



Leadership and Reward Practices as determinants of Effective Service Delivery of academic staff in South-East Universities, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on leadership and reward practices as determinants of effective service delivery by academic staff in South-East universities in Nigeria. This study specifically examined the relationship that exists among leadership, reward, and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities in South-East Nigeria. Two research questions posed and two null hypotheses formulated guided the study. A correlational survey research design was used. The population of the study was 1972 academic staff, and the sample was 332 drawn using multi stage sampling technique. Three researcher designed questionnaires titled “Leadership Practice Questionnaire (LPQ)”, “Reward Practice (RP)”, and “Service Delivery Questionnaire (SDQ)” were validated and used for data collection. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC), and Linear Regression model were used to analyze the data. Findings showed that a strong positive relationship exists between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities; a moderate positive relationship exists between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities. More so, a significant relationship exists between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities; a significant relationship exists between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities. It was recommended that universities ought to implement meritocratic and competency-based criteria for leadership appointments. This is because leadership quality directly impacts service delivery.

Keywords: Leadership Practices, Reward Practices, Effective Service Delivery, University Administration in Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Effective service delivery in Nigerian universities, especially in South-East Nigeria, is encountering substantial issues from educational stakeholders. Although universities contribute to quality education, significant research, and community service, (FRN, 2014) numerous difficulties are compromising their effectiveness, such as insufficient funding, substandard working environment, overcrowded classrooms, and ineffective leadership. This has resulted in delayed undergraduate outcomes, insufficient project supervision, low research production, and inconsistent academic calendars. Researchers discovered that these challenges are particularly prevalent among academic staff in public tertiary institutions (Ochai, Akpakwu, and Atama (2025), hence emphasising the necessity for improvements in leadership and reward practices to ensure effective service delivery within these universities.

The assessment of service delivery by university academic staff is conducted through their performance in teaching, research, and community service. The provision of teaching services is essential in any educational institution, as it incorporates both the assessment and supervision of students' academic activities. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) asserts that university education should foster a sense of community among students through projects and action research. University academic staff effectively deliver teaching services by obtaining constructive feedback from students during lectures, conducting individual meetings to discuss academic



progress, facilitating class discussions, guiding student research, and managing class size. The academic staff also provides research services. Agbionu, Anyalor, and Nwali (2019) assert that the research responsibilities of academic staff entail problem investigation, findings presentation, and results publication. Academic staff at universities engage in research, pursue funding, distribute results, cooperate with colleagues, and participate in training, so contributing to knowledge growth and institutional reputation. Academics contend that the effectiveness of research service delivery is contingent upon scholarly research productivity, typically assessed through publications, acquisition of research grants, and provision of research support services that can markedly augment the research competencies of academic staff (Oyeyemi, Ejakpovi, Oyeyemi, and Adeniji, 2019; Chizoba, 2023; Oniyorah, 2021). Community service delivery represents a facet of service provision at universities, wherein academic staff utilise their expertise to address community needs while promoting reciprocal advantages (Hall, Tandon, Tremblay, and Singh, 2017). An academic staff demonstrates effectiveness in these services by implementing community-based learning initiatives, serving as advisors on governmental or civic committees, organising public awareness programs, conducting workshops for community members, and acting as resource persons in workshops and training sessions.

To enable academic staff to proficiently provide high-quality teaching, engage in scholarly research, and partake in community-orientated employ to effectively guide, encourage, and manage teams or organisations initiatives, university administrators must assess the institution's leadership and reward practices. According to Ihua (2024), leadership practice involves the attitudes, techniques, and strategies that leaders utilise to effectively guide, encourage, and manage teams or organisations. In this context, leadership practice emphasises the use of diverse contemporary leadership styles utilised by the university administrator to influence staff members towards achieving the university's vision and mission statement. Leadership practice involves exhibiting confidence, motivating academic staff, articulating the university's vision, establishing elevated standards, fostering innovative problem-solving, bolstering the strengths of academic staff, acknowledging their contributions, offering recognition, valuing exemplary performance, assessing performance, implementing corrective measures, delivering direct feedback, addressing minor issues proactively, providing explicit direction, and making timely decisions. These practices of leadership may impact the service delivery of academic staff, either positively or negatively.

