

ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. It is a new coronavirus that has spread throughout the world and causes devastating effects on all sectors of the nation, private universities inclusive. Human resource constitutes an integral part of the University system without which attainment of vision and mission statements would prove abortive. This paper examined human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private universities in Kwara State. Descriptive research design was used in the study. Twenty Registrars and Deans were purposively selected from the private Universities in Kwara State and used as participants in the study. A researcher-designed questionnaire entitled: "Human Resource Management during COVID-19 Pandemic Questionnaire" (HRMCPQ) was used to obtain relevant information from the participants. Two research questions and one research hypothesis guided the conduct of the study. Both descriptive and inferential statistic were used in data analysis. The findings of the study showed that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of Registrars and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private universities in Kwara State. Based on the findings of the study, private universities in Kwara State should lay more emphasis on the use of Information and Communication Technology tools in the management of human resource in their institutions in order to achieve stated goals and objectives.

Keywords: *Human Resource, Management, COVID-19, Private Universities, Kwara State*

Introduction

The human resource within the university system is an essential component in the attainment of the institution's vision and mission statements. This is the main reason private universities in Nigeria pay more attention to the management of their personnel. Thus, the role of academic and non-academic staff in ensuring conducive environment for effective teaching and learning cannot be put aside with a wave of hand (Akinnubi, 2019).

COVID-19, as a novel, has modified the experience of work for the vast majority of human resource in both Public and Private Universities in Nigeria. It compelled institutions across the globe to adapt how work is organized and how jobs are designed. The potential for fractures between employee groups has also increased. For example, between those who are Information and Communication Technology (ICT) compliance and those who are not, those who remained on payroll versus those furloughed, and even those in different business units impacted differently by the pandemic (Harney & Collings, 2021).

In a time of crisis such as the one ravaging the human race, human resource manager is called to assess and contribute to a broader response that embeds institution's mission, values, and societal impact with a focus on the well-being of academic and non-academic staff, stakeholders, and the community as a whole. Even those in the production sector are not spared by COVID-19 pandemic which has affected payment of school fees and dwindling funds available in private Universities.

According to Onwuegbuna, Francis and Adedoyin (2021), one of the utmost priorities of Human Resource 1(HR) managers

during covid-19 era was to emphasize health and safety concerns in the organization (for employees and employers) and the rapid adoption of teleworking to cushion the effect of the pandemic for effective and efficient productivity. In particular, HR managers have positioned the workforce to respond to this imminent pandemic by engaging them to be more resilient and productive. In this respect, corona virus (the world's new pandemic) has created numerous challenges for human resources managers. HR challenges are diverse; these challenges were worsened with the advent of the covid-19 pandemic. HR practitioners now have to worry about the efficient and effective functionality of the organization towards the achievement of organizational goals despite the restrictions of movement, inability to hold physical meetings, appraise employees despite remote working, effective ways to sensitize employee on the corona virus and its effects, maintenance of personal hygiene and psychological state of employee to function effectively among others.

Coronavirus pandemic is described by the World Health Organization (2020), as a contagious disease caused by a newly discovered virus known as covid-19. Primarily, the virus is transmitted through droplets of saliva and nasal discharge from an infected person. Covid-19 is described as a pandemic because it has a high rate transmission if not controlled. Corona virus was initially believed to have originated in a food market around Hubei province in Wuhan, China in December, 2019. Currently, it is unclear where the virus actually began. Organizational activities have been disrupted by Covid-19 pandemic. This has become a great challenge to the operations of human resource department in Nigerian Universities. In a bid to control this virus, Private Universities have suddenly

adopted remote working, email and video conferencing to replace on-site operations with all its implications (Lewis, 2020). With the gradual reopening of economic activities, HR professionals are faced with the challenge of hiring additional medical personnel to augment the existing one in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 pandemic (Onwuegbuna, Francis & Adedoyin, 2021).

There is no gain saying the fact that some institutions during COVID-19 period are working online. These institutions start and complete all their transactions with their clients online. This will lead to contraction in organization activities and consequently result in merging of roles performed by different personnel into one single role performed by an individual. Thereby reducing the human resource required by the organization. Personnel whose roles falls within the merged ones may be rendered redundant. Other organizations may layoff due to inability to engage in business activities due to the effect of the lockdown (Alonge, 2021). Hence, this paper investigated human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Universities in Kwara State.

