struggle with inadequate training opportunities, weak appraisal systems, low staff morale and poor alignment between staff efforts and institutional goals (Cletus et

al., 2024; Mafindi, 2024). Research supports the importance of these human-resource strategies in higher education. For instance, studies have shown that performance management systems in open-distance learning institutions influence academic staff perceptions of effectiveness and alignment with institutional goals. Moreover, organizing professional support staff in universities is shown to be a complex and ongoing challenge, whereby university structures, support systems and staff management practices constantly need calibration to support effective service delivery. Despite this recognition, there remains considerable evidence from developing-country contexts that universities face shortcomings in staff management—such as irregular training, weak appraisal systems, insufficient motivation and poor alignment between staff efforts and institutional mission (Ezeocha, 1990). In sum, while effective staff management is widely acknowledged as central to service delivery in higher education, empirical investigations focusing on how these practices operate in public universities in sub-Saharan African contexts remain relatively few and fragmented.

In particular, although research has explored individual staff-management components such as training (Ogunode et al., 2024) and appraisal (Ibelegbu et al., 2022), there remains a gap in empirical studies that examine how these strategies: motivation, training, and appraisal, collectively influence service-delivery outcomes within public universities in Nigeria's Rivers State. Moreover, many of the existing studies are limited to single institutions or non-teaching staff, and do not explore the inter-relationships between the staff-management levers and service delivery in a multi-institution setting. This study thus sets out to examine how staff-management strategies, specifically motivation, training and appraisal, are employed in two public universities in Rivers State and how they influence service delivery. The objectives are: (1) to identify the staff-management strategies used in the selected universities; (2) to determine the effects of these strategies on service delivery. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform university managers, policy-makers, and other stakeholders about effective staff-management practices that can enhance service delivery, reduce inefficiencies, and contribute to sustainable development of public higher-education institutions. Staff, students and the broader community stand to benefit from improved institutional performance and quality of service. Finally, the paper is structured as follows: first a review of the literature and the conceptual framework; next, methodology; then results; followed by discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(i). Staff Motivation in Higher Education

Motivation of university staff has long been recognized as a critical determinant of institutional performance, including service delivery. In the higher-education context, motivation refers to the internal and external forces that prompt staff to perform, persist and align with institutional objectives (Obajemu & Dekpen et al., n.d.). For instance, Orugun et al. (2019) investigated motivational factors and academic staff performance in higher institutions in Kogi State, Nigeria. They found that regular pay, work-conditions, achievement and job-security significantly predicted teaching quality. Similarly, a review by Cletus, Barkindo, Sarah & Ogunode (2024) found that academic staff motivation in Nigerian tertiary institutions is generally low, with contributory factors including poor salaries, inadequate infrastructure, lack of training, delayed allowances and weak involvement in decision-making. Other recent empirical work includes Chidi (2023) who studied motivation and staff performance in tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria; the study identified salary/wages, working environment, training and information availability as key motivational push-factors. These studies collectively affirm that motivation is linked to job performance, staff retention, loyalty and ultimately “delivery” of university functions.

However, several gaps remain. First, while many studies focus on academic staff, fewer cover non-academic (administrative, technical) staff whose contribution to service delivery is also substantial, especially in public universities. Second, most studies establish the link between motivation and performance generally, but less often explicitly connect motivation to service-delivery outcomes (e.g., teaching effectiveness, research output, community engagement) in the public-university context. Third, in the specific context of Rivers State universities (such as the two institutions in your study), empirical evidence on how motivation operates as a strategic lever is scarce. Thus, this study helps fill this gap by assessing the role of motivation (alongside other strategies) in the service-delivery outcomes for two public universities in Rivers State.

Previous studies affirm that motivation plays a major role in staff commitment and job performance. In south Africa, Van der Westhuizen et al. (2020) found that inadequate incentives reduce academic staff morale and participation in university's activities. In Kenya, Ng'ethe et al (2012) reported that recognition and opportunities for advancement significantly influences staff retention and productivity. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, winter and Sarros (2017) found that supportive leadership and recognition correlate with teaching effectiveness and research output.

