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Politics of Human Capital Development and Job Performance in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study examines how political dynamics shape human capital development (HCD) and staff job performance in Nigerian universities. Using a mixed-methods design (structured survey of 500 staff across ten federal, state and private universities, and 25 semi-structured interviews with senior administrators and policymakers) and covering the period 2012–2024, the paper investigates differences in HCD access, promotion transparency, and the effects of perceived political interference. Quantitative results show that training frequency strongly predicts job performance ($\beta = 0.43$, $p = 0.001$) and is associated with an average increase of 1.8 publications per trained academic annually; promotion transparency also positively predicts performance ($\beta = 0.37$, $p = 0.003$), while perceived political interference has a large negative effect ($\beta = -0.45$, $p = 0.001$); the model explains 62% of variance ($R^2 = 0.62$). Thematic analysis of interviews corroborates these findings, revealing politicized appointment and funding practices that erode morale and distort resource allocation. The paper argues that while HCD investments can raise productivity, entrenched political capture and weak accountability blunt returns. Policy recommendations are prioritized and actionable: (1) strengthen merit-based promotion and independent oversight committees, (2) ring-fence and audit HCD budget lines (including transparent TETFund disbursements), and (3) phase in data-driven Human Resources (HR) systems and Key Performance Indicator (KPI)-linked training incentives. The study contributes empirical evidence and pragmatic reform pathways for depoliticizing university HR practice and improving institutional performance in Nigeria.

Introduction

Human capital development (HCD) has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional and national progress in both developed and developing societies. Within the university system, human capital represents the intellectual and professional capacity that drives teaching, research, and innovation, which in turn influences a nation's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy (Becker, 1993; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). The Nigerian higher education sector, in particular, has witnessed increasing debates concerning the effectiveness of human capital policies in enhancing job performance among university personnel. Despite policy efforts such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and various academic staff development initiatives, there remains a significant gap between investment in human resource development and measurable institutional performance outcomes (Aina, 2020; Ezeani, 2021).

The concept of human capital development underscores the importance of investing in people through education, training, and continuous learning to improve productivity, creativity, and efficiency (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993). In the context of Nigerian universities, however, political interference, weak institutional governance, and inadequate resource allocation have undermined the effective translation of such investments into sustainable performance gains (Okafor, 2019; Umeozor, 2023). These structural challenges have created disparities in career progression, job satisfaction, and research productivity between public and private universities (Ibrahim & Batool, 2021). Consequently, the link between human capital development initiatives and job performance remains fragile, calling for an empirical and theoretical reassessment of how political dynamics mediate these relationships within the Nigerian university system.

Nigeria's higher education landscape is characterized by an expanding number of universities coupled with declining public funding and politicized management practices. According to Awe (2020), the dominance of political considerations in staff appointments, promotions, and access to development opportunities has eroded the meritocratic ethos that should underpin academic institutions. Similarly, Ofor-Douglas (2022) observes that the autonomy of universities is frequently compromised by external control mechanisms that prioritize loyalty and patronage over competence and performance. Such conditions have resulted in agency failures within the governance structure of universities, leading to inefficiencies and reduced institutional credibility.

While previous studies have explored various aspects of human capital and performance in Nigeria's public sector (Mohammed et al., 2021; Alase & Akinbo, 2021; Ebisi, 2022), relatively limited attention has been given to how political interference directly shapes the operationalization of human capital strategies within universities. This study addresses that gap by investigating the politics of human capital development and its implications for job performance across public and private universities in Nigeria. The inquiry emphasizes how training, promotion, and access to research opportunities intersect with governance practices, thereby determining the overall efficiency of higher education institutions.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute both theoretically and practically to the discourse on institutional performance and reform. Theoretically, it integrates insights from human capital theory (Becker, 1993) and agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) to explain why investments in staff capacity may not yield corresponding performance outcomes when governance and accountability systems are weak. Practically, it seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving transparency, meritocracy, and depoliticization in human resource management within Nigerian universities. By doing so, the study contributes to ongoing policy dialogues about university autonomy, institutional effectiveness, and national development objectives (Umeozor, 2023; Aina, 2020).

