

# Effect of Moral Incentives on the Performance of Academic Staff of Selected Universities in North Central Nigeria

**Vivien Anna UGBA (Ph.D)**

Department of Business Management, Benue State Univeristy, Makurdi-Nigeria

**Victor UTOR (Ph.D)**

Department of Business Management, Benue State Univeristy, Makurdi-Nigeria

**Simeon Terhile NOMHWANGE (Ph.D)**

Department of Business Administration, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka Univeristy, Makurdi-Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The study explored the effect of moral incentives on performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central Nigeria. The study specifically examined the effect of recognition, employee participation and workplace flexibility on performance of academic staff. The study utilized a survey research design and questionnaire was used for the collection of data. The population of the study consisted of 4076 academic staff of five selected Universities in North Central Nigeria. A sample size of 364 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. The validity and reliability of instrument was conducted to ensure internal consistency of the measurement items and data collected from the participants was analyzed using regression analysis with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23). The study found that recognition, employee participation and workplace flexibility had a positive and significant effect on the performance of academic staff of selected Universities in North Central Nigeria. The study concluded that moral incentives provided by Universities help in improving the performance of employees. It recommended that Universities in Nigeria should constantly appreciate and recognize outstanding employees as a way of enhancing their performance; they should put in place mechanisms that will encourage the involvement of employees in decision-making and flexible work schedules should be provided to help employees in managing their work load and personal life.*

**Keywords:** *Moral Incentives, Recognition, Participation, Workplace Flexibility, Employee Performance, Quality of Work, Timeliness*

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## 1.0

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The performance of employees in any organization is essential, not only for the growth of the organization, but also for individual employees. Human resources in modern organizations are regarded as the most essential assets for organizational success. With the present global economic trend, employee performance is a fundamental issue for employers of labour that want their organizations to compete auspiciously. Organizations all over the world are therefore concerned with developing effective human capital strategies to enhance employee performance (Cherif, 2020), and increasingly striving to have dedicated, satisfied and committed staff that work towards the achievement of organizational goals (Omar, Ali & Masrom, 2020). There is an increasing need for organizations to understand appropriate reward policies that will motivate employees for increased performance (Benatallah & Rosman, 2022).

Incentives are designed to encourage performance of employees in the workplace and they play an important role in promoting the capacity of employees and motivating them to develop skills and abilities to meet individual needs thereby improving their performance (Elumah, Ibrahim & Shobayo, 2016). Employees are motivated by financial incentives such as increase in pay, promotions and bonus, while others are motivated by moral incentives such as appreciation, praise and recognition. The modern-day employees are not simply motivated by their salary hence, the need to encourage the participation and performance of workers by organizations through the provision of moral incentives (Abdullah, 2022).

Moral incentives are a set of motives aimed at achieving emotional and psychological balance and humanitarian needs of employees by treating them properly and eliminating issues that may bring up complaints in the workplace. Moral incentives could be in the form of workplace flexibility, participatory decision-making and recognition or appreciation to employees (Almahdi, 2017; Ghazal, 2022). Workplace flexibility allows employees to have control over their schedules enabling them to balance their work and personal life (Hussain, Shah & Raza, 2023). Recognition is the acknowledgement of employees for exemplary performance or accomplishments of tasks at workplace. Employee participation involves the involvement of employees in the activities of organizations and the nature of their job (Al-Qudah, 2016). Nyaribo and Naykundi (2016) stated that moral incentives promote employees' performance in area of efficiency, effectiveness at work process, and service delivery. Employee performance is the completion of a specific task by employees to attain set goals.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The performance of employees is measured through the quality of work and timeliness of output. Educational institutions are expected to give attention to employees, their selection process, and the provision of the necessary competency and skills to increase their productivity at work (Ali & Wadi, 2016). Universities all over the world are formal institutions set up by the government and individuals or organized groups and recognized as centers of excellence, where knowledge is not only acquired, but also disseminated to those who require it (Ghawanmeh & Abumaal, 2021). In Nigeria, universities are facing daunting challenges, especially the poor performance of employees due to poor working conditions. The performance of academic staff of universities is declining due to work overload, poor pay and poor facilities, and most of the institutions do not formulate an integrated system of incentives to encourage employees in providing quality services (Shehu, 2021). The performance of academic staff in Nigerian universities is gradually declining because of poor incentives plans, and the provision of moral incentives has not received adequate attention in Nigerian universities. It is from the foregoing that this study was set out to investigate the effect of moral incentives on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria.

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study is carried out to investigate the effect of moral incentives on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria. The study specifically;

- i. Examine the effect of recognition on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria;
- ii. Ascertain the effect of employee participation on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria;

- iii. Determine the effect of workplace flexibility on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria.