Reward practices are crucial for improving effective service delivery in universities. Udeaja, Amobi, and Ezenwegbu (2021) assert that reward is fundamentally crucial to service delivery and staff success within any organization. Reward practice refer to tactics employed in the workplace to foster employee motivation and augment their efforts in attaining designated objectives (Lilian and Okoye, 2024). In this context, reward practice refers to the measures employed by university administrators to motivate staff members, involving both financial and non-financial methods. These practices involve the timely disbursement of salary, consistent allocation of research allowances, provision of earned academic allowances, issuance of sick leave allowances, settlement of arrears, annual accessibility to TETFund grants, public recognition of academic staff, personalised written commendations, acknowledging academic staff contributions, organization of celebratory events to honour achievements, provision of grants to facilitate academic staff development in teaching, awarding of plaques to exemplary academic staff, promotion accompanied by immediate financial benefits, compliance with promotional criteria, prompt delivery of promotion letters, and uncompromised promotional evaluations. These practices could have an impact on the service delivery of academic staff.

In Nigerian universities, academic staff may hold the positions of professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, lecturer I, lecturer II, assistant lecturer, and graduate assistant. The effectiveness of their service delivery may hinge on the extent to which leadership and reward practices have been implemented in their universities. The Vice-Chancellors of South-East universities are tasked with promoting efficient service delivery by executing leadership and reward practices. Their influence on academic staff service delivery directly affects the quality of graduates, university rankings, and staff reputation.

The researcher observed that the service delivery by academic staff at state universities in South-East Nigeria is ineffective due to various factors, including a lack of direction and objectives, inadequate practical expertise, dependence on antiquated teaching methods, poor technological integration, and insufficient involvement in decision-making by the state government. Academic staff frequently prioritise journal publication solely in relation to promotions, disregarding research and community engagement. Such attitudes result in poor learning outcomes, reduced student satisfaction, and a decline in institutional image. The 2025 Times Higher Education



World University ranking highlighted the exclusion of state universities from this list, indicative of their poor service delivery as measured by critical factors such as teaching and research excellence.

Numerous studies have investigated research on leadership, reward, and effective service delivery outside the university system. Leadership strategies and service delivery have been carried out by researchers (Okachi & Nkwor, 2024; Ihua, 2024; Ekankumo & Dawaye, (2023). Furthermore, the relationship between reward practices and teachers' job performance (Lilian & Okoyo, 2024), reward systems and teacher job dedication (Akpomi & LongJohn, 2023), reward systems and work performance (Mendina, 2024), and reward systems and commitment (Ogolo & Nwaonumah, 2024). These studies, however, did not examine how leadership and reward practices interact to determine effective service delivery. This gap necessitates further investigation of leadership and reward practices as determinants of effective service delivery of academic staff in South-East universities, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Globally, academic staff service delivery is assessed through effective teaching, significant research, and community engagement, essential for universities' missions. In South-East Nigeria, particularly state universities, improving effective service delivery is vital. To meet stakeholder demands and international standards, university administrators must lead, and ensure that staff are being motivated. Adoption of leadership and reward practices is also expected.

Prior to this study, the researcher observed that there are challenges associated with ensuring effective service delivery among academic staff at state universities in South-East Nigeria. Such challenges among others include leadership issues, low motivation, and inadequate institutional support, negatively leading to poor research productivity, ineffective teaching, and student dissatisfaction. These factors raise concerns about the quality and relevance of university education, potentially increasing dropout rates and threatening accreditation status. Nevertheless, the researcher's observation is not sufficient to arrive at a conclusion without full-based research that examines the relationship that exists among leadership practice, reward practice, and effective service delivery of academic staff. Hence, the need to examine leadership and reward practices as determinants of effective service delivery of academic staff in South-East universities, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship that exists among leadership practices, reward practices, and effective service delivery of academic staff in South-East universities, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1 determine the relationship between leadership practices and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities.
- 2 ascertain the relationship between reward practices and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities.

Research Questions

Two research questions posed guided the study.

- 1 What is the relationship between leadership practices and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities?
- 2 What is the relationship between reward practices and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses formulated guided the study and were tested at the probability level of 0.05 level of significance.