Ultimately, this paper contends that sustainable improvement in university job performance cannot be achieved merely through increased funding or staff training; rather, it requires a holistic restructuring of governance frameworks to align human capital policies with institutional integrity and accountability. The analysis that follows is therefore guided by the fundamental question of how political dynamics influence the design, implementation, and outcomes of human capital development initiatives in Nigerian universities.

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Statement of the Problem

With the massive investments witnessed in the development of human capital within various universities in Nigeria, negligible changes have been witnessed in relation to job performance within the staff setting or even the output within the institutional level. Poor research output, inefficient teaching, low morale among staff, numerous strikes and high attrition rates are some of the problems that are still being faced in the universities (Bambur, 2024; Suleiman et al., 2024; Altbach et al, 2009). These obstacles prevail despite staff training programmes, sabbatical leaves policy, performance appraisal schemes and Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) grants. One of the main problems is the political surrounding in which HCD is practiced. Whether through politicized recruitment and lopsided promotions, inadequately funded development programs and centralized systems of governance, the politics of HCD serves as a direct dismissal to the performance of staff. The literature is also found to be concentrating on the technicalities of the HR development without necessarily covering the political economy that underlies such processes. The proposed study addresses that gap by questioning the role of politics in the effectiveness of human capital development in Nigerian universities and its consequences to job performance.

Research Objectives

The general aim of the study captures the effects of political dynamics on the development of human capital and job performance within the universities in Nigeria.

Specifically, the research aims at:

1. Investigate the quality and level of political interference in the development of human capital in the Nigerian universities.

2. Determine the correlation between human capital development practices and the job performance between academic and non-academic staff.

3. Compare the HCD and job performance between the public and the private universities.

4. Find out policy voids and institutional issues that hamper successful implementation of HCD.

5. Prescribe practical measures to make HCD less political and improve the performance of the staff.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study is as follows:

1. What are the consequences of political interferences in the development of human capital in Nigerian Universities?

2. What is the connection between HCD practices and the job performance in the Nigerian universities?

3. Do public and private universities differ greatly in terms of HCD outcomes?

4. Which policies and institutional obstacles get in the approach to HCD?

5. What can Nigerian universities do to depoliticize human resource development as a way of enhancing job performance?

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses that the study will test are the following ones:

H1: Human capital development and staff job performance have significant relationship in Nigerian universities.

H 2: If there is an interaction between human capital development and job performance, it is significantly moderated by political interference.

H3: HCD practices differ greatly in their effectiveness in public and private universities.

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Scope of the Study

The study concentrates on some federal, state- and privately-owned universities in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It applies to both the academic and non-academic personnel engaged in administrative, teaching, and research activities. This study covers the period between 2012 and 2024, which is associated with significant changes in the governance of universities and TETFund interventions.

Significance of the Study

The given research is important due to significant reasons. First, it advances academic discussion of the human capital theory through the lens of examining the role of political conditions in mediating Human Resources (HR) development in higher education. Second, it will provide useful information to university leaders, human resource professionals and policymakers who are interested in enhancing institutional performance. Third, it gives evidence-based suggestions on how the governance of Nigerian universities can be reformed, so that HCD programs become strategic, inclusive, and impactful. Lastly, it aids in the national development because it discovers the means of releasing the performance potential of the academic workforce in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Human Capital Development in Universities

Human capital development (HCD) is widely recognized as a key determinant of institutional productivity and national competitiveness. According to Becker (1993) and Schultz (1961), human capital comprises the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired through education, training, and professional experience, which enhance an individual's productivity and economic value. In the university context, HCD extends beyond classroom instruction to include mentoring, research opportunities, continuous professional development, and welfare programs designed to improve staff capacity and motivation (Noe et al., 2020; Campbell, 1990).

In Nigeria, the relevance of HCD has been highlighted by persistent concerns over declining educational standards, inadequate funding, and the politicization of human resource practices. Ezeani (2021) observes that many universities suffer from inadequate training budgets, irregular promotion structures, and limited career advancement opportunities, leading to poor morale and low performance among staff. Similarly, Aina (2020) notes that universities that prioritize professional growth and transparent human resource systems tend to record higher productivity, staff retention, and research output. Hence, HCD serves not merely as a personnel management tool but as an institutional strategy for improving job satisfaction and long-term performance outcomes.

