

PERFORMANCE AND REWARD SYSTEMS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The performance and reward systems of academic staff remain critical determinants of quality teaching, research productivity, and overall institutional effectiveness in Nigerian public universities. However, these systems are often constrained by persistent challenges such as inadequate remuneration, lack of transparency in promotion processes, limited funding, poor infrastructural support, and inconsistencies in policy implementation. This study examines the challenges undermining effective performance and reward systems among academic staff in Nigerian public universities and explores strategic interventions for improvement. Anchored on Reinforcement Theory, the study relies on qualitative insights drawn from existing literature and policy documents. The data generated were analyzed using content analysis. The findings reveal that inadequate and inconsistent reward systems remain a major barrier to staff motivation. Limited access to existing interventions, coupled with bureaucratic bottlenecks, reduces their overall effectiveness. Moreover, performance and reward systems are still largely input-based emphasizing qualifications, years of service, and administrative compliance rather than being performance-driven, where actual teaching outcomes, research productivity, and community service are prioritized. These systemic issues have contributed to low staff morale, brain drain, declining research commitment, and weakened service delivery within Nigeria's higher education sector. The study recommends that the Nigerian government and university management should restructure the current reward system to make it more performance-driven, focusing on measurable teaching and research outcomes rather than solely on inputs. Furthermore, TETFund programs should be expanded, adequately funded, and decentralized to minimize bureaucratic delays and to ensure transparent and equitable access to grants, training opportunities, and international conference sponsorships.

Keywords: Performance Management, Reward Systems, Academic Staff, Public Universities.

Introduction

Since independence, Nigerian Public Universities have played a critical role in nation-building, producing skilled manpower and driving socio-economic development. However, persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, politicization of university governance, and brain drain have hindered the system's effectiveness (Saint, Hartnett, & Strassner, 2003; Okebukola, 2015). The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s exacerbated wage erosion, leading to declining morale among academic staff (Onah & Anikwe, 2016).

Performance appraisal is an essential tool for measuring staff contributions in teaching, research, and community service (Armstrong, 2014). In Nigerian Public Universities, however, appraisal mechanisms often lack transparency and balance, with disproportionate emphasis on research publications at the expense of teaching and community engagement (Fapohunda, 2015). This imbalance creates discontent and questions about fairness among academic staff.

Reward systems both monetary (salaries, allowances, research grants) and non-monetary (recognition, promotion, sabbatical opportunities) play a crucial role in motivating staff (Aguinis, 2019). Studies in Nigeria indicate that inadequate and irregular remuneration contributes to reduced productivity, low morale, and increased cases of academic staff seeking opportunities abroad (Adeniji et al., 2019; Ejumudo & Ejumudo, 2023).

Evidence shows that effective reward systems directly enhance staff performance. For example, a study at Kwara State University revealed that recognition and fair appraisal mechanisms improved lecturers' productivity (Akinwumi, 2024). Similarly, research in private universities in North-Central Nigeria established a significant correlation between base salary and research productivity (Musa, Bakare, Isah, Adeniyi, & Enebi, 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of structured and transparent reward systems in driving academic excellence.

Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between reward systems and staff commitment. Research in Federal Colleges of Education across Northern Nigeria shows that managerial incentives, recognition, and conducive work environments significantly enhance job satisfaction, which in turn boosts performance (Orji & Enyiamaka, 2022). Likewise, Ujebe, Ogbonnia, and Nwafor (2023) argue that effective performance measures are strongly associated with institutional loyalty among academic staff.

Beyond rewards, academic staff face mounting workloads due to student population growth without a proportional increase in staffing. Coupled with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and delays in salary payments, these conditions compromise effective teaching, research, and service delivery (Ajayi, Haastrup, & Osalusi, 2010; Segilola, 2022). The imbalance between workload and institutional support undermines staff motivation and performance outcomes.

The cumulative effect of these challenges is declining staff morale, increased industrial disputes, and worsening brain drain in Nigerian Public Universities (Bako, 2019; Omede, 2021). When appraisal systems are perceived as unfair or incomplete, academics become disengaged, leading to poor productivity in research and teaching. Without reforms, Nigerian Public Universities risk further erosion of global competitiveness and inability to retain top talent.