H0₁ There is no significant relationship between leadership practices and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities

H0₂ There is no significant relationship between reward practices and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviewed the concept of leadership practice, reward practice, service delivery, and the Nigerian university system.

Leadership Practice

Leadership is a complex, multidimensional concept essential for organizations to achieve specific objectives. Although extensively studied, a universally accepted definition remains elusive. According to Hanson (2017) leadership has the capacity to influence people in a manner that allows them to feel empowered and accomplished, without resorting to coercion. Lipham (2016) opined that the leadership process entails an asymmetrical allocation of power between leaders and group members, with a primary emphasis on achieving goals. Consequently, it is imperative for every organization to possess it, since its absence may hinder the attainment of objectives. In a university setting, leadership is defined as the capacity of an administrator, such as a vice-chancellor, to influence staff in achieving the university's vision and mission, significantly impacting organizational success. Leadership has traditionally been essential across civilizations for directing conduct and attaining goals.

Leadership practice is essential to the daily operations and overall success of any organization. Yukl (2019) defined leadership practice as the acts and tactics leaders use to steer their teams, including articulating a clear vision, building trust, and encouraging cooperation. Leadership practice in this context, refers to the application of various contemporary leadership behaviours employed by the university administrator to exert influence on his or her staff so as to guide them towards the attainment of the university's vision and mission statement. Leadership practices include exhibiting confidence, motivating academic staff, articulating the university's vision, establishing elevated standards, fostering innovative problem-solving, bolstering the strengths of academic staff among others. Purwanto, Bernarto, Asbari, Wijayanti, Choi, and Hyun (2022) argued that a suitable leadership practice has the ability can to forecast the performance of teaching staff in educational institutions. Adopting a specific leadership practice could have a significant impact on the delivery of services by academic staff in higher education institutions. UI Haq, Jabbar, and Gill (2023) propose that higher education administrators can enhance the performance of the academic staff by implementing a blend of diverse contemporary leadership practices. Bada and Atanda (2021) concluded that leadership practices did not significantly influence service delivery of academic staff, but Ihua (2024) determined that leadership practices to a high extent enhances service delivery of staff.

Reward Practice

Reward is fundamentally crucial to effective service delivery and staff success within any organization. Ogbonna and Chizoba (2022) are of the opinion that reward is a primary factor that, in their absence, will result in dissatisfaction, and their presence will generate feelings of satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction. Emilianova (2019) defines reward as the process of creating and executing strategies, policies, and systems that assist the organization in achieving its objectives by retaining and recruiting the necessary personnel and enhancing their motivation and dedication. Igomu and Aakoo (2023) defined reward practice as a set of tactics that an organization utilizes to recognize and recompense. Akpomi and Long John (2023) are of the view that reward practices available to organizations are categorized as monetary and non-monetary reward. Several scholars identified reward systems to include extrinsic reward and intrinsic reward (Iremeka, Ezepue, Ede, & Amaeze, 2023; Odejimi and Mbaegbu, 2023; Kerketta and Chauhan, 2023). Reward practices include timely payment of salaries and allowances, accessibility of TETFund grants, public acknowledgment of academic staff, personalized recognition, celebratory events, teaching development grants, awards for excellence, promotions with financial benefits, adherence to promotion standards, and prompt issuance of promotion letters. These reward practices could influence service delivery of academic staff either positively or negatively. Adetunji,



Abari, and Mohammed (2020) in their findings observed that there exists a low, negative, and significant relationship between reward system and teachers' attitude to work in secondary schools. Although, Medina (2024) found a contrary opinion in his study carried out in Universities and Colleges in the Philippines that a moderate, strong, and positive relation exists between reward systems and performance of faculty members.

Service Delivery

Service delivery is very vital towards achieving the goal of universities. Service delivery refers to the manner in which staff operate within the organizational system to provide services that may be either satisfactory or unsatisfactory (Ajaegbo, 2020). Academic staff service delivery refers to the quality of work that academic staff at Nigerian universities is required to do (Utup, 2024). Abiodun-Oyebanji (2019) defined academic staff service delivery as the expected level of academic staff performance within the university system. In this context, academic staff service delivery refers to the diverse methods employed by an academic staff to offer his or her responsibility so as to impart knowledge, and contribution to the achievement of the vision and mission statement of the university. Service delivery in the universities are based on academic service delivery and supportive academic service delivery (Ochai, *et al*, 2025). The academic staff provides the academic services which include teaching services, community services, research services, supervision services, mentoring services, record keeping services, and advising services. The researcher anchors the dimensions of service delivery on teaching, research, and community services. These form the basis of measuring service delivery of academic staff.