#### **1.4 Hypotheses**

- H<sub>01</sub>:** Recognition has no significant effect on performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria
- H<sub>02</sub>:** Employee participation has no significant effect on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria
- H<sub>03</sub>:** Workplace flexibility has no significant effect on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria

## **2.0**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Concept of Moral Incentives**

Incentives that employees receive within the organization are vehicles through which the goals and aspirations of organizations can be achieved. One of the best ways to encourage employees to be more efficient and effective is to actually give them a reason to do so. Incentives are designed to encourage the employees to work and achieve timely targets as well as to advance their work for improved performance (Sahi, Sudan & Singh, 2017). Moral incentives are motivation drivers not in form of material or money but more into psychology appreciation and recognition that are given to individuals as rewards for work achievement (Benatallah & Rosman, 2022). This implies that moral incentives are provided to compliment financial incentives.

Moral incentives are related to the psycho-social needs in relation to the human relations theories; they are based on employers respecting the feelings of their employees, their hopes and aspirations (Elumah, Ibrahim & Shobayo, 2016). Moral incentives are provided in the form of participatory decision-making, certificates of appreciation, training and parties for deserving employees. These incentives meet the individual psychological and social needs (Celik & Ora, 2021). Moral incentives fulfill the needs of the individuals such as self-realization and appreciation, respect and social acceptance that they receive (Yousif, 2017). The above definitions suggest that moral incentives are based on the idea that every human being has the right to respect since they have feelings, objectives, and aspirations. In the university system, the purpose of moral incentives is to reward employees for their excellent job performance through opportunities, including flexible work hours, greater participation, verbal recognition, training and education, pleasant work environment, and sabbaticals (Al-Bahadli, 2018).

### **2.2 Dimensions of Moral Incentives**

In this study the dimensions of moral incentives include recognition, employee participation or involvement and workplace flexibility.

#### **i. Recognition**

Employee recognition refers to the appreciation shown for employees' contribution or exemplary performance to the organization (Rozi & Sunarsi, 2020). Organizations offer employee recognition in various ways ranging from the provisions of gifts cards, certificates, shopping vouchers, 'thank you', praise dinners, trophies, career advancement opportunities, trainings, appreciating ideas and respect where it deserves (Oburu & Atambo, 2016). The goal of employee recognition in the workplace is to reinforce particular behaviors or actions and activities that result in better performance and positive organizational results (Siddiqui, 2019). Verbally conveyed social acknowledgments boost employees' performance. Recognition helps to raise employees' self-

esteem, which in turn spur greater effort and better results (Tsutsumi & Kwakami, 2017). Recognizing the workers for a job well done will make them feel appreciated and encourage them to continue increasing their efficiency. This implies that having efforts noticed and valued can be a great motivator and encourage employees to stay with an organization.

## **ii. Participation**

Participation refers to the involvement of employees in decision-making and affairs of the organization (Putri, 2020). The goal of participation is to ensure that employees are actively involved in decision-making and problem-solving activities, thereby creating a sense of belonging. The potential for participation among employees is the basis of intrinsic motivation (Isichei & Godwin, 2015). Brown (2016) explains that participation is essential to igniting employee satisfaction. It keeps workers interested in their jobs and gives them a sense of purpose, which in turn boosts performance. Employees who actively participate in organizational affairs are inspired to work more and this boosts their commitment to the organization to achieve better results (Ferne & Metcalf, 2015; Dede, 2019). This implies that participation results to commitment and improved performance by employees in an organization.

## **iii. Workplace Flexibility**

Workplace flexibility is defined as the existence of certain opportunities in the workplace that provides opportunities for employees to have greater control over their schedules, enabling them to better balance their work and personal life (Beltrán-Martín & Roca-Puig, 2013). Workers seek flexibility to address their personal and family needs, including childcare, eldercare, schooling, and healthcare (Bal & Jansen, 2016). Work flexibility accommodates workers by enabling them to allocate resources between work and non-work domains according to their preferences. Flexible workplace practices are often primarily designed to address employer needs in the organization, and they help to improve the work-life balance of employees in consistent with organizational goals (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). This helps to reduce absenteeism and improves job satisfaction as well as work performance.

## **2.3 Employee Performance**

Employee performance is the rate at which employees are able to complete tasks assigned to them over a period of time. Employee performance is defined as the extent to which staff contribute to achieving organizational goals of the (Youssif, 2017). Performance of employees involves the quality of output, timeliness of output, creativity at work and cooperativeness (Rida, & Siddiqui, 2019). Performance is associated with quality of output and timeliness of output, presence and attendance on the job, efficiency of the work completed and effectiveness of work completed (Mamdani & Minhaj, 2016).

## **2.4 Measures of Employee Performance**

Employee performance is thus the outcomes of work achieved over time and is measured using quality of work and timeliness.