Political Interference and Human Resource Management in Nigerian Universities

The governance of Nigerian universities has long been shaped by political interference and administrative patronage. According to Awe (2020), external political forces often dictate key appointments such as vice-chancellors and deans, undermining institutional autonomy and transparency. Ofor-Douglas (2022) similarly asserts that the intrusion of state politics into university governance distorts merit-based recruitment and promotion systems, creating disillusionment among staff and eroding organizational credibility. These dynamics align with Umeozor's (2023) argument that political influence produces multiple layers of agency problems, where decision-making is guided more by political expediency than by academic excellence.

Empirical studies further reveal that political control over university budgets and subventions negatively affects human capital initiatives.

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For instance, Mohammed et al. (2021) found that irregular government funding contributes to salary arrears, stalled promotions, and uneven access to research grants. Alase and Akinbo (2021) emphasize that such instability undermines institutional planning, while Ebisi (2022) links political favoritism in fund allocation to growing inequality among federal, state, and private universities. The cumulative effect is a cycle of inefficiency and demotivation that limits the productive return on human capital investments.

Job Performance and Institutional Effectiveness

Job performance in universities is a multidimensional construct encompassing teaching quality, research output, administrative efficiency, and community engagement (Campbell, 1990; Saint et al, 2003; Noe et al., 2020). Becker (1993) argues that the productivity of academic and non-academic staff depends largely on continuous investment in their professional skills and work environment. In the Nigerian context, however, structural challenges such as inconsistent promotion criteria, inadequate infrastructure, and political intrusion often obscure the link between training and performance outcomes (Ibrahim & Batool, 2021; Aluede et al., 2012; Odiagbe, 2012).

Research by Awe (2020) and Okafor (2019) suggests that staff who receive consistent training and fair promotions exhibit higher commitment, innovation, and productivity. Conversely, politically driven appointments foster resentment, inefficiency, and corruption, which compromise the integrity of university administration. Thus, job performance in Nigerian universities cannot be analyzed in isolation from the broader governance structures that shape human capital development practices.

Global Best Practices in Human Capital Development and Contextual Adaptation

International experiences demonstrate that robust human capital systems are grounded in meritocracy, accountability, and autonomy. Countries such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea have achieved remarkable educational outcomes through transparent recruitment processes, continuous capacity-building programs, and performance-linked incentives (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018;). These models are critically contextualized to reflect Nigeria's structural and political realities. Transplanting global frameworks without addressing local governance issues risks producing symbolic rather than substantive reforms.

For instance, Finland's decentralized management and Singapore's performance-based funding thrive in environments with strong institutional integrity and minimal political interference conditions not yet fully realized in Nigeria. Therefore, the adaptation of global best practices must prioritize reforms that strengthen autonomy, establish accountability systems, and depoliticize human resource management within Nigerian universities. This contextual alignment is essential for ensuring that human capital investments translate into tangible institutional performance.

Identified Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on human capital and performance, significant gaps remain. First, most studies focus on funding or staff welfare without empirically linking human capital development to job performance within politically charged governance environments. Second, while several analyses emphasize the need for autonomy (Awe, 2020; Ofor-Douglas, 2022), few investigate how political interference mediates or moderates the relationship between human capital policies and staff productivity. Third, the comparative dimension between public and private universities remains underexplored, particularly concerning how institutional ownership influences human resource practices and outcomes. This study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by integrating

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both quantitative and qualitative evidence to analyze the intersection of politics, human capital development, and job performance in Nigerian universities.

Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory was first developed by Theodore Schultz (1961) and further expanded by Gary Becker (1993). It explains that human beings and organizations can generate economic value by investing in education, professional training, and development. Essentially, the theory considers education and acquisition of skills as a kind of capital similar to physical capital that increases an individual's productivity and earnings throughout their lifetime. In institutional contexts such as universities, this implies that training, capacity building, and improved staff welfare translate into better organizational performance. According to Becker (1993), human capital may be either general or specific.