Teaching is one of the dimensions of service delivery. As part of their service delivery, academic staff provide teaching, which includes various tasks and activities. Okpa (2019) defines teaching as the application of instructional strategies to students' desired learning outcomes. According to Uzoigwe (2021) teaching is a systematic and interactive process by which an academic staff imparts knowledge and skills to the learners. Razalli, Kamaruddin, Tek, Teck, and Daud (2021) describe teaching in university to involve tasks such as planning, management, delivery, mentoring, and assessment with the aim of disseminating knowledge or skills to students in an effective way. In this context, teaching is a comprehensive and complex process that incorporates several methods to facilitate knowledge acquisition and assist learning. An academic staff teaching services includes course preparation, lecture delivery, facilitating discussions, providing feedback, supervising and assessing students, mentoring, managing classrooms, integrating technology, and creating course materials. These responsibilities demand significant time and effort, as universities expect effective delivery of these services. According to Walters and Openjuru (2016) academic staff are required to demonstrate effectiveness by delivering relevant content, preparing thoroughly, using suitable methodologies, and assessing student progress and assessing student progress.

Research is an essential task of an academic staff that plays a pivotal function with the university. According to Turk and Ledic (2016), it is very crucial towards career advancement in the academic system. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) describe research as a meticulous way of making inquiries into the future, by finding out, initiating knowledge, and giving solutions to questions. Research is a rigorous academic process involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to generate new knowledge. In universities, an academic staff engages in some research services through conducting academic research, obtaining research grants, disseminating research findings, collaborating with fellow researchers, participating in research training opportunities, supporting university's research policies, and publishing in impact factor journals, book chapters among others. These research services provided by academic staff are crucial for the advancement of knowledge, the improvement of the educational experiences of their students, and the boosting of academic prestige of themselves, and their institution. Supporting this assertion, Oniyorah (2021) opines that offering research support services can significantly improve academic staff in their research endeavours. An academic staff demonstrates effectiveness in these research services through increase in research productivity. Research productivity according to Oyeyemi, Ejakpovi, Oyeyemi, and Adeniji (2019) is measured by the number of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, referred books, book chapters, h-index, awarded research grants, and conference proceedings.

Community service delivery

Community service delivery is an aspect of service delivery that enhances effectiveness. According to Netting, Kettner, McMurtry, and Thomas (2017) community service delivery focuses on improving the standard lifestyles



for individuals and communities, by addressing needs and increasing social satisfaction. Nkono and Ekanem (2020) describe community service as the intentional engagement with the community which addresses the community needs to promote mutual benefits between the university and the public. Contextually, community service can be referred to as a voluntary and collaborative endeavour undertaken by an academic staff to address societal concerns. Academic staff members engage actively with their communities through public lectures, workshops, and civic activities, collaborate with industries, and contribute to educational outreach. They work with community organizations, act as liaisons between the university and the community, support local initiatives, and participate in advisory committees. Their effectiveness is demonstrated by leading community-based learning projects, advising on civic committees, and organizing workshops for community members.

University Administration in Nigeria

University education in Nigeria refers to the post-basic education provided by universities in the country, aiming to equip students with advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies in various fields. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014), tertiary education which covers university education and all other post-secondary section of the national education system shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation; (b) making professional course contents reflect our national requirements; (c) making all students part of a general programme of all-round improvements in university education, to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge, nationalism, and information Technology (IT); (d) making entrepreneurial skills acquisition a requirement for all Nigerian universities . (p: 41).