(ii) Staff Training and its Impact

Training and continuous professional development are widely accepted as central human-resource practices that enhance staff competence, adaptability and institutional performance. In Nigeria, recent work highlights the importance of training for academic staff job-performance. For example, Ogunode, Ukozor & Chijioke (2024) explored staff training and academic job performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions, finding a positive relationship between continuous training and improved performance in teaching, research and community service. Ehwarieme et al., (2024) conducted a study on staff-training procedures and impacts in Nigerian universities (Delta State University & Edwin Clark University) and concluded that on-the-job training, seminars and job rotations positively affect staff performance, but institutional support for training is weak. In another strand, Okebiorun (2019) studied training and development programmes among non-teaching staff in south-western Nigerian universities. Beyond Nigeria, evidence from other regions reinforces the importance of training. Atinga et al. (2021) in Ghana observed that structured training programmes improved administrative efficiency and student satisfaction. In Malaysia, Daud et al. (2019) reported that training improves ICT proficiency and adaptability among university staff. The findings revealed a positive correlation between training programmes and organizational commitment. These studies underscore that training enhances staff capacity, supports professional development and relates to better institutional outcomes. But again, there are notable gaps. Many studies look at training in isolation (i.e training/performance) rather than as part of an integrated staff-management strategy. Few link training outcomes to the broader service-delivery performance of universities (teaching/learning processes, research outputs, community engagement). Also, specific context-based studies for Rivers State public universities remain limited, especially combining academic and non-academic staff categories. The present study helps address these gaps by investigating how training (as a strategy) influences service delivery within the two selected universities.

(iii) Staff Appraisal and Performance Outcomes

Performance appraisal is another key staff-management strategy often cited in human-resource management literature. Appraisal systems are designed to assess, give feedback, reward and guide staff performance aligned to institutional objectives. In the Nigerian higher-education context, Onyekwere & Azubuike (2023) studied human-resource-development performance appraisal in Nigerian universities (including the two universities in Rivers State) and found that timely appraisal and reward systems are crucial to staff commitments and performance. Brimah & Oduwole (2024) investigated performance appraisal and job productivity of academic staff in Kwara State University and found a strong correlation ($r = 0.755$) between appraisal through teaching-research-community engagement and job productivity. Amarachi et al. (2024) assessed appraisal systems and job performance among library staff in higher institutions; they found the ranking and checklist methods significantly explained performance variability ($r = 0.836$ & $r = 0.862$). These works demonstrate that good appraisal systems support accountability, boost performance, and can link to improved institutional outcomes. Yet there are still important gaps. Most appraisal-research focuses on academic staff only (or library staff) rather than across academic and non-academic staff. Many studies measure internal staff productivity rather than external service delivery metrics (student satisfaction, administrative responsiveness, research/commercialisation). Furthermore, contextually for Rivers State public universities, there is little documented evidence on how appraisal systems operate holistically and link to service delivery. This research thus adds value in examining staff appraisal (alongside motivation and training) in two Rivers State universities and its effect on service delivery. Comparative findings shows that appraisal influences productivity across board. Ssemaala (2020) in Uganda found that appraisal strategies determine academic staff output.

(iv) Service Delivery in Universities

Service delivery in higher education refers broadly to how institutions deliver on their core missions: teaching/learning, research, community engagement and administrative functions. Service delivery is operationalized in terms of teaching quality within university system. Quality service delivery in universities is essential for national development, student satisfaction, and institutional reputation. Edema, Otaror et al., (2024) studied mentoring and organizational-culture effects on quality service delivery in Nigerian public universities and found that mentoring and culture significantly influenced service outcomes. Similarly, ICT capacity has been found to influence service delivery. Abba et al., (2023) found a positive link between ICT usage and academic staff performance in Nigerian universities, which in turn influences service delivery.

Whilst many studies address components of service delivery (e.g., student satisfaction, teaching quality, administrative processes), fewer explicitly investigate the influence of staff management strategies (motivation, training, appraisal) on service delivery outcomes. Also, the service-delivery literature often focuses on student outcomes or facilities, rather than linking back to staff-management practices. In the Nigerian broader context, evidence for the Rivers State universities is limited. Thus, this study contributes by linking staff-management strategies to service-delivery outcomes in that region and by doing so across both academic and non-academic staff populations.