Literature Review

Human resource management also known as personnel management is an essential approach to attaining competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of highly committed and capable staff using an integral array of planning, staffing, training and development, recruitment and selection, compensation and reward system, employee relations and structural techniques as at when need requires. In any organization, human resource should be considered as a pivot for boosting corporate performance. At present in many institutions and establishments, human resource is encountered with problems such as

ineffective use of employees in the organization to achieve desired goals, when there is no satisfactory relationships among workers and work groups to effectively tap the synergy of group effort. Also, no motivating employees and creating the conducive work environment to enable workers unleash their creative potentials, to satisfy the needs of both the organization and the individual. Having the right staff at the right place and at the right time is utmost important to the survival and success of any institution (Okon et al., 2021).

The use of internet is posing a challenge in implementing remote strategy due to poor network thereby affecting virtual meeting and effective teaching and learning. Staff leaves have been truncated due to corona virus pandemic as majority of the staff were at home during the lockdown. Physical communication was not spared during the pandemic. Adelakun (2020) submitted that the sudden outbreak of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) which originated from the city of Wuhan, China, has become a major public health challenge for not only China but also countries all over the world. In fact the pandemic has led to the total lockdown of most of the human activities in various parts of the world, specifically private Universities in Kwara State.

Armstrong (2006) observed that the assumption underpinning the practice of human resource management (HRM) is that people are the organization's key resource and organizational performance largely depends on them. Therefore if an appropriate range of human resource policies and processes are developed and implemented effectively, then human resource will make a substantial impact on organization performance. Boohene and Ausinura (2011) argued that the case for an association between human

resource management and organizational performance is based on two arguments. The first one being that the effective deployment of human resource offers one of the most powerful bases of competitive advantage. The second argument is that effective deployment of human resource depends on the application of a distinctive combination of practices, or the use of a consistent set of human resources practice (Okon, Obo, Akpan & Mback, 2021).

Strategic human resource management scholars have drawn on the resource-based view of the firm to argue that a high commitment human resource (HCHR) strategy leads to firm competitive advantage by creating greater firm-level employee-based resources that are rare and valuable (Christopher, 2021). Akinnubi (2021) corroborated the aforementioned statement that the implementation of effective human resource strategies in private universities will go a long way in achieving set goals and objectives. Specifically, reduction in students' wastage, identifying redundant staff and improvement in the income of the institutions. Academic staff are able to discharge their tripartite functions of teaching, research and publications and community services when a good human resource management is instituted.

Human resource includes the quality of lecturers. The quality of school achievement in general and students' performance in particular depend on the quality of the academic staff employed. This statement was confirmed by National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), where it was stated that no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. The academic staff of the universities are very essential in terms of the role they perform towards the attainment of the university's vision and

mission statements (Akinnubi, 2010). According to Akinnubi and Oladimeji (2021), teachers at all levels of education are employed to impart knowledge and to contribute to the existing knowledge through research, publications and community service (peculiar to higher institutions of learning). Thus, the lecturer's ability to perform depends on the number of learners he is assigned to teach and supervise their projects at a time. The administrative staff are engaged in the universities to complement the efforts of the academic staff in order to achieve effective teaching and learning thereby resulting to high students' academic performance.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (Alonge, 2021).

Human resource management is obtaining, using and maintaining a satisfied staff. It is a significant part of management concerned with employees at work and with their relationship within the organization. Human resource management connotes the planning, organizing, compensation, integration and maintenance of people for the purpose of contributing to organizational, individual and societal goals. Human resource management is that part of the management task which is concerned with the staff of the organization and their contribution to its effectiveness. HRM's central concern is the efficient utilization of human resources in order to attain educational goals and objectives. It is that part of the management process concerned with recruiting and selecting people; training and developing them for

their work; ensuring that their payment and conditions of employment are appropriate, where necessary negotiating such terms of employment with trade unions; advising on healthy and appropriate working conditions; the organization of people at work, and the encouragement of relations between management and the personnel (Christopher, 2021; Lewis, 2020).

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the strategies put in place in human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private Universities in Kwara State.
2. Determine the level of human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private Universities in Kwara State.
3. Investigate the difference between the perceptions of Registrars and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private universities in Kwara State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study:

1. What are the strategies put in place in human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State?
2. What is the level of human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of Registrars

and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was used in this study. This design was appropriate for this study as it allowed the researcher observed and recorded situations as they existed. Mixed method of research was used in the study, that is, both qualitative and quantitative methods of reporting data obtained from investigation were used. Four Universities (Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Crown Hill University, Eyenkorin, Landmark University, Omu-Aran and Summit University, Offa) established before year 2021 served as population and were all used as samples in the study. Twenty Registrars and Deans (Registrars-4 and Deans-16) were purposively selected as participants in the study. Registrars and Deans were used as participants in the study because they could provide required information to pilot the conduct of the study. A researcher-designed questionnaire entitled: "Human Resource Management during COVID-19 Pandemic Questionnaire" (HRMCPQ) was used to obtain relevant information from the participants and it made up of two sections-A and B. Section A sought information on demographic aspects of the participants, while section B obtained relevant information on human resource management strategies. Interview was also conducted to obtain data from the participants. Lecturers in the areas of Educational Management and Educational Measurement and Evaluation in Al-Hikmah University validated the questionnaire designed for this research work. These experts who were readers and professors examined the questionnaire to see whether it was suitable for the information required. In so doing, these profes-