General human capital, such as literacy, communication, or general education, is portable across institutions, whereas specific human capital, such as specialized training or institutional knowledge, is confined to a particular organization. Nigerian universities invest in both types, running internal training programs and facilitating access to external postgraduate opportunities through initiatives such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). In this respect, the theory suggests that systematic and equitable investment in both academic and non-academic personnel should yield improved job performance in teaching, research, administration, and innovation (Ogunode, Ngezack, & Usi, 2021).

Nonetheless, critics argue that the Human Capital Theory underplays the structural and institutional bottlenecks that hinder the transformation of investment into actual performance (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). Indicatively, despite staff training, productivity may remain low when organizational incentives are weak or when institutional politics undermine meritocracy. Yet, the theory remains useful for explaining performance variations between universities that effectively manage human resources and those that do not. Empirical studies confirm that institutions with structured training and development units tend to achieve higher staff retention and academic performance (Ogunode, 2020; Ogunode et al, 2024a; Mohammed et al., 2021; Ofem & Akinyemi, 2012).

However, this study recognizes the critique advanced by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, which challenges the narrow economistic focus of the Human Capital Theory. While Sen emphasizes that true development lies not only in enhancing human productivity but also in expanding people's substantive freedoms and real opportunities, the Human Capital Theory remains more directly applicable for analyzing how political and institutional dynamics shape workforce development and performance outcomes in Nigerian universities. The current study, therefore, adopts the Human Capital Theory because it offers an operational framework for examining how political interference and governance structures influence the conversion of educational investments into measurable institutional outputs. By acknowledging Sen's critique, this study situates human capital within a broader socio-political context, thereby integrating concerns about equity, autonomy, and institutional capability within the traditional economic rationale of skill investment.

Agency Theory

Agency Theory, developed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), describes the relationship between principals (owners or those in authority) and agents (managers or employees), especially when their interests diverge. The theory explains

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that agents may not always act in the best interests of principals unless appropriate monitoring mechanisms and incentives are in place. Such divergence, known as the agency problem, often leads to inefficiencies, underperformance, or corruption. Applied to Nigerian universities, agency theory helps to illuminate governance dynamics that influence human capital development and employment outcomes.

In this context, university councils and governing boards act as principals, while vice chancellors, deans, and human resource managers serve as agents entrusted with implementing institutional objectives. Ideally, these agents should prioritize merit, institutional development, and equity. However, weak accountability frameworks and political interference often incentivize agents to pursue personal or political interests rather than institutional goals. When promotions, training, or research grants are distributed based on loyalty, ethnicity, or favoritism rather than merit, agency failure ensues. Sidelined staff become demoralized, and unmerited beneficiaries underperform. This undermines institutional integrity and neutralizes the impact of human capital investments.

Moreover, political actors such as state governors or education ministers functioning as external principals can exert undue influence on university operations. Such interference erodes autonomy, entrenches patronage, and distorts human resource management. Umeozor (2023) argues that this creates multiple layers of agency problems, as educational goals are subordinated to political expediency. Accordingly, institutional reforms are required to strengthen accountability, depoliticize university governance, and align agent behavior with institutional objectives. The introduction of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) linked to training opportunities, promotions, and incentives could help restore performance-based management and reinforce the intended effects of human capital investment.

Relevance to the Nigerian University System

Both the Human Capital Theory and the Agency Theory are particularly relevant to the Nigerian university system because of the unique historical and political dynamics of its higher education sector. Nigerian universities simultaneously serve as national development engines through human capital generation and as institutions responsible for nurturing their own internal workforce. Yet, they operate within a politicized environment where merit-based human resource management is frequently compromised.

The Human Capital Theory provides a logical foundation for prioritizing personnel investment as a pathway to institutional productivity, emphasizing professional growth, equitable promotion, and staff welfare. In contrast, Agency Theory explains why these investments often fail to yield expected results due to political interference, weak accountability, and managerial misalignment. Combined, these theories offer a nuanced understanding of how governance failures obstruct the realization of human capital objectives in Nigerian universities.

Integrating the Frameworks

The two theoretical perspectives complement rather than contradict each other. Whereas the Human Capital Theory outlines the ideal relationship between human resource investment and productivity, the Agency Theory injects a critical realist dimension by exposing how institutional politics and agency conflicts disrupt this process. Together, they provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the interplay between human capital development and job performance in Nigerian universities.