(v) Theoretical Framework

To underpin the analysis of staff-management strategies, several theoretical frameworks are applicable. This study is anchored on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Goal-Setting Theory, which collectively provide a robust foundation for understanding how motivation, training and appraisal influence service delivery in universities. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1966) distinguishes between hygiene factors (salary, work conditions, job security) and motivators (recognition, achievement, professional growth). In the university system, hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction, while motivators enhance commitment, teaching enthusiasm and administrative responsiveness. The theory supports the expectation that motivated staff will perform better in teaching, research and service roles, thereby improving institutional service delivery.

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) posits that investment in people through training and skill development increases individual and organizational productivity. Within universities, training enhances competence in pedagogy, ICT utilization, research skills and administrative functions. Therefore, training is theorized to influence service delivery by improving the capacity of staff to perform their roles effectively. Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) provides the underpinning for performance appraisal in higher institutions. The theory argues that clear goals, measurable performance indicators and constructive feedback improve staff performance and institutional efficiency. Effective appraisal systems create accountability and help align staff behaviours with university objectives, thereby enhancing service delivery outcomes. These three theories jointly frame the study by explaining the pathways through which motivation (Herzberg), training (Human Capital) and appraisal (Goal-Setting) affect service delivery in universities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for capturing existing practices, perceptions, and relationships among variables without experimental manipulation. Descriptive surveys allow researchers to gather data on phenomena as they naturally occur and to summarize the status of variables in a population (Check & Schutt, 2012). As a type of observational design, descriptive studies are useful for describing distributions, patterns, and associations of variables without attempting to infer cause and effect. In the context of this study, the design enabled examination of how staff-management strategies (motivation, training, appraisal) are practiced in two public universities in Rivers State and how these are associated with service delivery outcomes.

The research was conducted in two public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria: Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU). These institutions were purposefully selected because they are major public higher-education providers in Rivers State, making them suitable settings for studying staff management in the state's university system. The target population comprised all staff employed in both

institutions- covering academic, administrative, and technical/non-academic staff. This inclusive population ensures that findings reflect the views and practices across the full workforce, rather than focusing only on academic staff.

To ensure representativeness across different staff categories, stratified random sampling was used. Staff members were first grouped into strata (academic, administrative, technical), and from each stratum respondents were randomly selected in proportion to the stratum's size. This reduces sampling bias and ensures each category is represented fairly. In total, 400 respondents were drawn across both universities. This sample size is considered sufficient for producing stable estimates, supporting descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and inferential hypothesis testing such as z-tests.

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled Staff Management Strategies and Service Delivery Questionnaire (SMSSDQ). The questionnaire was developed based on a review of literature on staff motivation, training/development, appraisal, and service delivery in higher education. It was divided into sections:

- **Section A: Demographic/Profile Items** (e.g. staff category, years of service, university)
- **Section B: Staff Motivation Practices** (e.g. recognition, incentives, career progression)
- **Section C: Training/Development Practices** (e.g. workshops, seminars, ICT training, on-the-job training)
- **Section D: Performance Appraisal Practices** (e.g. frequency, feedback quality, linkage to promotion, fairness)
- **Section E: Service Delivery Outcomes** (e.g. perceptions of teaching quality, research output, administrative efficiency, community engagement)

Items were presented on a Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) using some open-ended questions that allowed for elaboration.

For validity, the SMSSDQ underwent expert review by faculty in higher education management and human resource specialists from Nigerian universities, who evaluated the content, clarity and relevance of items. After revisions, a pilot test was administered to approximately 30 staff members at one of the universities to assess clarity, internal consistency, and to flag ambiguous items. Based on pilot feedback, the instrument was refined (rewriting, reordering) before full deployment.

For reliability, Cronbach's alpha was computed using the pilot data for each subscale (motivation, training, appraisal, service delivery). Each subscale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of ≥ 0.70 , which is generally considered acceptable in social science research (i.e., internal consistency of items). Cronbach's alpha is widely used to assess reliability/internal consistency of multi-item scales. The pilot results were thus deemed satisfactory, allowing the instrument to be used for the main study.

Permission was obtained from the management of both IAUE and RSU to distribute the questionnaires among staff. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and instructions for completion and return.