However, despite the pivotal role of performance and reward systems in sustaining quality higher education, Nigerian Public Universities continue to grapple with poorly structured appraisal mechanisms, inadequate and inconsistent reward systems, and overwhelming workloads. These deficiencies have resulted in low morale, weak institutional commitment, and high staff attrition. The absence of transparent and equitable reward systems undermines productivity, leading to

declining research output and poor teaching quality. This situation poses a critical challenge to the global competitiveness of Nigerian Public Universities and underscores the urgent need for strategic interventions to realign performance and reward systems with international best practices.

Research Questions

- i. How do existing performance appraisal and reward mechanisms influence the motivation, commitment, and productivity of academic staff?
- ii. What strategic efforts adopted by government to strengthen performance and reward systems in Nigerian Public Universities for improved institutional effectiveness?
- iii. What are the major challenges affecting performance and reward systems for academic staff in Nigerian Public Universities?

Literature Review

Concept of Performance

The concept of performance has been examined from multiple angles in management and organizational behavior, with scholars offering definitions that emphasize different dimensions. Armstrong (2014) and Aguinis (2019) both define performance in terms of measurable outcomes within a specific timeframe, underscoring the importance of results relative to organizational goals. While this outcome-oriented perspective is useful for assessing tangible achievements such as publications or completed teaching hours, it risks overlooking important qualitative aspects of performance such as mentoring and professional conduct.

In contrast, Campbell (1990) shifts the focus from outcomes to behaviors, arguing that performance should be understood as actions that are relevant to organizational objectives and can be assessed in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. This behavioral perspective draws attention to classroom engagement, collegiality, and adherence to academic ethics—factors often neglected in the outcome-dominated appraisal systems of Nigerian Public Universities. Similarly, Sonnentag and Frese (2002) emphasize the cumulative value of discrete behavioral episodes, suggesting that long-term contributions such as academic mentoring or institutional leadership should be recognized alongside short-term outputs.

Bernardin and Russell (2013) bridge these perspectives by distinguishing between task performance (teaching, research, and community service) and contextual performance (teamwork, professionalism, institutional citizenship). This dual perspective is particularly relevant in the Nigerian higher education context, where an excessive focus on research publications has not only marginalized teaching and community service but also downplayed contextual contributions critical to institutional growth.

Synthesizing these perspectives reveals a gap that most appraisal practices in Nigerian Public Universities disproportionately reward quantifiable outputs while undervaluing behavioral and contextual contributions. This imbalance has fostered dissatisfaction, weakened institutional

loyalty, and contributed to brain drain. Bernardin and Russell's framework is therefore the most comprehensive, as it captures both the tangible and intangible dimensions of academic performance.

For this study, performance is thus conceived as the totality of academic staff outcomes and behaviors spanning teaching, research, service, and institutional citizenship that advance the core mandates of Nigerian Public Universities. Therefore, adopting this integrative definition, the study recognizes the need for performance appraisal systems that move beyond narrow output measures to more holistic assessments aligned with institutional effectiveness and staff motivation.

Concept of Reward Systems

Reward systems have been defined and interpreted differently by scholars, reflecting the multidimensional nature of employee motivation and compensation. Armstrong (2012) defines a reward system as the policies, processes and practices of an organization for rewarding its employees in accordance with their contribution, skill and competence, and their market worth. This perspective emphasizes both internal equity (rewarding based on contribution and competence) and external equity (rewarding in line with market competitiveness). Within the Nigerian university context, failure to match salaries with market worth has contributed significantly to brain drain among academic staff.

Milkovich and Newman (2016) conceptualize reward systems as comprising all the monetary, non-monetary, direct and indirect returns employees receive as part of the employment relationship. This broader definition highlights that rewards extend beyond salaries and allowances to include non-financial incentives such as recognition, promotion opportunities, sabbatical leave, and research grants. This is particularly relevant in Nigerian Public Universities, where many lecturers value non-monetary benefits such as career development opportunities and academic recognition.