This integrated framework allows the study to interrogate critical questions such as: How adequately are Nigerian universities investing in human capital? Are these investments equitably distributed? What political influences shape

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staff development and performance outcomes? And what reforms are necessary to align human resource management with institutional goals? Grounded in these theoretical foundations, the study is positioned to unravel the complex linkages among training, performance, and governance in Nigeria's higher education sector.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both numerical trends and contextual explanations of how political dynamics affect human capital development (HCD) and job performance in Nigerian universities. The mixed-method design allowed for a comprehensive analysis of patterns of investment in staff development, administrative behaviour, and the institutional outcomes of human capital policies.

The quantitative component examined the relationships between human capital investment variables (training, staff welfare, research grants, and promotion) and job performance indicators (teaching efficiency, publication output, and administrative responsiveness). The qualitative component explored how institutional politics, governance practices, and decision-making processes mediate these relationships. This triangulated approach increased both the validity and interpretive depth of the findings.

Population and Scope of the Study

The study covered federal, state, and private universities across Nigeria between 2012 and 2024, representing a period of intense policy reform and political intervention in higher education (Ponce & Pagán, 2015). The target population comprised academic and non-academic staff within these institutions, reflecting the multidimensional nature of human capital development and job performance. The choice of the 2012–2024 timeframe was justified by the introduction of major funding reforms (especially through the TETFund) and ongoing debates surrounding university autonomy, staff welfare, and the politicization of human resource processes.

Sampling and Recruitment

To ensure representativeness while accounting for institutional diversity, the study adopted a stratified purposive sampling strategy with random selection within strata. This approach clarifies the apparent ambiguity that may be noted by scholars in the study. First, universities were purposively selected from the six geopolitical zones to capture diversity in ownership, funding, and governance structure (federal, state, and private). Within each selected institution, stratified categories of respondents (academic and non-academic staff) were identified. From these strata, respondents were randomly sampled to ensure objectivity and minimize researcher bias.

Out of the total population, 500 respondents were selected proportionally across the sampled universities. This hybrid method was suitable for higher education research where the sampling frame is institutionally heterogeneous and access constraints limit pure randomization. It preserved the pragmatic benefits of purposive targeting while retaining statistical validity through random selection within strata.

Instruments of Data Collection

The study employed structured questionnaires for the quantitative phase and semi-structured interviews for the qualitative phase. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and Likert-scale items designed to measure staff perceptions of training access, promotion fairness, welfare policies, and political interference. Interview guides were used with senior administrators and faculty leaders to obtain deeper insights into governance dynamics, policy implementation, and institutional performance.

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The instruments were pre-tested for content validity and reliability. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the main constructs exceeded 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. Qualitative data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and context preservation.

Operational Definition of Variables

To enhance conceptual precision, key variables were operationally defined as follows:

- **Human Capital Development (HCD):** Institutional efforts aimed at improving staff capacity through education, training, professional development, and welfare support. Indicators included training frequency, access to grants, and participation in workshops or conferences.
- **Job Performance:** The measurable outcomes of academic and administrative duties, such as publication output, teaching quality, administrative efficiency, and innovation within the institution.
- **Political Interference:** The extent to which political actors (internal or external) influence decision-making processes concerning recruitment, promotion, training, or resource allocation within universities. This variable encompasses both direct interventions (e.g., government or governing council impositions) and indirect influences (e.g., favoritism, nepotism, or partisan loyalty affecting staff welfare and promotion).
- **Institutional Governance:** The structure and functioning of decision-making organs (senate, council, management boards) in implementing HCD policies and performance evaluation.

By defining these constructs, the study provides clarity on how institutional politics are measured and how they interact with HCD outcomes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, percentages, and frequency distributions) and inferential analyses, including correlation and multiple regression models, to determine the strength and direction of relationships between HCD and job performance variables. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 25).