The questionnaires were administered face-to-face and, where feasible, electronically (via email) to enhance reach. Data collection spanned approximately two weeks, with reminder prompts sent to non-respondents to increase the return rate. Ethical protocols were followed: participants gave informed consent, no identifying information was collected, and the data were stored securely. The 400 questionnaires distributed, were returned (response rate of 100%).

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What staff management strategies are employed in the two public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of IAUE and RSU Staff on Professional Development

Item No	Questionnaire Item	IAUE Staff \bar{X}	SD	RSU Staff \bar{X}	SD	Decision Remark
1	My university provides regular training to staff.	3.42	0.61	2.95	0.74	Agree (Moderate Extent)
2	Performance appraisal is transparent and fair.	2.88	0.65	2.54	0.70	Agree (Moderate Extent)
3	Motivation and incentives improve service delivery.	3.65	0.58	3.12	0.67	Strongly Agree (High Extent)
Grand Mean	—	3.32	—	2.87	—	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree/Positive; Mean < 2.50 = Disagree/Negative

Table 2: z-test Analysis of IAUE and RSU Staff Mean Ratings on Staff Professional Development

Variable	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Z_{cal}	Z_{crit}	Decision ($p < 0.05$)
Training and Development	IAUE Staff	200	3.42	0.61	398	2.45	1.96	Reject H_0 (Significant)
	RSU Staff	200	2.95	0.74				
Performance Appraisal	IAUE	200	2.88	0.65	398	1.32	1.96	Accept H_0 (Not Significant)
	RSU Staff	200	2.54	0.70				
Motivation and Incentives	IAUE Staff	200	3.65	0.58	398	3.72	1.96	Reject H_0 (Significant)
	RSU Staff	200	3.12	0.67				

Table 1 presented the mean ratings and standard deviations of staff at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU) regarding three key staff-management strategies: regular training, transparent performance appraisal, and motivational incentives. For IAUE staff, the item 'My university provides regular training to staff' had a mean of 3.42 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.61, indicating that on average staff agreed that training is provided and that responses were relatively close to that mean. For RSU staff, the corresponding mean was 2.95 (SD = 0.74). While this still falls in the "Agree" range (per the decision rule ≥ 2.50), it is notably lower than the IAUE figure, and the larger SD suggests more disagreement or variability among RSU respondents.

For the item 'Performance appraisal is transparent and fair', IAUE staff had a mean of 2.88 (SD = 0.65) whereas RSU staff scored 2.54 (SD = 0.70). Both mean values hover just above the threshold of 2.50, suggesting only moderate agreement that appraisal is transparent and fair, and the lower mean at RSU indicates a weaker perception in that institution.

For the item 'Motivation and incentives improve service delivery', IAUE staff reported a mean of 3.65 ($SD = 0.58$), indicating strong agreement (i.e., "High Extent") that motivational practices are effective. RSU staff had a mean of 3.12 ($SD = 0.67$), which is still positive but lower. The grand means for the three items were 3.32 for IAUE and 2.87 for RSU, indicating that overall staff at IAUE perceive these staff-management strategies more favourably than their counterparts at RSU.

The descriptive statistics show that while both institutions show positive perceptions of staff-management strategies, IAUE appears to lead RSU in the strength of those perceptions. The moderate mean for appraisal in both institutions suggests this strategy may be less strongly established than training or motivation. The higher variability in RSU responses points to differing experiences or inconsistencies in staff-management practice that may merit institutional review.

In Table 2, the z-test results show that for the variable Training and Development, the calculated z-value (2.45) exceeds the critical value (1.96) at $\alpha = 0.05$, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. This indicates a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of staff at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) and Rivers State University (RSU) regarding the extent to which their institutions provide staff training and development. In practical terms, staff at IAUE perceive training/development practices more favourably than those at RSU. However, for the variable Performance Appraisal, the z-value (1.32) is below the critical threshold (1.96), leading to accepting the null hypothesis: there is no statistically significant difference in how staff at IAUE and RSU perceive the fairness or effectiveness of appraisal systems. This suggests that both institutions may be similar in their appraisal practices. The implication is that while training/development appears to be a differentiating strategy between the two universities, appraisal systems appear to be more uniformly perceived and may thus represent a common area for improvement in both institutions.