Lawler (2003) views a reward system as formal and informal mechanisms by which employee contributions are acknowledged and compensated in organizations. His perspective underscores the importance of both formal mechanisms (e.g., structured salary schemes, promotions) and informal mechanisms (e.g., praise, recognition). Nigerian Public Universities, however, often emphasize formal rewards while neglecting informal ones, thereby weakening motivation and job satisfaction.

Dessler (2017) defines reward systems as integrated structures that provide both intrinsic and extrinsic returns to employees for performing organizationally desired tasks. His distinction between intrinsic rewards (job satisfaction, recognition, academic freedom) and extrinsic rewards (pay, bonuses, promotion) resonates with the academic environment. In Nigerian Public Universities, the neglect of intrinsic rewards often undermines staff commitment and engagement.

Torrington, Hall, and Taylor (2014) explain a reward system as the way in which an organization distributes financial and non-financial benefits to employees in return for their contribution. This definition stresses the principle of reciprocity—the exchange of employee effort for institutional rewards. In Nigeria, when this exchange is perceived as unfair, it leads to low morale, frequent strikes, and reduced productivity.

Across these definitions, reward systems are seen as encompassing financial and non-financial, formal and informal, intrinsic and extrinsic mechanisms through which organizations recognize and compensate employee contributions. To this study, Milkovich and Newman's (2016) definition is adopted as the most comprehensive, since it integrates both monetary and non-monetary, direct and indirect returns. This framing aligns with the expectations of academic staff in Nigerian Public Universities, who seek not only fair and competitive salaries but also opportunities for recognition, promotion, research support, and conducive working conditions. Thus, in this study, reward systems are conceptualized as the total package of monetary, non-monetary, direct, and indirect benefits provided by universities to academic staff in recognition of their contributions to teaching, research, and community service.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Reinforcement Theory, developed by Skinner (1953) within the framework of behaviorism. The theory posits that human behavior is shaped and maintained by its consequences: behaviors followed by favorable outcomes are more likely to be repeated, while those followed by unfavorable outcomes are less likely to recur (Skinner, 1953; Luthans & Doh, 2018). Reinforcement can take the form of positive reinforcement (e.g., salary increases, promotions, recognition), negative reinforcement (e.g., removal of excessive workload after meeting targets), punishment (e.g., sanctions for misconduct), or extinction (withholding rewards to discourage poor performance). Reinforcement schedules further determine whether behaviors are strengthened through continuous or intermittent reinforcement (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Applied to Nigerian Public Universities, the theory explains how academic staff behaviors in teaching, research, and community service are influenced by reward structures. For example, promotions, research grants, sabbatical opportunities, and recognition serve as positive reinforcements that sustain high performance, while punitive measures deter misconduct and absenteeism. Conversely, extinction occurs when efforts such as quality research or heavy teaching loads are not recognized, leading to demotivation, disengagement, and in many cases, brain drain. This makes Reinforcement Theory particularly relevant for examining how inconsistent and poorly structured reward systems contribute to low morale and declining productivity in Nigerian universities.

Other motivational theories also provide insights into staff performance. Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) emphasizes fairness in reward distribution, suggesting that perceived inequities can reduce motivation. Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) highlights the belief that effort will lead to

performance and that performance will be rewarded. While both theories are valuable, they place greater emphasis on perceptions and cognitive processes. In contrast, Reinforcement Theory directly addresses the behavioral link between performance outcomes and tangible rewards, making it more suitable for this study's focus on structured appraisal and reward systems in universities.

