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Talent Attraction and Employee Task Performance: Evaluating the State and Federal Public Higher Educational Institutions in Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the impact of talent attraction practices on employee task performance across federal and state higher educational institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. From a larger PhD thesis population of 2,749 academic and senior non-teaching staff across seven institutions, a purposive sub-sample of 278 respondents was drawn from five institutions: Federal University, Federal Institute, State University, State Polytechnic, and State College of Education. Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire covering demographic variables, talent attraction practices, and task performance, measured on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics provided institutional comparisons, while ordinary least squares regression tested the study objectives. Findings revealed that attraction practices had a significant positive impact on task performance in federal institutions but no significant effect in state institutions. The comparative regression further showed that the impact was stronger in federal than state institutions, although the difference was only marginally significant. The study concludes that attraction practices are more effective in resource-advantaged federal institutions, while state institutions need reforms to achieve similar outcomes. It recommends strengthening recruitment transparency, employer branding, and adequate funding at the state level, while urging federal institutions to consolidate existing practices with structured onboarding and development programs.

Keywords: Talent attraction, task performance, higher education, federal and state institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary knowledge-driven economy, higher educational institutions occupy a central position in shaping human capital, driving national competitiveness, and promoting socio-economic development. Universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and other specialized higher educational institutions, play the dual role of producing skilled graduates and generating research that informs policy and industry practices. However, the ability of higher educational institutions to deliver on their mandate depends not only on infrastructural capacity and funding but also on their capacity to attract, retain, and effectively manage talented employees. Talent management has therefore emerged as a strategic necessity in higher education, particularly in developing contexts where the competition for scarce talent is intense

(Mensah, 2019). Among the dimensions of talent management, talent attraction is increasingly emphasized as a critical determinant of employee task performance, which represents an individual's ability to effectively and efficiently execute assigned duties in line with organizational expectations (Campbell and Wiernik (2015)).

Talent management is broadly defined as the systematic and strategic approach to acquiring, developing, retaining, and deploying talent to meet present and future organizational needs (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019). Within this framework, talent attraction refers to organizational strategies, policies, and practices aimed at drawing high-quality candidates to the institution. These may include transparent recruitment processes, employer branding, competitive compensation packages, and opportunities for professional growth. For higher education, where employees include academic staff, administrators, and senior non-teaching personnel, attraction practices influence not only the quality of new hires but also the morale and productivity of existing staff (Mlambo, Mlambo & Adetiba (2022).

Unlike many corporate organizations, higher educational institutions face unique challenges in talent attraction. Academic labor markets are highly specialized and globalized, meaning that universities must compete internationally for faculty with doctoral qualifications, research expertise, and teaching competence. In addition, younger generations of academics and professional staff increasingly consider not only remuneration but also career development opportunities, institutional reputation, and work-life balance in their employment choices (Ejiogu and Adebayo (2020)). The effectiveness of attraction practices is thus expected to impact employees' subsequent performance, particularly in carrying out teaching, research, and administrative tasks.

Employee performance is a multidimensional construct, but task performance is particularly relevant in the higher education context. Task performance refers to the execution of duties that directly contribute to organizational goals, such as preparing and delivering lectures, conducting assessments, managing student affairs, undertaking research, and providing administrative support. High task performance is essential for institutions to maintain accreditation standards, attract students, and sustain competitive rankings. Previous studies highlight that employees who perceive recruitment and attraction practices as fair and supportive are more likely to exhibit stronger commitment and higher levels of performance (Otoo, 2020). Conversely, weak or politicized attraction processes can demotivate employees, foster cynicism, and hinder performance outcomes.

Nigeria provides a distinctive setting for examining the relationship between talent attraction practices and task performance. The higher education sector is divided into federal, state and private ownership structures. Federal universities and institutes are funded and regulated by the national government, while state governments establish and manage state universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Private organizations and individuals are also given licenses to operate, with standard guidelines application to all forms of ownership. This division has created disparities in governance, funding, and autonomy that shape the management of human resources (Onyango & Wanyoike, 2021).