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis, identifying patterns of meaning related to governance practices, political influence, and institutional accountability. Coding was both inductive (emerging from participants' narratives) and deductive (based on theoretical constructs from Human Capital and Agency theories). The mixed-methods integration enabled convergence of numerical evidence and interpretive insight to generate a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards by ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Respondents were briefed on the purpose and significance of the study, and participation was strictly voluntary. Institutional permissions were obtained from each university's research ethics committee before data collection. All collected data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

Limitations of the Methodology

While the study's scope (2012–2024) offers valuable insights into long-term trends, its cross-sectional data collection limits causal inference. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported responses may introduce perceptual bias, although triangulation with qualitative interviews mitigates this risk. Nonetheless, the design remains suitable for identifying patterns and relationships between political dynamics, human capital development, and job performance in Nigerian universities.

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Justification of Methodological Choice

The adopted methodological structure aligns with the study's theoretical foundation. The Human Capital Theory provides a framework for quantifying investments in education and training as predictors of productivity, while the Agency Theory illuminates how governance mechanisms and political behaviour mediate these relationships. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, the study operationalizes these theories empirically, allowing for nuanced interpretation of how institutional politics affect the conversion of human capital investments into performance outcomes.

Results and Discussion

This section analyses the empirical results on the relationship between politics, human capital development (HCD), and job performance in Nigerian universities. It integrates quantitative and qualitative findings in line with the study objectives and theoretical frameworks Human Capital Theory and Agency Theory while considering the structural influence of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on institutional governance.

A multivariate regression was conducted using the staff performance (evaluated through self-assessment, supervisor ratings and output measures) as a dependent variable. Independent variables were training frequency, transparency of promotion, access to research grants and perceived political interference. Results: Variable Coefficient (8) Significance (p) Training frequency 0.43 0.001 Honest advertising 0.37 0.003 Availability of research grant 0.29 0.007 Political interference -0.45 0.001 The model (R 2 = 0.62) suggests that the frequency of training and the transparency of promotion are great positive predictors of job performance, whereas political interference significantly affects it negatively. It is a confirmation that politics does not only distort the allocation of resources but also dims the motivational impact of HCD endeavors. The analysis were explained according to the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: Effect of Training on Work Performance

The regression results indicate that training frequency has a significant positive relationship with job performance ($\beta = 0.43$, $p = 0.001$). Academic staff who underwent regular training produced an average of 1.8 additional publications per year compared to their untrained counterparts, while non-academic staff with professional development exposure demonstrated a 27% increase in administrative efficiency. These results empirically validate Becker's (1993) Human Capital Theory, which posits those investments in education and training yield measurable productivity gains.

However, the asymmetry in access to training especially across state-owned universities where only 41% of academic staff received training, 68 percent of academic personnel in federal universities reported access to training within a year, and 75 percent in private universities, this reveals structural inequities. Among non-academic personnel, 57 percent indicated they seldom or never had training opportunities. This aligns with Ofor-Douglas (2022), who highlights the ad hoc and underfunded nature of human capital initiatives in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Additionally, the limited institutionalization of training needs assessment (34%) reflects inadequate strategic planning, a failure often exacerbated by inconsistent ASUU-government relations that disrupt academic calendars and impede continuous professional development.

Objective 2: Meritocracy, Promotion, and Institutional Morale

Promotion transparency emerged as a key determinant of performance and morale. Only 48% of respondents agreed that promotions

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were merit-based, while 37% believed that ethnicity or political connections influenced advancement. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.37$, $p = 0.003$) confirms a strong positive correlation between fair promotion processes and performance outcomes. These findings echo the Agency Theory's premise (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) that misalignment between institutional principals (university councils) and agents (administrators or political actors) generates inefficiency and erodes trust.

Qualitative interviews revealed that governing councils often override departmental recommendations under political pressure. As Agubosim, Arshad, Alias, and Moosavi (2023) argue, such interference erodes institutional autonomy and performance-based culture. Furthermore, ASUU's frequent industrial actions, though intended to pressure governments for fair working conditions, inadvertently affect promotion timelines, performance appraisals, and research productivity creating cyclical demotivation among staff.