Therefore, Reinforcement Theory offers a strong conceptual foundation for this research. It explains why academic staff respond positively to consistent promotions, recognition, and financial incentives, but lose commitment when reinforcements are absent or inconsistently applied. It also provides a practical guide for policy, underscoring the need for transparent, equitable, and sustained reward systems that reinforce both task performance (teaching, research, service) and contextual performance (teamwork, mentoring, professionalism). However, situating staff motivation and productivity within this framework, the study highlights how effective reinforcement mechanisms can strengthen institutional effectiveness in Nigerian Public Universities.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore performance and reward systems among academic staff in Nigerian Public Universities, focusing on challenges and potential interventions. A qualitative approach was chosen because it provides deeper insights into staff experiences and institutional contexts that cannot be captured through quantitative methods. The research relied on secondary data such as government policy documents, university regulations, official reports, and scholarly publications, which were purposefully selected for their relevance to the research objectives. Data were analyzed using content analysis. This methodological choice is consistent with the Reinforcement Theory framework, which highlights how rewards and sanctions shape behavior, thereby aligning the study's data analysis with its theoretical foundation and research objectives. It provided the analytical lens for interpreting findings. This study was organized from introduction, conceptual issues, theoretical framework, data presentation and analyses, summary, conclusion and recommendations.

Results and Discussion of Findings

The collected data were annualized thematically according to the research questions raised.

The Influence of Reward Systems on Performance in Nigerian Public Universities

Performance and reward systems are deeply interlinked, as rewards serve as reinforcements for desired behaviors and outcomes. In the Nigerian university system, academic staff performance which is defined by teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and community service is largely shaped by the incentives and recognition provided. Where reward systems are weak, performance outcomes tend to decline, suggesting a direct interdependence between the two variables (Aguinis, 2019; Armstrong, 2014).

The reward system functions as a motivational tool to encourage staff to put in their best. Monetary rewards such as salaries, research grants, and allowances, as well as non-monetary rewards such as recognition, promotion, and sabbatical leave, serve to boost morale and commitment. Studies in Nigerian Public Universities have shown that inadequate remuneration and irregular rewards contribute significantly to low motivation and declining staff performance (Adeniji et al., 2019; Ejumudo & Ejumudo, 2023).

The perception of fairness in reward distribution has a significant impact on staff performance. According to Equity Theory, when staff perceive that their inputs (teaching, research, supervision) are not equitably rewarded, they may reduce their efforts or seek opportunities elsewhere. This is evident in Nigerian Public Universities where staff dissatisfaction with reward policies has contributed to recurrent strikes, absenteeism, and the ongoing brain drain (Musa et al., 2025; Omede, 2021).

Reward systems also play a pivotal role in shaping research output. Performance appraisal systems that prioritize research publications while neglecting teaching and community service distort incentives and create an imbalance in performance outcomes. In many Nigerian Public Universities, limited access to research funding and inadequate recognition for innovative teaching have negatively influenced research productivity and knowledge creation (Fapohunda, 2015; Okebukola, 2015).

Effective reward systems foster stronger institutional commitment, while weak or inconsistent systems contribute to disengagement. Ujebe, Ogbonnia, and Nwafor (2023) found that performance appraisal mechanisms linked with fair rewards improved academic staff loyalty and reduced turnover intentions. Conversely, where promotion is delayed or based on favoritism, staff morale drops, affecting institutional effectiveness. Thus, a properly aligned reward system enhances both individual and organizational performance in Nigerian Public Universities.

The nexus between performance and reward systems also lies in balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Academic staff often value intrinsic rewards such as academic freedom, peer recognition, and opportunities for professional growth as much as extrinsic rewards like salaries and allowances (Dessler, 2017). Nigerian Public Universities that fail to recognize both dimensions risk undermining long-term performance sustainability, as staff may become disengaged if intrinsic needs are neglected.

For performance and reward systems to effectively complement one another, there must be strategic alignment with institutional goals. This means linking rewards directly to measurable outcomes such as quality teaching, impactful research, and meaningful community service. In Nigeria, this alignment is often missing due to underfunding, policy inconsistencies, and governance challenges. Strengthening this nexus through transparent, fair, and comprehensive reward policies can significantly enhance the global competitiveness of Nigerian Public Universities (Saint, Hartnett, & Strassner, 2003; Bako, 2019).