Federal institutions often enjoy relatively stable funding, standardized recruitment frameworks, and stronger reputational advantages that allow them to attract highly

qualified staff. In contrast, state institutions frequently grapple with irregular funding, political interference in recruitment, and limited capacity to compete for scarce talent. Consequently, attraction practices in state institutions may be less effective, potentially limiting their ability to enhance employee task performance. Examining the extent to which these differences influence the relationship between attraction practices and performance provides important insights for human resource management in higher education.

Despite the growing body of literature on talent management, several gaps persist. First, most existing studies have focused on private organizations or multinational corporations, with relatively fewer investigations in the higher education sector of developing economies (King (2018)). Second, among studies that examine higher education, there is limited comparative analysis between different ownership structures, especially between federal and state institutions in Nigeria. Third, although talent management encompasses multiple dimensions such as development, retention, and succession planning, there is need for more focused investigations of attraction practices as a discrete construct and its direct influence on performance outcomes.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, which posits that sustainable competitive advantage derives from valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991). Employees in higher educational institutions represent a strategic resource whose performance can determine institutional success. Attraction practices serve as the initial mechanism through which institutions acquire such resources, making them foundational to performance outcomes. Additionally, contingency theory suggests that the effectiveness of management practices depends on contextual factors. Thus, the federal–state ownership divide provides a natural context for testing whether attraction practices produce similar effects across institutions with different governance and resource profiles.

Study Objectives and Relevance

Guided by these considerations, this study pursues three specific objectives:

i. To examine the impact of talent attraction practices on employee task performance in state higher educational institutions.
ii. To establish the effect of talent attraction practices on employee task performance in federal higher educational institutions.
iii. To compare the impact of talent attraction practices on employee task performance across federal and state institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Talent management encompasses coordinated activities for attracting, developing, deploying and retaining people whose capabilities are strategically valuable for organizational performance (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019; Caligiuri, 2024). Within this portfolio, talent attraction refers to practices that generate applicant interest and enable organizations to acquire high-quality hires—e.g., transparent recruitment, employer branding, competitive rewards, and credible career prospects (Caligiuri, 2024; Thunnissen, 2024). In higher educational institutions, attraction extends beyond compensation: academic reputation, research infrastructure, workload norms, and scholarly freedom also shape applicants' preferences. Employee task performance denotes the proficiency with which individuals execute role-prescribed activities that directly contribute to core

outputs (e.g., teaching, assessment, research, administration). Canonical work in occupational psychology conceptualizes task performance as a distinct yet related dimension of job performance alongside contextual and counterproductive facets (Campbell and Wiernik, 2015).

Theoretical Underpinnings

The resource-based view (RBV) holds that organizations secure sustained advantage by assembling valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources; skilled employees and their knowledge stock fit this profile, making talent attraction a gateway to strategic resources (Collings et al., 2019; Caligiuri, 2024). At the same time, contingency theory implies that talent management effectiveness is conditional on environmental and organizational contexts (governance, funding, autonomy). In higher educational institutions, ownership and regulatory arrangements can moderate how attraction practices translate into performance. In Nigeria, federal and state higher educational institutions operate under different funding and administrative regimes (Sheffield Hallam University (SHU, 2022)), suggesting non-uniform returns to identical TM practices. Human capital theory further predicts that institutions investing in high-calibre entrants will realize productivity gains via superior skills and learning curves, but these gains depend on complementary systems (e.g., supportive work environments, role clarity).

Talent attraction in Higher Education Internationally, higher educational institutions deploy employer branding and targeted recruitment to differentiate their value propositions in increasingly competitive, global academic labour markets. Evidence shows employer branding strengthens perceived organizational attractiveness and supportive climates, mechanisms associated with performance-enabling attitudes and behaviors (Aftab, Satti, Ali & Khan, 2024). In African higher educational institutions, studies document the salience of credible recruitment, research resources and career pathways in shaping attraction, while limited budgets, precarious working conditions and migration pull factors constrain success (Thunnissen, 2024). Nigerian investigations echo these realities. A comparative view of university work environments reports disparities across federal, state and private institutions, with implications for the appeal of academic jobs and subsequent productivity (Ogunode, Jegede, and Abubakar, 2019). Recent work in Delta State universities also finds that talent management strategies (including attraction) are linked to non-academic staff performance, underscoring the operational relevance of talent management levers in the sector (Institute of Journal of Advances in Education and Management (IJAEM, 2024)). Collectively, these findings suggest that attraction effectiveness hinges on credible signals of institutional support (e.g., transparent hiring, resources, manageable workloads) and that such signals vary systematically by ownership and funding profile.