### **i. Quality of Work**

Quality of work is the value of work delivered by employees in an organization and this includes quality of task completion and interactions (Achie & Kurah, 2016). According to Victor and Kathaluwage (2019), quality of work done involves efficient completion of services with little

direction and supervision. Altrasi (2014) argues that to maintain quality of work, organizations should recognize effort put forth by employees. Quality of work is affected by accurate job placement.

## ii. Timeliness

Timeliness refers to timely delivery of work in terms of schedules and meeting deadlines. It recognizes employees who complete work on time and meet deadline (Mohammad, 2013). According to Kintayo (2014), timeliness of employees is affected by a number of factors which include among others, work responsibilities, skills required in the job, work environment and job motivation. Timely completion of work is a good determinant of staff performance (Rao, 2015). This indicates that the period for completion of work is very important in measuring performance by organizations.

## 2.5 Nexus between Moral Incentives and Employee Performance

A plethora of studies have demonstrated the role of moral incentives on the performance of different organizations. Shehu (2021), explored the role of incentives in increasing employees' efficiency in Bayero University Kano and found that moral incentives increase employees' efficiency. It also revealed that recognition of outstanding performance through merit award or certificate boosts morale and improve the efficiency of employees. The results of the study by Waqar, Sana, Kashif and Ahson (2018), established that moral incentives such as recognition, work flexibility, feedback to employees, freedom and advancement opportunities positively affect job satisfaction and performance in the workplace.

Alnsoura and Kanaanb (2021), in their study on the effect of moral incentives on job tenure of academics in Jordanian universities discovered that training and education, recreational facilities, occupational health, and flexible working hours, breaks, and sabbatical have positive significant effects on job tenure. Elumah, Ibrahim and Shobayo (2016), also averred that moral incentives significantly impact on employees' performance in Nigerian universities. The authors found a negative significant relationship between moral and organization performance. Giving staff bus, official car, annual, causal or maternity leave, recognition, and feedback to employees improve their competence, efficiency and effectiveness (Oloke, Oni, Babalola & Ojelabi, 2017).

A related study in India by Abdullah and Vani (2022), reported that moral incentives showed a significant impact the performance of employees in Yemeni Private Universities in India. Employee performance was correlated with moral incentives. Universities have focused on the retention of employee with better incentives and improvement of performance (Hussain, Shah & Raza, 2023). They explained that employees who are praised and recognized for their accomplishments by the managers exhibit higher performance.

Nyaribo and Naykundi (2016), also affirmed that participation and recognition given to employees as moral incentives promote their performance in the areas of efficiency, effectiveness and service delivery. Bastos, Almeida Horongoso, Bittencourt and Barth (2017), argued that moral incentives promote the quality of work done by employees. The provision of moral incentives such as annual leave, sick leave and favourable working hour's policy affect the performance of employees (Al Otaibi, 2017). This demonstrates that moral incentives help in increasing satisfaction among employees, which result to increased commitment to work and performance.

### 3.0

### METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. This design gives room for intensive study into the phenomenon under study by generating first hand data through the administration of research instruments to the respondents. The study was restricted to Universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. The population of the study was four thousand and seventy-six (4076), academic staff from the ranks of Graduate Assistant to Professor of five selected Federal Universities in North Central Nigeria. This includes one thousand, two hundred and fifty-five (1,255), staff from University of Jos, eight hundred and twenty-four (824) from Federal University of Technology Minna, eight hundred and eleven (811) from Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, six hundred (600) from University of Abuja, Abuja and five hundred and eighty-six (586) from The Federal University, Lafia. The Taro Yamane's formula was used in determining the sample size, arriving at 364 respondents. The validity of the instrument was done using principal component analysis, showing the Chi-square value of 264.729, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.827 and Bartlett's test of 10 degree of freedom with a significance level of 0.000. The reliability of the instrument was established through an internal consistency test conducted on two selected universities. The internal consistency test revealed the Cronbach's alpha of 0.882, 0.847, 0.869 and 0.824 for recognition, participation, and workplace flexibility and employee performance respectively which were well above the threshold value of 0.7. This is an indication that the adopted and modified scales for this study were reliable. A test of significance was applied to determine the acceptance or rejection of the stated hypothesis using Multiple regression to determine the strength of the effect of moral incentives dimensions on employee performance. The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23).

### 4.0

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The study selected five selected Federal universities in the North Central Zone of Nigeria. A total of three hundred and sixty-four (364) copies of the questionnaire were randomly distributed to academic staff of the five selected universities. The response rate shows that out of this number, three hundred and forty-one (341) representing about 94% were retrieved while twenty-three (23) representing 6% were not returned by the respondents. This means that the analysis of primary data was based on 94% rate of response for the survey.