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that Nigerian Public Universities struggle not only with underfunded reward systems but also with misaligned reinforcement mechanisms. Poor remuneration, inequitable reward distribution, and distorted appraisal priorities weaken both task and contextual performance. By integrating Reinforcement Theory with insights from Equity and Expectancy theories, it becomes clear that effective performance–reward alignment requires transparent, consistent, and comprehensive systems that reinforce both tangible outcomes and intangible contributions. Without such reform, institutional effectiveness and global competitiveness will continue to decline

Government Strategic Efforts put in place to Enhancing Reward Systems for Academic Excellence in Nigerian Public Universities

The performance of academic staff in Nigerian Public Universities is directly influenced by the reward systems put in place by government and institutional authorities. In recognition of the link between reward mechanisms and productivity, the Federal Government of Nigeria has introduced a series of strategic interventions to improve funding, strengthen academic staff development, review salary structures, and enhance infrastructure. These initiatives not only address the challenges of motivation and retention but also align Nigeria with global standards in higher education. Despite persistent underfunding and industrial disputes, government-led reforms such as the establishment of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), the implementation of Needs Assessment Reports, and salary harmonization structures have demonstrated commitment towards revitalizing the education sector.

Funding remains a cornerstone of reward systems in higher education. Historically, Nigeria has allocated less than 10% of its national budget to education, far below UNESCO’s benchmark of 15–20% (UNICEF, 2023). For instance, in 2023, only 8.2% of the national budget was earmarked for education (World Bank, 2024). This underfunding has hindered the competitiveness of reward structures and led to challenges such as brain drain, strikes, and declining morale among academic staff. To mitigate this, supplementary interventions through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) were established, creating opportunities for research funding, infrastructure development, and salary adjustments. These financial interventions remain critical, as they provide universities with the means to enhance reward systems through research grants, allowances, and incentives directly tied to performance (Okebukola, 2015).

The establishment of TETFund in 2011 marked a significant turning point in Nigeria’s higher education funding landscape. By law, TETFund derives its revenue from a 2% education tax on assessable profits of companies registered in Nigeria (NEITI, 2017). Between 2015 and 2020, TETFund disbursed over ₦1.024 trillion to universities and other tertiary institutions, funding projects that included staff training, research grants, and conference sponsorships (NEITI, 2020). In 2016 alone, ₦130.1 billion was collected as education tax and deployed across tertiary

institutions (NEITI, 2017). These funds have been instrumental in strengthening academic reward systems by ensuring that lecturers benefit not only from salaries but also from performance-related incentives such as publication grants, international conference participation, and postgraduate training (NUC, 2020).

Continuous professional development is central to enhancing academic excellence. Through TETFund's Academic Staff Training and Development (AST&D) programme, thousands of lecturers have been sponsored for postgraduate studies, workshops, and international conferences. For instance, in 2021, TETFund sponsored hundreds of academics for overseas conferences and funded over 1,000 staff for postgraduate education (TETFund, 2021). These interventions serve as non-monetary rewards that boost staff morale and create avenues for promotion and recognition. In line with UNESCO's emphasis on quality higher education, the Nigerian government has also promoted sabbatical leave, research fellowships, and sandwich programmes that expose staff to global best practices (Okoli & Lamm, 2019). Such capacity-building efforts directly link staff performance with reward systems, as they create tangible career advancement opportunities.

One of the most far-reaching government interventions was the 2012 Needs Assessment of Nigerian Public Universities (NANPU). The report revealed acute staff shortages, dilapidated infrastructure, and inconsistencies in reward structures. In response, the Federal Government released ₦30 billion for university revitalization and ₦40 billion for Earned Academic Allowances (EAAs) in 2020 (FGN, 2020). More recently, in April 2025, ₦50 billion was approved to settle outstanding allowances for academic and non-academic staff (Premium Times, 2025). These interventions represent efforts to close the gap between staff expectations and actual rewards, ensuring that academic staff are compensated for additional responsibilities such as supervision, research, and administrative duties. The periodic implementation of the Needs Assessment reports underscores the recognition of reward systems as vital to performance improvement (Ogunode et al., 2021).