University education in Nigeria aims to achieve several goals, including high-quality student intake, teaching, and facilities. It emphasizes research and development, staff welfare, and a curriculum that meets labor market needs. The system promotes diverse learning modes and access to training funds, alongside initiatives like the students industrial work experience scheme (SIWES). Additionally, it enforces educational standards, equitable access through scholarships and loans, inter-institutional cooperation, and community services. The realization of the universities' goals and objectives is dependent on effective administration according to Ogunode and Abubakar (2020). Administration is key to the development of university education in Nigeria. University administration in Nigeria is a critical pillar in the success of higher education that requires visionary leadership, sound policies, efficient resource management, and responsiveness to the needs of students and staff. Ogunode and Abubakar (2020) further defined university administration as application of the universities' resources to implement the teaching programme, research programme and the community service programme of the universities with the aims of realizing the objectives of the universities. In this context, university administration refers to the structured process of managing, organizing, and coordinating the various activities, resources, and functions within a university to ensure effective teaching, research, and community service. It involves the management of academic and non-academic affairs, including teaching, research, student services, staffing, finance, infrastructure, and policy implementation.

University administration in Nigeria is characterized by a three-tier governance structure consisting of the Governing Council, Senate, and university management. University administration in Nigeria is characterized by a three-tier governance structure. This consists of a governing council responsible for policy formulation and financial oversight, a senate that oversees academic matters such as curriculum and standards, and a management team led by the vice-chancellor that implements policies and manages daily operations. Aguba (2016) observed that in Nigeria, university administration is structured around two key statutory organs: the Governing Council and the Senate. The Governing Council, chaired by the pro-chancellor, oversees the university's policies and operations, including finance, staff conditions, and property management. Conversely, the Senate, led by the vice-chancellor, handles academic responsibilities such as course provision and syllabus approval. The second important aspect in university administration is the principal officers. The principal officers include the Vice-Chancellor, deputy vice-chancellors, registrar, bursar, and librarian, each responsible for distinct areas. Academic administration involves organizing programs, managing departments and faculties, and ensuring accreditation and quality assurance. Student administration, overseen by the Dean of Students Affairs, focuses



on admissions, records, welfare, and extracurricular activities. Lastly, administrative functions entail policy implementation, budgeting, human resources, facility maintenance, and ICT services.

University administration in Nigeria has not been an easy task because of the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria. The Nigerian state universities in recent times have come under attacks for poor performance. The quality of the state universities in Nigeria is going down due to poor management. The researcher observed that some state universities in Nigeria face several challenges including: inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, irregular salary payment, political interference, frequent strikes, low research output, brain drain, high student population and overcrowding, limited autonomy, poor industry collaboration, unstable academic calendar, and security challenges. Supporting this view, Aguba (2016) identified poor funding, students' personnel and staff personnel administration matters as some of the challenges facing university administration. According to Ogunode and Abubakar (2020) some of the challenges of university administration includes inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities, brain drain, insecurity, strike actions, corruption, inadequate data to plan, and weak administrators

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work was based on two theories; Transformational leadership, and Expectancy.

Transformational Leadership Theory

James V. Downton was the originator of the word "transformational leadership" in 1973; however, Burns significantly developed the notion in 1978 by highlighting the need for leaders to have a compelling vision and charismatic personality in motivating team members. Bass elaborated on the concept in 1985 by developing the "Bass Transformational Leadership Theory." He showed how to measure effectiveness by stating that followers are more likely to emulate leaders who show real excitement. Bass stated that transformative leaders provide their followers with personal advantages, a profound feeling of purpose, and a robust sense of self. This builds trust, loyalty, and respect, which pushes followers to go beyond their comfort zones. Transformational leadership is important for excellent management because it gives individuals power by letting them make decisions and encourages new ideas. This technique fosters autonomy and accountability, resulting in increased commitment and productivity in the workplace. It motivates individuals to recognise their potential by altering their attitudes and objectives, fostering trust, and establishing common goals. It emphasises explicit objectives, cognitive development, and collaboration in educational institutions. A vice-chancellor at a university must be honest, support change, and motivate the university community by taking risks and setting a clear path for change. He urges educators to reevaluate their concepts and pedagogical approaches while advocating for elevated standards. These leaders want to see change, are good at communicating, and encourage teamwork, which makes it easier for staff to give their best ideas and be involved in assessing student success. They model the best behaviour, give advice, and help others while putting the needs of their followers first. These leadership attributes will significantly improve service delivery among university academic staff, hence affecting students' learning outcomes. The research conducted by Septi, Nila, and Muhammad (2018) demonstrates that transformational leadership enhances learning outcomes at SMK Negeri in Palembang, Indonesia.