Talent Management and Employee Task Performance

A substantial HRM stream associates well-designed people practices with higher employee performance through capabilities and motivation pathways. Multilevel talent management reviews argue that attracting high-potential employees, when combined with enabling HR support, positively influences unit and individual performance (Collings et al., 2019; Caligiuri, 2024). Empirically, relationships are frequently mediated by employee competencies and psychological processes (e.g., psychological contract fulfilment), which translate HR

practices into effort and proficiency (Mensah, 2019). Although many studies are outside higher education, sectoral work indicates similar mechanisms: when recruitment is perceived as fair and merit-based and is coupled with resources to do the work, employees report stronger commitment and deliver better task outcomes. Conversely, politicized or opaque attraction undermines motivation, attenuating any performance gains. Within Nigerian tertiary institutions, evidence on work environment and HR practices underscores that performance benefits materialize where systems are coherent and adequately resourced (Ogunode, Jegede, and Abubakar (2019); Institute of Journal of Advances in Education and Management (IJAEM, 2024)).

Federal vs. State Higher Educational Institutions in Nigeria

Nigeria's higher educational institutions landscape comprises dozens of federal and state universities, polytechnics and colleges of education (Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), 2022). Federal institutions typically enjoy relatively steadier funding flows and stronger standardized procedures; in contrast, state institutions often face budget volatility and variable HR governance. These contextual asymmetries shape both the credibility and the yield of attraction practices. For example, federal institutions can signal long-term research support and career development with greater confidence, making offers more attractive to high-calibre candidates. State institutions, despite employing similar recruitment scripts, may be constrained by fiscal and procedural uncertainty, weakening the attraction–performance chain. Such context-contingent differences are consistent with contingency theory expectations and help explain why empirical results can diverge by ownership. They also resonate with sectoral reports that document uneven working conditions and resource access across ownership types (Ogunode, Jegede & Abubakar, 2019).

Synthesis and Research Gap

The cumulative literature suggests that (i) talent attraction is conceptually and practically central to TM; (ii) attraction can influence employee task performance via competence and motivational routes; and (iii) the strength of these links is contingent on institutional context and complementary systems. Nevertheless, gaps remain. First, while talent management–performance evidence is robust in private and multinational settings, comparative analyses within higher educational institutions, especially contrasting federal and state ownership in Nigeria, are sparse. Second, attraction is often embedded within composite talent management indices, obscuring its distinct effects on task performance. Third, many studies neglect boundary conditions (e.g., governance, funding, workload norms) that plausibly moderate human resource management–performance links. By focusing explicitly on talent attraction, task performance, and the ownership divide across universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, this study addresses these gaps and provides context-sensitive evidence from Nigeria's higher educational institutions system.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the effect of talent attraction practices on employee task performance across federal and state higher educational institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. This design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection and statistical analysis of data from a defined population at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study population, drawn from the researcher's PhD thesis, comprised 2,749 academic and senior non-teaching staff across seven public higher educational institutions in Delta State. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a representative sample of 349 respondents was established for the PhD study. For the present article, a purposive sub-sample of 278 staff was extracted from five institutions: Federal University, Federal Institute, State University, State Polytechnic, and State College of Education. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure representation of the federal–state divide and major institution types, while academic and senior non-teaching staff were retained because they are directly responsible for the teaching, research, and administrative tasks that define task performance (Etikan and Bala, 2017; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood, 2015).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from established talent management and employee performance scales in the human resource management literature. The instrument contained sections on demographic variables, talent attraction practices, and task performance. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Negatively worded items were reverse-coded before analysis to ensure measurement consistency. Content validity was ensured through expert review and alignment with prior studies. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All alpha values are above the 0.70 minimum acceptable value

Data were coded and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) summarized talent attraction and task performance across institutions and ownership types. Inferential analysis employed ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to test the study objectives: (1) the effect of talent attraction on task performance in state institutions; (2) the effect of talent attraction on task performance in federal institutions; and (3) the comparative effect across ownership, using an interaction model with a federal dummy variable. Results were presented in APA-style tables and interpreted in line with conventional significance thresholds ($p < .05$), with marginal results also noted.