The government has repeatedly revised salary structures to retain talent within Nigerian Public Universities. The Consolidated University Academic Salary Structure (CONUASS) was introduced to harmonize pay and make salaries competitive (Fashoyin, 2018). However, due to inflation and currency depreciation, periodic reviews remain necessary. For example, ₦40 billion was released in 2020 for Earned Academic Allowances, while ₦50 billion was approved in 2025 to offset arrears (FGN, 2020; Premium Times, 2025). In addition to salaries, incentives such as hazard, book, and responsibility allowances have been introduced to encourage productivity and reduce brain drain. These measures serve as vital elements of reward systems by recognizing the multifaceted contributions of academics to teaching, research, and service.

Research and digital infrastructure are critical components of modern reward systems, as they directly influence staff output and recognition. The Nigerian Research and Education Network

(NgREN) initially connected 27 federal universities, providing 155 Mbps links with a 10 Gbps backbone, giving over 1.4 million students and staff access to research-grade internet (Adewale, 2013; NgREN, 2015). This digital platform enhanced collaboration, publication, and global recognition of Nigerian academics. Similarly, partnerships with the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) have enabled universities to strengthen ICT-driven teaching and research. These interventions not only improve performance but also act as indirect rewards by offering academics opportunities for international collaboration and visibility.

Governance reforms have also been introduced to strengthen accountability in reward systems. The National Universities Commission (NUC) regularly evaluates university programmes, linking accreditation outcomes to staff performance. In the 2018 accreditation cycle, 1,343 academic programmes across 48 universities were assessed, creating a competitive environment for performance recognition (NUC, 2018). As of 2024, Nigeria had 298 universities under NUC oversight, comprising 72 federal, 67 state, and 159 private universities (NUC, 2024). These policies, including performance-based funding and quality assurance frameworks, ensure that academic staff are rewarded based on measurable contributions rather than seniority alone (Obadara & Alaka, 2013).

The Nigerian government has implemented a range of strategic interventions to enhance reward systems in universities. From funding and TETFund initiatives to capacity building, salary harmonization, ICT infrastructure, and policy reforms, these measures have significantly shaped the reward-performance nexus in higher education. However, persistent underfunding, inflation, and governance challenges continue to undermine these gains. To achieve sustainable academic excellence, Nigeria must increase its education budget in line with global standards, strengthen TETFund's research focus, and implement consistent salary reviews that reflect the true market worth of academic staff.

Challenges Affecting Performance and Reward Systems for Academic Staff in Nigerian Public Universities

Nigerian Public Universities are facing a critical shortfall in academic staff. The National Universities Commission (NUC) reports that only about 16,856 lecturers are available against a required 21,912, leaving a deficit of over 5,000 staff (NUC, 2020). Moreover, only 12% are professors, compared to the benchmark of 25%, while more than 60% are junior lecturers, creating a weak mentorship structure (Ifedili & Ifedili, 2012). This imbalance negatively affects teaching quality, research productivity, and fairness in reward allocation (Kamale & Asaju, 2024).

Industrial disputes remain one of the most significant disruptors of academic performance. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has embarked on recurrent strikes, leading to a cumulative 28 months of lost academic time in the last two decades (Ogunode, Jegede, & Musa,

2021). Strikes are often triggered by unpaid promotion arrears, withheld allowances, and poor reward structures, thereby undermining staff morale and institutional credibility (Oni, 2020). Inadequate infrastructure and poor ICT facilities hinder effective teaching and research in Nigerian Public Universities. Studies reveal persistent challenges such as unstable electricity, poor internet connectivity, inadequate training, and limited access to ICT facilities (Ogunode, Garba, & Solomon, 2021). For instance, in Benue State universities, staff reported these constraints as major obstacles to teaching and research performance (Umar & Terhemba, 2020). Without adequate ICT tools, reward systems that value digital scholarship remain unattainable. Research grants are vital for performance enhancement, yet most academic staff face difficulties in accessing them. A survey of 240 lecturers across six federal universities revealed that constraints such as weak proposal writing skills, lack of institutional support, and stringent grant conditions hinder effective access (Adedeji & Akinyemi, 2021). The study recorded a mean challenge score of 3.36 (on a 5-point scale), showing broad agreement among respondents. This lack of funding opportunities reduces research output and negatively affects promotion and rewards.