Expectancy Theory

The expectancy theory was developed by Victor Vroom in 1964. This theory posits that motivation is driven by the belief that effort will lead to desired performance and outcomes. That is to say that people are motivated when they believe that their effort will lead to good performance, and that performance will lead to rewards they actually want. This theory can be used to explain why a significant number of employees put in low levels of effort in carrying out job responsibilities. The expectancy theory focuses on three components; expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. The expectancy is the belief that effort will lead to good performance. It tries to answer how strong the perceived relationship between the individual's effort and performance of the behavior is. The instrumentality is the degree to which the individual believes that performing at a particular level will lead to the attainment of a desired outcome. It answers how strong the perceived relationship between performing a behavior and the desired outcome is. The valence refers to the degree an organizational reward satisfies an individual's personal goals or needs. It answers how desirable a particular outcome to an individual is. Expectancy theory tries to explain why a lot of employees are not motivated on their jobs and so merely do the



minimum necessary things to get by. When an individual perceives that effort cannot provide the anticipated outcomes, or if there is a disconnection between effort and achievement, the expectancy is minimal, approaching zero. In a scenario where the individual perceives a weak relationship between effort and performance, he may believe that work could potentially yield the desired outcome, resulting in a moderate anticipation, ranging from zero to one. If the individual earnestly desired the outcome, its valence is positive, specifically exceeding one. The implication is that an employee tries to help achieve the organizational goals in the hope that his personal objectives will be achieved from there. This theory is significant in the university system because the effectiveness of academic staff will be improved. This is because when university administrators recognize and reward hard work and diligence of the academic staff, this will motivate them and will make them put more effort into the delivery of services.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Relevant literature has been examined about leadership and reward practices. Empirical data indicates that leadership practices in Nigerian university libraries are unrelated to service delivery (Bada & Atanda, 2021). Conversely, leadership practice in senior secondary schools in Nigeria significantly improve staff service delivery (Ihua, 2024). Literature indicates that the leadership strategies utilised by the Bayelsa Education Development Trust Fund in Nigeria significantly impact the quality of education service delivery. Ekankumo and Dawaye (2023) discovered that democratic and charismatic leadership strategies are significantly present to a very high degree, but authoritarian and laissez-faire strategies are minimally present to very low degree, and transactional leadership exists to a low degree. Furthermore, research indicates that several obstacles impede successful service delivery in Namibia, including logistical issues, political interference, insufficient human resources, and financial limitations (Atiku, Kurana, & Ganiyi, 2023). Okachi and Nkwor (2024) discovered that some strategies such as capacity building, delegation of authority, proactive conflict resolution, human resource management, and accountability improve the quality of educational service delivery in Nigeria. Research indicates that reward strategies and systems exhibit a moderate, significant positive relationship with staff performance in higher education institutions in the Philippines and Nigeria, respectively (Mendina, 2024; Ezeaku, 2025; Motendo, Atambo & Abuga; Lilian & Okoyo, 2024). Empirical data indicates that reward systems relate with job participation, job dedication, teacher productivity, and staff commitment (Akpomi & LongJohn, 2023; Adetunji, Abari, & Mohammed, 2020; Ogolo & Nwaonumah, 2024). The literature review discovered that prior research has examined leadership, and reward with relation to service delivery, job involvement, job dedication, teacher productivity, commitment, and performance in isolation; however, no study has jointly addressed both variables, thus identifying the gap this research aims to fill. The research evidence did not demonstrate the relationship among leadership practice, reward practice, and effective service delivery, particularly in selected institutions in the South-East states. This research has addressed this gap.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational survey research design. The area of the study is South-East, Nigeria. South-East is one of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The South-East state is made up of Abia, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Anambra. The population of the study comprised all the 1972 academic staff in three selected universities in South-East, Nigeria. These states are Abia State University Uturu (ABSU) with 508 academic staff, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam (COOUI) with 701 academic staff, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) with 763 academic staff. All the faculties in the three state universities were used. Also, the following academic staff cadres were used for the study: Professor, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturer 1, Lecturer 11, and Assistant Lecturers. The sample size was 332 academic staff which were drawn from three selected state universities in South-East Nigeria. Taro Yamane of 5% margin of error was used to decide the sample size. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample of the study. In the first stage, the purposive sampling technique was used to select three universities from the three selected states namely ABSU, COOUI, AND ESUT based on the available institutional statistical information. In the second stage, the stratified random sampling with Bowler's proportional allocation formula was used to select the sample size for the actual academic staff. Three researchers designed questionnaires titled "Leadership Practices Questionnaire (LPQ)", "Reward Practices Questionnaire (RPQ)", and "Service Delivery Questionnaire (SDQ)". The questionnaire comprises a total of 45 items, each with a total of 15 items categorized into two sections, A and B. Section A dealt with the demographic data of the respondents, which included the university code, while section B dealt with information on the researcher designed questionnaire. The response format for