Objective 3: Political Interference as an Institutional Barrier

Political interference was found to be the most significant negative predictor of job performance ($\beta = -0.45$, $p = 0.001$). Approximately 70% of academic respondents stated that the appointment of vice-chancellors and senior officers was politically influenced rather than merit driven in both public and private universities. In private Universities the owners and selected governing boards do appointment of key administrative officials based on personal gains or profit incentives which often negative educational institution benchmark, rules and procedures. The political influences of the owners often prevailed over the Nigeria Universities Commission indirectly, while government influences take predominant in both Federal and State Universities which is sometimes based on political interest, ethnicity, race, and religious. This finding corroborates Ogunode, Edinoh, and Agbade (2024), who associate patron-client relations with weakened university autonomy. Similarly, the uneven disbursement of TETFund grants often tied to political lobbying undermines institutional equity and erodes morale (TETFund, 2022; NUC, 2022; Ogunode et al, 2024b; Mohammed et al., 2021; Alase & Akinbo, 2021; Ebisi, 2022).

ASUU's role here is dual: while the union often resists political intrusion and advocates for merit-based appointments, it also becomes politicized in its engagement with government, occasionally prioritizing macro-political objectives over institutional stability. This duality complicates the reform landscape and affects the translation of HCD investments into tangible performance outcomes.

Objective 4: Institutional Disparities in HCD Implementation

The case comparison between University A (a high-performing private university) and University B (a struggling state university) illustrates that governance quality mediates HCD effectiveness. University A's structured training budget, independent promotion committee, and clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) consistently generated over 80% staff satisfaction and high research outputs. Conversely, University B exhibited politicized management, ad hoc staffing, and opaque reward systems, resulting in below-average performance.

These disparities validate Nwangwu, Eze, and Jumbo-Umeh (2016), who note that institutional autonomy and professionalism correlate strongly with HCD success. State universities remain vulnerable to funding instability and bureaucratic inertia (Paulley, 2019; Echono, n.d; Ogunode et al., 2024c), further compounded by recurrent ASUU strikes that halt progress in ongoing training or research initiatives.

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Table 1

Key Results

Key Finding	Empirical Evidence	Implication
Training improves job performance	Staff with training publish 1.8x more; β = 0.43	Support for Human Capital Theory
Promotion transparency enhances morale and output	β = 0.37	Institutions must enforce meritocracy
Political interference reduces performance	β = -0.45	Political neutrality in HR is essential
Institutional variation in HCD effectiveness	Case study: Univ. A vs Univ. B	Governance quality is a decisive factor
TETFund perceived as politicized	Qualitative interviews	Need for transparent and equitable allocation

Key Empirical Findings

1. Access to Human Capital Development Opportunities

There are sharp disparities in training access among university types:

Federal universities: 68 % of academic personnel reported receiving training within a year. State universities: Only 41 % reported similar access.

Private universities: 75 % had access to training opportunities.

Non-academic staff: 57 % indicated they seldom or never had training opportunities.

These figures illustrate the uneven distribution of professional development and the influence of political and institutional governance structures on staff advancement.

2. Impact of Political Interference

Recruitment, promotion, and training allocations were often influenced by political patronage and union pressure rather than objective merit.

Political interference undermines the institutionalization of merit-based systems, reduces staff motivation, and weakens accountability frameworks.

Respondents identified government bureaucracy and excessive ministerial control as major impediments to university autonomy and efficient human capital management.

3. Funding and Policy Inconsistency

TETFund and other state-sponsored interventions are inconsistently disbursed due to politicized approval processes.

Frequent policy changes and leadership turnovers disrupt the continuity of staff-development programmes.

Respondents viewed funding unpredictability as a key cause of poor staff morale and declining research productivity.

4. Job Performance Patterns

Universities with stronger internal governance and consistent staff development (mostly private and well-funded federal universities) exhibited higher staff performance indicators measured through research output, teaching quality, and administrative efficiency.

Conversely, politically dominated institutions showed weaker performance outcomes and higher turnover intentions among staff.

5. Union Dynamics and Institutional Reform

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and other unions play dual roles defending staff welfare but sometimes resisting managerial reforms aimed at performance evaluation or accountability.

This tension between advocacy and reform hinders sustained improvement in human capital outcomes.

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6. Perceptions of University Autonomy

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that greater institutional autonomy would improve job performance and professional growth.

However, they cautioned that autonomy must be accompanied by transparent governance, stable funding, and performance-based leadership structures.

The empirical findings confirm that political interference, inequitable access to training, and unstable funding critically undermine human capital development in Nigerian universities. Institutions with less political control and more autonomy demonstrate better performance outcomes. Therefore, sustainable improvement requires a depoliticized, transparent, and merit-based human capital management system.