Research Question 2: What are the effects of staff management strategies on service delivery in these institutions?

Table showing mean and standard deviation score for effect of Regular training employed in two Universities in Rivers state N=400

Table 3: Mean Ratings of IAUE and RSU Staff on the Effect of Staff Management Strategies on Service Delivery

Item No.	Questionnaire Item	IAUE Staff \bar{x}	SD	RSU Staff \bar{x}	SD	Decision Remark
1	My university provides regular training to staff.	3.42	0.61	2.95	0.74	Agree (Moderate Extent)
2	Performance appraisal is transparent and fair.	2.88	0.65	2.54	0.70	Agree (Moderate Extent)
3	Motivation and incentives improve service delivery.	3.65	0.58	3.12	0.67	Strongly Agree (High Extent)
Grand Mean	—	3.36	—	2.90	—	Agree

Decision Rule: Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agree/Positive; Mean < 2.50 = Disagree/Negative.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of IAUE and RSU Staff Mean Ratings on Staff Management Strategies and Service Delivery

Variable	Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision ($p < 0.05$)
Training and Development	IAUE Staff	200	3.42	0.61	398	2.45	1.96	Reject H_0 (Significant)

	RSU Staff	200	2.95	0.74				
Performance Appraisal	IAUE Staff	200	2.88	0.65	398	1.32	1.96	Accept H_0 (Not Significant)
	RSU Staff	200	2.54	0.70				
Motivation and Incentives	IAUE Staff	200	3.65	0.58	398	3.72	1.96	Reject H_0 (Significant)
	RSU Staff	200	3.12	0.67				
	RSU Staff	200	2.82	0.72				

Decision Rule: If $z\text{-cal} \geq z\text{-crit}$ (1.96), reject H_0 ; if $z\text{-cal} < z\text{-crit}$, accept H_0 .

Table 3 and Table 4 present the mean \pm SD values for staff perceptions of how these strategies influence service delivery and the z-test results comparing means across the two institutions.

For Training and Development, IAUE staff mean = 3.42 (SD = 0.61); RSU staff mean = 2.95 (SD = 0.74). The z-calculated value was 2.45, which exceeds the critical z-value of 1.96 (for $\alpha = 0.05$) as indicated in Table 4. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0 : no significant difference between means) is rejected for this variable, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two institutions in perceptions of training's impact on service delivery.

For Performance Appraisal, IAUE mean = 2.88 (SD = 0.65); RSU mean = 2.54 (SD = 0.70). Here the z-calculated value was 1.32, which is less than the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, we accept H_0 : no significant difference between the institutions in perceptions of appraisal's impact on service delivery.

For Motivation and Incentives, IAUE mean = 3.65 (SD = 0.58); RSU mean = 3.12 (SD = 0.67). The z-calculated value was 3.72, again exceeding 1.96. Thus, the difference is statistically significant, suggesting that staff at IAUE perceive the motivational levers as having a greater effect on service-delivery than RSU staff do.

These z-test results indicate that while motivational strategies and training/development are significantly differently perceived across the two universities, performance-appraisal effects do not differ significantly between them. Specifically, IAUE appears to offer stronger motivational and training practices (or at least staff perceive them as stronger), which correspond to higher agreement levels on their positive impact on service delivery. For RSU, the relatively lower mean scores suggest room for enhancing these strategies. The non-significant difference regarding appraisal suggests both institutions are more alike (and perhaps equally weak) in their appraisal practices perceived impact on service delivery. This signals to university managers that motivational and training initiatives may be relatively more variable (and thus more amenable to targeted improvement) than appraisal systems, and that strengthening appraisal-systems may be a common challenge for both institutions.

In practical terms, these results support the study's central premise that staff-management strategies influence service delivery outcomes. The higher means in the institutions for motivation and training align with improved service-delivery perceptions. University leaders in Rivers State should therefore prioritise interventions in those areas. For example, enhancing staff-motivation mechanisms (recognition, incentives) and bolstering training programmes, as means to enhance service delivery, reduce inefficiencies and contribute to sustainable institutional performance.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that staff motivation and training/development were each significantly positively associated with improved service delivery in the two public universities studied, while performance appraisal, although positively related, did not show significant variation between the two institutions.