Capacity building remains inadequate in most Nigerian Public Universities. Many academic staff lack opportunities for training, conferences, and sabbatical leaves, due to poor funding and limited institutional support (Okebukola, 2015). This limits skills development and research collaboration, reducing competitiveness at the global level. Consequently, performance is constrained, and reward systems that depend on international exposure remain poorly implemented (Ofojebe & Ezugoh, 2010).

Reward systems in Nigerian Public Universities often fail to balance financial and non-financial incentives. A study at the University of Lagos showed that reward systems—both monetary and recognition-based significantly influence employee commitment (Eze & Adeleke, 2020). However, many institutions overemphasize financial rewards while neglecting recognition, career development, and academic freedom. This imbalance weakens motivation and erodes sustained performance.

Beyond institutional barriers, systemic challenges such as underfunding, overcrowded classrooms, outdated curricula, and inequitable leadership practices persist (Ogunode et al., 2021). Nigeria's per-student funding allocation averages \$362 annually, far below UNESCO's recommended \$1,000 minimum (World Bank, 2020). Poor governance, political interference, and bureaucratic delays further complicate performance evaluation and equitable reward distribution.

Summary of Findings

i. Inadequate and inconsistent reward systems remain a major barrier to academic staff motivation and performance. Despite interventions such as salary reviews, allowances, and TETFund supports, many academic staff perceive the reward system as inequitable, delayed, and

insufficient compared to workload and international standards. This has contributed to strikes, low morale, and the persistent problem of brain drain.

ii. Government interventions through TETFund and capacity-building initiatives have positively influenced research output and staff development. Findings show that TETFund sponsorship for conferences, postgraduate training, and research grants has enhanced academic staff performance by improving their competencies, international exposure, and productivity in publications. However, limited access and bureaucracy reduce the effectiveness of these interventions.

iii. Performance and reward systems in Nigerian Public Universities are still largely input-based rather than performance-driven. Promotions and salary structures are often tied more to years of service and qualifications than to measurable contributions in teaching, research, and community service. This weakens the link between performance and rewards, reducing institutional effectiveness and innovation.

Conclusion

The performance and reward systems in Nigerian Public Universities are constrained by inadequate remuneration, inequitable distribution, and policies that privilege seniority over measurable productivity. Viewed through Reinforcement Theory, weak and inconsistent rewards reduce motivation, weaken commitment, and encourage negative behaviors such as low productivity, absenteeism, and strike actions. Government interventions like TETFund and periodic salary reviews have provided some relief, but their impact is limited. TETFund benefits are disproportionately accessible to senior academics, while salary reviews are often delayed, inflation-insensitive, and not performance-based. These shortcomings create distorted reinforcement schedules that fail to align staff motivation with institutional goals, fueling recurring industrial disputes and brain drain. Ultimately, the challenge is not just insufficient rewards but their misalignment with desired academic outcomes. Therefore, restructuring interventions through Reinforcement Theory, Nigerian Public Universities can design fair, timely, and performance-based systems that motivate excellence and foster sustainable institutional development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the paper recommended the following.

- i. The Nigerian government and university management should restructure the current reward system to be more performance-driven rather than solely input-based. Academic promotions, allowances, and other benefits should be tied to measurable outputs in teaching, research, publications, and community service. This will motivate staff to be more productive and reduce reliance on seniority as the primary criterion for rewards.
- ii. TETFund programs should be expanded, adequately funded, and decentralized to reduce bureaucratic delays. Transparent and equitable access to grants, training, and conference

sponsorships should be ensured so that a larger proportion of academic staff benefit from capacity-building opportunities.

- iii. Federal and State governments should prioritize adequate and stable funding for the university system to address recurring staff dissatisfaction over wages and allowances. This includes periodic salary reviews that reflect inflationary realities and global academic standards. Stable policies and timely implementation of agreements with staff unions will foster trust, reduce industrial disputes, and enhance institutional effectiveness.

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