**Table 1: Regression Model**

Variable	B	T	Sig	Tolerance	VIF
Recognition	.353	4.092	.001	.867	1.255
Participation	.254	2.084	.009	.825	1.212
Workplace Flexibility	.351	3.033	.003	.831	1.204
R- Square	.614				
Adj. R- Square	.607				
F-Statistics	17.171				
Durbin-Waston	1.612				
Sig.	.000				

*Source: Computation from SPSS Output, 2023.*

The regression model demonstrated that the predictor variables (recognition, participation and workplace flexibility) jointly explained 61.4% variation in firm performance ( $R^2= 0.614$ ), while other factors outside the model contributed 38.6 %. The F-statistics (17.171) and sig value (0.000) shows the significant effect of the predictor variables on the dependent variable (employee performance).

#### 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

The research reported that the three hypotheses tested showed positive effects on employee performance.

**Table 2: Hypotheses Testing**

	Hypothesis	Result	Decision
<b>H01:</b>	Recognition has no significant effect on performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria	.001 < 0.05	Rejected
<b>H02:</b>	Employee participation has no significant effect on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria	.009 < 0.05	Rejected
<b>H03:</b>	Workplace flexibility has no significant effect on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria	.003 < 0.05	Rejected

*Source: Field Survey, 2023.*

The hypotheses were all rejected since the p-values were lower than 0.05. This implies that recognition, employee participation and workplace flexibility have positive and significant effect on the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central Nigeria. The outcome of the first hypothesis indicated that recognition had a positive significant effect on the performance of academic staff performance of selected in North Central Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.353$ ;  $t = 4.092$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). The test of hypothesis two reported a positive and significant effect of employee participation on the performance of academic staff performance of selected in North Central Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.254$ ;  $t = 2.084$ ;  $p = 0.009$ ). The research also revealed that there is a positive and significant effect of workplace flexibility on the performance of academic staff performance of selected universities in North Central Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.351$ ;  $t = 3.033$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ).

#### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

The result of the study demonstrates that there is a positive and significant effect of recognition on the performance of academic staff performance of selected universities in North Central Nigeria. This result is consistent with Waqar *et al.*, (2018), whose research established that recognition positively affects employee job satisfaction and performance. In support of the result, Shehu (2021), discovered that recognition of outstanding performance through merit awards improves the efficiency of employees. Hussain, Shah and Raza (2023), also found that recognizing employees for job accomplishments enhanced their performance. The implication of the finding to universities is that employees who are openly recognized and rewarded for job performance show more commitment to work.

The result of hypothesis two indicate that employee participation has a positive and significant effect on the performance of academic staff performance of selected universities in North Central Nigeria. In support of this result, Elumah, Ibrahim and Shobayo (2016), found that the participation of employees in decision-making significantly impact on employees' performance in Nigerian universities. The finding is corroborated by Al Otaibi (2017), who postulated that workplace flexibility policies such as annual leave, sick leave and working hours significantly affect employee performance. The implication of the finding to universities is that the involvement of employees in organizational affairs significantly improves their productivity.

The result of hypothesis three indicated that workplace flexibility has a positive significant on the performance of academic staff performance of selected universities in North Central Nigeria. In support of the finding, Alnsoura and Kanaanb (2021), found that the provision of flexible working hours and sabbaticals significantly improved the performance of university staff in Jordan. This result is agreed by Waqar *et al.* (2018), who affirmed a significant effect of workplace flexibility on job performance. The research by Abdullah and Vani (2022), found that moral incentives such as flexibility in the work place showed a positive significant effect on university staff performance. Employee performance was correlated with moral incentives. The finding implies that flexibility in the workplace enables employees to balance work and personal life and this invariably improves job performance.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The study demonstrated that the dimensions of moral incentives namely, recognition, participation and workplace flexibility positively affected the performance of academic staff of selected universities in North Central, Nigeria. Moral incentives therefore play a major role in staff performance in the university. The study concludes that the recognition of employees in the work place enable them to show more commitment thereby improving performance. The study also concludes that the involvement of employees in decision-making and activities of the organization help to improve their performance. Finally, the study concludes that workplace flexibility provides academic staff of universities with the opportunity of balancing work and personal life to increase performance.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made based on findings of the study:

- i. The universities in Nigeria should constantly appreciate and recognize outstanding employees as a way of enhancing their performance. Acknowledging the employee performance publicly helps to increase their trust in the university thereby increasing performance.
- ii. Universities in Nigeria should put more mechanisms that will encourage the employees in coming up with better innovative ways of achieving organizational set goals. Universities should improve the level of academic staff involvement in decision-making to influence their performance.
- iii. Flexible work schedules should be provided by universities in Nigeria to help employees in managing their work load and personal life. This can build more efficiency in the employees to promote career growth to enhance their performance.

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