The strong positive relationship between staff motivation and service delivery in this study aligns with earlier work in Nigerian higher-education and public-service contexts. For instance, Chidi (2023) found that salary, working environment, training and information availability significantly influenced staff performance in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Similarly, Cletus et al. (2024) reported that motivation levels among academic staff in Nigeria were generally low and linked to factors such as poor remuneration, inadequate infrastructure and weak involvement in decision-making. These prior findings support the current result that when motivational strategies are stronger, staff are better able to contribute to improved service delivery.

The significant effect of training/development is also consistent with existing literature. For example, Osunyikanmi (2024) observed that implementation of training and development policies in Nigerian universities was weak, negatively impacting productivity. Furthermore, studies in university library settings in South-South Nigeria found that training and development of librarians correlated with improved job performance. The current study's finding linking training/development to service delivery builds on these results by extending the outcome beyond productivity to institutional service delivery, and by including both academic and non-academic staff.

The finding regarding appraisal is somewhat more nuanced. Prior studies indicate that performance appraisal systems can influence staff commitment and productivity. For instance, Ibelegbu et al. (2022) found that improved appraisal and promotion practices in state universities in South-East Nigeria are necessary for staff morale and performance. Also, Ebegbetale et al. (2023) showed that appraisal feedback significantly affects work performance, although motivation did *not* always moderate that relationship. In the present study, while appraisal was positively related to service delivery, differences between the two institutions were not statistically significant. This suggests that although appraisal matters, it may be more uniformly implemented (or perceived) across the institutions studied, and thus may not be the distinguishing lever of service delivery in the same way that motivation or training are. It also highlights that appraisal alone might not be sufficient unless combined with motivation and training.

It will be observed that the results largely support the literature that staff-management strategies matter for institutional outcomes, and extend it by showing that in the Rivers State public-university context, motivation and training may be stronger levers for service delivery than appraisal in its current form.

While this study offers important insights into how staff-management strategies, such as motivation, training/development, and performance appraisal, relate to service-delivery outcomes in two public universities in Rivers State, several avenues for future research remain open. First, longitudinal designs should be employed to track changes in staff-management practices and service delivery over time. This will be necessary because a cross-sectional survey captures associations at one point in time, but cannot establish causality or temporal dynamics. Future research could follow cohorts of staff across two or more waves to examine how modifications to motivation, training and appraisal practices influence service-delivery outcomes. Second, qualitative or mixed-method follow-ups are recommended. While a quantitative survey provides breadth, qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) can deepen understanding of how staff experience and interpret management practices, uncover organizational and contextual barriers, and provide rich narrative of mechanisms linking practices to outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research provides empirical evidence from two public universities in Rivers State showing that staff-management strategies, specifically, motivation, training/development and performance appraisal, are positively associated with service delivery outcomes. By focusing on both academic and non-academic staff across multiple institutions, the study extends prior work on human-resource practices in Nigerian higher education, highlighting that motivation and training are stronger levers for service delivery than appraisal in the institutions studied. This contribution helps bridge the gap in staff-management literature in sub-Saharan African universities and offers a contextualized model for service delivery enhancement.

Furtherance to the study findings, the following recommendations will be useful for University Management in Rivers State:

- Introduction or expansion of non-financial incentives (such as recognition awards, professional growth opportunities and involvement in decision-making) alongside timely financial rewards. This will help boost staff morale and commitment, translating into better service delivery.
- Development of structured, ongoing training initiatives (workshops, ICT-based learning, peer mentoring) for all staff categories. Ensure these programmes align with institutional goals and emerging trends in higher education to build competence and adaptability.
- Review current appraisal frameworks to ensure fairness, clarity of criteria, and linkage to development and promotion. Provide regular feedback and use appraisal outcomes to inform training and career progression decisions.

By improving staff-management practices, universities strengthen their capacity to deliver high-quality teaching, research and community engagement. This in turn supports sustainable development by producing competent graduates, generating knowledge for societal challenges, and fostering institutions that contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic advancement of Rivers State and beyond.

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