4. DATA ANALYSIS, RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.

Biodata Descriptive Analysis

Table 1: Biodata Frequencies and Percentages (N=278)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	137	49.28
	Male	141	50.72
Marital Status	Divorced	3	1.08
	Married	221	79.5
	Single	42	15.11
	Widowed	10	3.6
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	89	32.01
	HND	34	12.23
	Master's Degree	85	30.58
	NCE/ND	9	3.24

	Others(specify)	7	2.52
	PhD	54	19.42
Age	21-30	25	8.99
	31-40	86	30.94
	41-50	105	37.77
	51-60	51	18.35
	Above 60	6	2.16
	Below 21	4	1.44
Employment Status	Academic Staff	159	57.19
	Senior Non-Teaching Staff	119	42.81
Institution Type	College of Education	34	12.23
	Institute	47	16.91
	Polytechnic	58	20.86
	University	139	50.0
Ownership of Institution	Federal-Owned	124	44.6
	State-Owned	154	55.4
Years in Organisation	0–5 years	98	35.25
	11–15 years	64	23.02
	6–10 years	58	20.86
	16–20 years	37	13.31
	Above 20 years	21	7.55

The biodata analysis (N=278) provides insight into the demographic and professional background of respondents across the five selected higher educational institutions.

Gender distribution shows balanced representation, while marital status indicates a predominantly married workforce, reflecting maturity and stability among employees. Educational attainment is spread across NCE/ND, HND, Bachelor's, and postgraduate levels, aligning with requirements of academic and senior non-teaching positions.

Age distribution reveals concentration in early- to mid-career brackets, suggesting employees are largely in active service years. Employment status shows the majority are engaged in full-time roles, pointing to a stable workforce.

Institutional distribution is well balanced with Federal University (77), Federal Institute (47), State University (62), State Polytechnic (58), and State College of Education (34). Ownership totals show Federal (124) and State (154), supporting valid comparative analysis.

Years in organisation distribution reveals 35% of employees with 0–5 years, 21% with 6–10 years, 23% with 11–15 years, 13% with 16–20 years, and about 8% above 20 years. This reflects a workforce with a strong representation of newer employees, balanced by experienced long-serving staff, providing important context for analysing talent attraction and task performance outcomes.

Descriptive Statistics of Talent Acquisition Practices (TAP) and Task Performance (TP)

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics by Institution Group

Institution Group	N	TAP	TAP (SD)	TP (mean)	TP (SD)

		(mean)			
Federal Institute	47	3.34	0.94	4.43	0.46
Federal University	77	3.88	0.59	4.78	0.41
State College of Education	34	3.76	0.78	4.53	0.39
State Polytechnic	58	3.41	0.75	4.44	0.46
State University	62	3.86	0.66	4.36	0.57

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics by Ownership

Ownership	N	TAP (M ± SD)	TP (M ± SD)
Federal	124	3.68 ± 0.78	4.65 ± 0.46
State	154	3.67 ± 0.75	4.43 ± 0.50

Talent Attraction Practices (TAP): Federal University (M=3.88) and State University (M=3.86) scored highest. State College of Education (M=3.76) was moderately high, above State Polytechnic (M=3.41) and Federal Institute (M=3.34). Ownership means were nearly identical (Federal=3.68; State=3.67), indicating no ownership effect overall.

Task Performance (TP): Federal University reported the highest (M=4.78), followed by State College of Education (M=4.53). Federal Institute (M=4.43) and State Polytechnic (M=4.44) were nearly the same, while State University was lowest (M=4.36). By ownership, Federal (M=4.65) exceeded State (M=4.43).

Overall, the results suggest consistently high task performance across institutions, with differences in talent attraction perceptions highlighting contextual institutional factors.