LPQ and RPQ were a four (4) point response scale of always (A), sometimes (S), rarely (R), and never (N), while for SDQ was strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, with weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Three experts validated the instruments, two from Educational Administration & Planning, and one from Measurement and Evaluation. The researcher requested that the experts study the items of the instruments, assess the suitability of the language, adequacy, and relevance of the items. On the basis of their input, the researcher effected the corrections, and used it to produce the final draft of the instrument. The internal consistency reliability of the three instruments which were 0.85, 0.83, and 0.85 respectively was established using Cronbach Alpha method. The researcher administered the instrument with three research assistants. The data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC), and Linear Regression Analysis. The decision rule shown below for determining the coefficient of correlation was derived from the work of Evans (1996). A score range of 0.01 to 0.19 is very low; 0.20 - 0.39 is low; 0.40 - 0.59 is moderate; 0.60 - 0.79 is strong; and 0.80 - 1.00 is very strong. More so, a correlation coefficient is statistically not significant if the significant value of .000 is more than the probability value of 0.05 ($p \text{ value} > 0.05$) in which case the null hypothesis will be accepted; a correlation coefficient is statistically significant when the significant value of .000 is less than the probability value of 0.05 ($p \text{ value} < 0.05$) the null hypothesis will be rejected.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What is the relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities?

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff.

Variables	N	R	R ²	Decision	
leadership practice		0.610	0.372	Strong Relationship	Positive
effective service delivery	332				

R= 0.01 – 0.19 (Very Low), 0.20 – 0.39 (Low), 0.40 – 0.59 (Moderate), 0.60 – 0.79 (Strong) and 0.80 – 1.00 (Very Strong); f^2 value of 0.02 indicates small effect, 0.15 indicates moderate effect, and 0.35 indicates large effect.

Data on Table 1 showed that Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient is given as 0.610. This implies that there is a strong positive relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities. Using the Cohen’s f^2 to determine the effect size, the r^2 which is 0.372 implies 37.2% of effective service delivery of academic staff can be attributed to leadership practice representing a large effect size of $f^2=0.59$. This indicates a strong positive increase in leadership practice leads to a corresponding strong positive increase in effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities.

Research question 2: What is the relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities?

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff

Variables	N	R	R ²	Decision	
reward practice		0.403	0.162	Moderate Relationship	Positive
effective service delivery	332				



$R = 0.01 - 0.19$ (Very Low), $0.20 - 0.39$ (Low), $0.40 - 0.59$ (Moderate), $0.60 - 0.79$ (Strong) and $0.80 - 1.00$ (Very Strong); f^2 value of 0.02 indicates small effect, 0.15 indicates moderate effect, and 0.35 indicates large effect.

Data on Table 2 showed that Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient is given as 0.403. This implies that there is a moderate positive relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities. Using the Cohen's f^2 to determine the effect size, the r^2 which is 0.162 implies 16.2% of effective service delivery of academic staff can be attributed to reward practice representing a moderate effect size of $f^2=0.15$. This indicates a moderate positive increase in leadership practice leads to a corresponding moderate positive increase in effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities.

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities.