sionals assisted to assess the face and content validity of the questionnaire by ensuring that irrelevances and ambiguous items were excluded. Test re-test method was used through a pilot study undertaken to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire. This yielded 0.89 coefficient of reliability for "Human Resource Management during COVID-19 Pandemic Questionnaire" (HRMCPQ). This was considered reliable pursuant to its use in the conduct of this study. Copies of the questionnaire were administered on the participants in the sampled universities. Four research assistants who were lecturers in these universities complemented the efforts of the researcher. Descriptive statistics of frequency and mean rating were used to analyse the research questions, while inferential statistic of t-test was used to test the research hypothesis formulated in the study at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussions

Research Question One:

What are strategies put in place in human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private Universities in Kwara State?

Interview method was utilized to obtain relevant data from the participants on the strategies put in place in management of human resource during COVID-19 pandemic in private Universities in Kwara State. It was realized that remote strategy is implemented as meetings were conducted virtually through zoom and WhatsApp applications. Lecturers engaged the students virtually to ensure that teaching and learning were not affected. The academic calendar was slightly affected which made some of the sampled private universities ended the academic session behind scheduled. As average of one month was added to the conclusion of 2019/2020 academic

session. Both academic and non-academic staff could not proceed on the annual leave having spent an average of five months at home as a result of lockdown. Staff wellness and safety initiatives were put into consideration. Salaries were promptly paid in most of the sampled private universities. Safety equipment which include nose masks, hand sanitizer dispenser and infrared thermometers among others were stated to be in place during COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 safety protocols were strictly adhered to as social distancing was observed. Specifically, staff found to be redundant were not spared during this period. The non-teaching staff engaged in staggered operations. This was to ensure that social distancing was maintained. Physical communication was reduced to the barest minimum. WhatsApp was greatly employed in ensuring free flow of information in the university community. Workshop and seminars were organized for both academic and administrative staff on the use of Information and Communication Technology tools. Some academic and administrative staff were retrenched in order to meet the institutions' finance.

It is therefore the role of human resource managers to introduce new measures to safeguard the health of employees who are risk takers for the organization (Ahmad, 2020). There is also need to be more innovative in response to the current challenges. Such measure may include educating employees the importance of observing social distancing, medical screening to identify employees who may have been exposed to the virus and measures for successful overall business operations despite the challenges (Onwuegbuna, Francis & Adedoyin, 2021). Alonge (2021) discovered that there was high reduction in the quantity of goods and services produced on the part of the organizations, thereby result

ing in low mobility of labour, reduction in wages and salaries, frustration of employment contracts and layoffs. Akin-nubi (2015) observed that human resources (teaching and non-teaching staff) remain essential ingredients in the teaching profession at a given point in

time without which attainment of the stated goals and objectives will prove abortive.

Research Question Two: What is the level of Human Resource Management during COVID-19 pandemic in private Universities in Kwara State?

TABLE 1. LEVEL OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

S/N	Items	Mean	Rank
1	Implementation of Remote Strategy	2.66	2
2	Consideration of Leave Strategy	1.98	5
3	Care for staff wellness and Safety Strategy	2.43	3
4	Communication Strategy	3.00	1
5	Retrenchment Strategy	2.13	4
	Overall Mean	2.44	

NB. Mean: 0.00 – 1.49 = Low, 1.50 -2.99=moderate, 3.00 and above =High

Table 2 indicates the level of human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State. The overall mean is 2.44 points which implies that the level of human resource management is moderate in the sampled universities. Communication strategy was ranked number one as the most strategy used to manage human resource with 3.00, while consideration of leave strategy was ranked the list with 1.98 points. Implementation of remote, care for staff wellness and safety and retrenchment strategies were ranked 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively. It can be further deduced that the overall mean of 2.44 points obtained from the level of human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic is an indication that the private universities in Kwara State were able to survive the wave of coronavirus in the area of human resource management in their institutions.