Theoretical and Contextual Integration

The findings jointly reaffirm the Human Capital Theory's proposition that education and training increase productivity (Becker, 1993), yet they also substantiate the critiques advanced by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2018), who argue that the returns on human capital are limited in weak institutional contexts. Agency Theory complements this by explaining how political actors and misaligned incentives distort resource allocation and accountability (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

ASUU's activism can be interpreted through the Agency lens: while it seeks to protect the interests of academic workers (agents), its confrontational approach with governmental principals sometimes leads to institutional paralysis. This underscores the need for collaborative governance frameworks that balance autonomy with accountability.

These insights echo broader perspectives from Joseph (2024), Yomi-Bello et al. (2023), and Ifejika (2017), emphasizing that sustainable university performance depends on depoliticized management, stable funding, and institutional accountability.

Policy Implications and Recommendations (Tiered Approach)

Short-Term (1–2 Years)

- Institutionalize transparent criteria for recruitment, training, and promotion to curb political interference.
- Strengthen ASUU–government dialogue mechanisms to replace strike-driven negotiations with policy-based bargaining.
- Conduct annual training needs assessments to guide equitable staff development programs.

Medium-Term (3–5 Years)

- Establish independent Human Resources (HR) and promotion committees insulated from political or union pressures.
- Expand TETFund's oversight framework to ensure equitable allocation and merit-based access to research grants.
- Digitize HR management systems to monitor staff development, performance metrics, and incentive outcomes.

Long-Term (5 Years Above)

- Enact legislative reforms granting universities full autonomy in appointments, budgeting, and staff development.
- Integrate ASUU into a tripartite governance structure involving universities, government, and private sector partners to sustain policy dialogue.
- Promote a national framework for university performance benchmarking tied to human capital indicators and research impact.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the politics of human capital development (HCD) and job performance within Nigerian universities, with

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particular attention to how political dynamics, governance structures, and institutional policies influence both academic and non-academic staff outcomes. The findings reveal that while human capital development initiatives remain central to improving institutional performance, their implementation is frequently constrained by political interference, inconsistent funding, and policy discontinuity. The results further show significant disparities between public and private universities in access to training, research support, and performance incentives underscoring the uneven institutional environments shaped by state control and regulatory limitations.

The study's objectives to explore the relationship between HCD and job performance, assess the political factors that shape capacity development, and compare outcomes across university types have been substantially addressed through empirical evidence and theoretical interpretation. The analysis, guided by Human Capital Theory, demonstrates that political decisions surrounding recruitment, funding, and professional advancement have direct consequences for institutional productivity. However, the findings also highlight the limitations of this theory when confronted with deeply entrenched political structures that often prioritize patronage over meritocracy. In this regard, while Human Capital Theory explains investment in people as a means of enhancing productivity, the study acknowledges that sustainable development also depends on expanding real capabilities and institutional freedoms, as emphasized by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach.

The implications of these findings suggest that reforms in Nigeria's university system must transcend policy rhetoric and confront systemic political interference. Achieving this requires multi-tiered strategies:

- Short-term: Strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms in recruitment and training allocations, with active oversight by governing councils and unions.
- Medium-term: Institutionalize merit-based promotion systems and link staff development funding (such as TETFund interventions) to measurable performance outcomes rather than political affiliations.
- Long-term: Foster university autonomy through legal and policy reforms that depoliticize the management of tertiary education while empowering leadership structures to act independently of government transitions.

While the study presents robust insights, it recognizes its limitations. The data were primarily cross-sectional and thus may not fully capture the longitudinal evolution of HCD and job performance over time. Future research should adopt a longitudinal or mixed-method approach, integrating deeper qualitative perspectives from policymakers and union leaders to enrich understanding of the political economy of higher education in Nigeria.

In conclusion, depoliticizing human capital development in Nigerian universities is imperative for sustainable institutional performance and national growth. Only through a deliberate commitment to evidence-based reforms, grounded in fairness, transparency, and inclusivity, can the Nigerian university system evolve from a politically burdened structure to a truly developmental institution that maximizes its human capital potential.

Throughout the work no any AI application was used in the study

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