Table 3: Linear regression analysis on no significant relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
	Regression	3433.868	1	3433.868	185.192	.000 ^b	Significant
1	Residual	6118.937	330	18.542			
	Total	9552.804	331				

Data on Table 3 reveals the linear regression analysis on no significant relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery among academic staff in state universities. The result revealed that the F value is 185.192, with a degree of freedom of 1 and 330, the hypothesis is rejected because the significant value of .000 is less than the probability value of .05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery in state universities.

Table 4: Linear regression analysis on no significant relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery among academic staff in state universities

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
	Regression	1551.804	1	1551.804	64.004	.000 ^b	Significant
1	Residual	8001.000	330	24.245			
	Total	9552.804	331				

Data on Table 4 reveals the linear regression analysis on no significant relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities. The result revealed that the F showed that the F value is 64.004 with a degree of freedom of 1 and 330, the hypothesis is rejected because the significant value of .000 is less than the probability value of .05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data presented in Table one revealed that leadership practice has a strong positive relationship with effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities in South-East Nigeria. The corresponding hypothesis in Table three revealed that there is a significant relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery in state universities. The researcher attributed it to the behaviours exhibited by the university administrators which include confidence, motivating and assisting academic staff, communicating the



university's goal to the academic staff, elevating standards, fostering innovative problem-solving, strengthening academic staff capabilities, offering clear guidance, addressing minor concerns presented by staff members, and executing rapid decision-making. The finding is supported by Bass's transformational theory, which asserts that leaders offer not only personal benefits but also a deep sense of purpose and self-identity, trust, vision, loyalty, and respect, hence fostering an environment where followers are encouraged to surpass their comfort zones. The implication is that when university administrators exhibit these leadership practices, the quality of service delivery by academic staff enhances. This finding aligns with Ihua (2024), who conducted study on leadership practices affecting teachers' quality service delivery in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria, and found that leadership practices significantly improve staff service delivery. Nonetheless, it contradicts the findings of Bada and Atanda (2021), who concluded that leadership approaches did not significantly influence staff service delivery.

The data presented in Table two revealed that a moderate positive relationship exists between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities in South-East Nigeria. The corresponding hypothesis in Table four revealed that there is a significant relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff in state universities in the South-East. The researcher attributed the result to the inconsistency in agreement existing in the policies of the state government with the university management on the financial and non-financial needs of the academic staff. In universities, payment of basic salary, research allowance, earned academic allowance, and accumulated arrears are usually delayed. More so, public acknowledge of academic staff which can be in form of written personalized messages, hosting of events, awarding plagues, is not imbibe as a yearly culture. TETFund yearly grant is not usually accessible. Issues on promotion with immediate financial benefit, prompt issuance of promotion letters, and adherence to promotional standard without compromise is not handled properly. The finding is supported by Vroom expectancy theory that posits that motivation is driven by the belief that effort will lead to desired performance and outcomes. That is to say that people are motivated when they believe that their effort will lead to good performance, and that performance will lead to rewards they actually want. The implication is that the level of academic staff service delivery moderately decreases if staff welfare is not adhered to. The finding is consistent with Medina (2024) in his study carried out in universities and colleges in the Philippines that a moderate positive relationship exists between reward systems and performance of faculty members. In a contrary view, Adetunji, Abari, and Mohammed (2020) in their findings observed that there exists a low, negative, and significant relationship between reward system and teachers' attitude to work in secondary schools.

The main limitation of this study is the inability to generalise the research findings. The geographical coverage included only three state out of five state universities in South-East Nigeria. This is due to the lack of statistical data regarding the populations of the two states at the time of the research.

CONCLUSION

This study examines leadership and reward practices as determinants of effective service delivery of academic staff in South-East Universities, Nigeria. This study demonstrates a strong and positive relationship between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff. The study demonstrated a moderate positive relationship between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff. A significant relationship exists between leadership practice and effective service delivery of academic staff, as well as between reward practice and effective service delivery of academic staff. Leadership and reward practices are crucial due to their relationship with effective service delivery of academic staff in Nigerian universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- 1 Universities ought to implement meritocratic and competency-based criteria for leadership appointments. This is because leadership quality directly impacts service delivery.



- 2 The state government should annually review the institutional financial and non-financial reward policies. This review will assist in addressing the immediate and emerging demands of the academic staff to enhance their service delivery significantly.

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