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Inferential Analysis: Regression Results

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Table 4: Regression Results for State Institutions

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	4.293	0.202	21.28	0.000
TAP	0.037	0.054	0.69	0.492

$R^2 = 0.003$

Table 5: Regression Results for Federal Institutions

Predictor	B	SE	t	p

Intercept	3.992	0.192	20.75	0.000
TAP	0.178	0.051	3.48	0.001

$R^2 = 0.090$

Table 6: Regression Results for Ownership Comparison (Interaction Model)

Predictor	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	4.293	0.192	22.34	0.000
TAP	0.037	0.051	0.72	0.471
Federal_dummy	-0.301	0.282	-1.07	0.286
TAP:Federal_dummy	0.141	0.075	1.88	0.061

$R^2 = 0.086$

In State institutions, Talent Attraction Practices (TAP) did not significantly predict Task Performance (TP), as indicated by a negligible slope and R^2 of 0.003. This suggests that in state-owned universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, recruitment and attraction practices are not directly linked to employee performance.

In Federal institutions, however, talent attraction practices significantly predicted task performance ($B = 0.178$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of 0.090. This implies that stronger attraction practices in federal universities and institutes are associated with higher employee task performance.

The interaction model showed a marginally significant difference in slopes ($p = .061$), suggesting that the positive relationship between talent attraction practices and task performance is stronger in Federal than in State institutions, though the evidence falls just short of conventional significance.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of effective attraction practices in federal contexts, while suggesting that other factors may play a stronger role in influencing task performance in state institutions.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the effect of talent attraction practices on employee task performance across federal and state higher educational institutions. The regression results revealed notable differences in the predictive power of attraction practices depending on ownership type.

In state-owned universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, talent attraction practices were not significantly associated with task performance. This aligns with findings that in resource-constrained environments, recruitment and attraction strategies may be undermined by political interference, inconsistent funding, and limited institutional autonomy (Onyango and Wanyoike (2021)). Employees in such institutions may therefore rely more on intrinsic motivation and survival strategies than on formal practices.

By contrast, in federal institutions, attraction practices had a significant positive influence on task performance, explaining approximately 9% of the variance. This is consistent with studies emphasizing that structured and competitive attraction strategies, such as transparent recruitment, merit-based hiring, and innovative employer branding, are essential in enhancing performance outcomes (Ejiogu and Adebayo (2020); Mlambo, Mlambo, and Adetiba (2022)). Federal institutions often have relatively stronger funding and standardized recruitment frameworks, which can make attraction practices more meaningful in driving task performance.

The comparative analysis suggested that attraction practices matter more in federal than in state institutions. Although the difference narrowly missed conventional significance, the pattern highlights contextual influences. Similar observations have been made in the broader human resource management literature, where institutional resources and governance conditions shape how talent management practices translate into performance (King, 2018); Mensah, 2019).

Overall, the findings support the talent management-performance nexus, while also underlining the importance of context. For higher education in developing countries, the implication is that strengthening attraction systems, through transparent recruitment, career development pathways, and competitive incentives, can enhance employee performance, particularly where institutional governance structures support their implementation (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2018; Otoo, 2020).

6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effect of talent attraction practices on employee task performance in federal and state higher educational institutions. The findings revealed that attraction practices had a significant positive impact on task performance in federal institutions, but not in state institutions. The comparative model further indicated that while the effect was stronger in federal settings, the difference across ownership was only marginally significant. Overall, the study underscores that context matters: institutional governance structures, resource availability, and policy environments shape the degree to which talent attraction translates into performance outcomes. By highlighting this variation, the study contributes to the talent management literature in higher education and offers evidence from a developing-country perspective. The following recommendations are made:

i. State-owned institutions should strengthen their recruitment and attraction systems by enhancing transparency, reducing political interference, and aligning hiring practices with merit-based standards.
ii. Federal institutions should consolidate their relatively effective attraction practices by integrating them with structured onboarding and continuous career development programs to sustain performance gains.
iii. Policymakers should provide enabling frameworks and adequate funding for higher educational institutions, particularly at the state level, to ensure that talent attraction strategies can be effectively implemented.
iv. Human resource managers across both federal and state institutions should embrace innovative employer branding and digital recruitment tools to appeal to younger, high-potential talent pools.
v. Future research should explore the mediating and moderating roles of organizational culture, leadership style, and employee engagement in the attraction–performance relationship, to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

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