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Okon, Obo, Akpan and Mbak (2021) opined that human resource is a valuable to organizations, especially the university system, all over the globe. The health and wholeness of staff will determine to a large extent their individual and collective contribution to the productive activities in an organization. The need to give

right quantity and quality and at the right time and place. COVID-19 pandemic, if not collectively compacted can truncated the existence of organizations, nations and the human society at large (Christopher, 2021). Private Universities in Nigeria that must remain in business in the face of the dwindling economic reality must ensure that their human resource is in the right quantity, quality and in good state of health so as to discharge their duties as expected of them by the institutions as meeting the students' need depends largely on this. Alonge (2021) submitted that the need to

ascertain the human resource implication of COVID-19 disease so as to guide against its detrimental effect on staff and organizations remains a sine qua non.

Hypothesis Testing

Ho: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of Registrar and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private universities in Kwara State.

TABLE 2. PERCEPTIONS OF REGISTRARS AND DEANS ON HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Variables	N	df	Calculated t-value	Probability t-value	Decision
Registrars	4				
		18	1.428	.171	Not Significant
Deans	16				

urgent attention to whatever will affect the supply of human resources in the As shown in Table 3, the probability t-value 0.171 is greater than the set p-value 0.05 for 18 degrees of freedom. This indicates that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of Registrar and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private universities in Kwara State is accepted. Thus, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of Registrars and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in private universities in Kwara State. Both the Registrars and the Deans viewed management of human resource in the sampled private universities the same way.

Lewis (2020) noted that e-learning enhances the efficacy of knowledge and qualifications through ease of access to huge amounts of information. It is also able to provide opportunities for better relationships between learners by the use of discussion forums without violating the rule of social distancing. Through this, e-learning helps eliminate barriers that have the potential of hindering participation including the fear of talking to other learners. It motivates students to interact with others, as well as exchange and respect different points of view. It eases communication and improves the relationships that help sustain learning. It makes available extra prospects for interactivity between students and teachers during content delivery (Oladipupo, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that private universities in Nigeria significantly contribute to a large extent in students' admission and reducing the rate of unemployment through their graduates who have been groomed to be self-employed. Historically, issues such as youth unemployment and poverty, in general, were thought to be the responsibilities of government and civil society (Awodiji, Ijaiya & Akinnubi, 2020). Private institutions took up these responsibilities notwithstanding that it deviates from their motive of profit-making, and to a great extent, they are doing just fine in solving the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria (Akinnubi, 2021).

Contributions of the Study

This study serves an eye-opener to administrators of private universities in Kwara State and Nigeria as whole on the need to adopt human resource management strategies in achieving their institutions' goals and objectives. This study established the role of Information and Communication Technology as a veritable tool in adhering to COVID-19 protocols. The National Universities Commission (NUC), governmental and non-governmental agencies would find the findings of this study useful in order to be well abreast of ways of managing human resource in this new normal in the university system. Furthermore, this study is of immense importance to future researchers in Educational Management and other related fields. Educational administrators, planners and the general public would see the need to contribute their quotas to the attainment of educational goals and objectives in the area of human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in the State and in the country as a whole.

Conclusions and Implications of the Study

It is a truism to assert that the interference of the coronavirus pandemic has caused so many challenges on the Nigerian education system, private universities in particular. Strategies such as effective communication, retrenchment, consideration of leave, implementation of remote and care for staff wellness and safety were put in place in human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State. The level of human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State was moderate with overall mean of 2.44 points. There was no significant difference between the perceptions of Registrars and Deans on human resource management during COVID-19 pandemic in Private Universities in Kwara State.

Effective use of human resource management strategies will help to attain the vision and mission statements of private universities in Kwara State. Private universities in Kwara State should lay more emphasis on the use of Information and Communication Technology tools in the management of human resource in their institutions. COVID-19 protocols, as spelt out by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), should be strictly adhered to in Private Universities in Kwara State in order to secure safety of the human resources in their institutions. More emphasis should be laid on workshops and seminars for both academic and non-academic staff on effective use of ICT tools in discharging of their responsibilities so as to attain effective human resource management. Redundant staff should not be retained in the university system as salaries paid to this category of staff should be put into infrastructural development.

Limitations and Scope of Further Research

This study is limited to Private Universities in Kwara State of Nigeria. The study mainly used questionnaire and interview for data gathering. The generalization of the findings of this study is limited because of the sample and sampling technique employed, which did not include private universities that were established in the year 2021 and other public universities in Kwara State. Nonchalant attitudes of the respondents towards data collection and dearth of relevant literatures also constituted part of the limitations of this study. Registrars and Deans were used as subjects for the study. Considering the limitations of the present study, further studies should be conducted which would incorporate Public universities in Nigeria. Human resource management and administrative effectiveness should be investigated in the Nigerian universities. Similar study should be conducted in the Nigerian Colleges of Education, Monotechnics and Polytechnics. This is because the aforementioned tertiary institutions are gravitating towards effective human resource management.

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