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TALENT ATTRACTION AND INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKING IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in South-West Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive correlational survey design. Three research questions and one research hypothesis guided the study. The population of the study comprised 2,106 senior academic staff and 363 senior non-academic staff across the 52 private universities in South-West, Nigeria. Data were collected from 408 senior academic and non-academic staff using a structured questionnaire. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Results showed that talent attraction (M = 2.57, SD = .44) and institutional networking (M = 2.20, SD = .36) were perceived at moderate levels; and talent attraction had a positive, statistically significant but weak relationship with institutional networking, r (406) = .172, p < .001. The findings suggested that the ability to attract competent personnel may support institutional networking, but talent attraction alone is not sufficient to provide the networking capacity a private university requires. The study therefore recommended among others that private universities should complement talent-attraction strategies with institutional support to leverage staff expertise and professional contacts through formal partnerships and collaborative networks.

Keywords: Academic Staff, Institutional Networking, Private Universities, Sustainability, Talent Attraction.

Introduction

Universities are complex institutions with the traditional mandates of teaching, research and community service. Globally, it has become increasingly difficult for individual institutions to possess all the expertise, technology, knowledge, resources, and capabilities they require to fulfil their core mandates and achieve sustainability. Consequently, relationships with other universities, research organisations, industries, professional bodies, government agencies, and international partners have become an important part of their development and sustainability. The establishment and management of relationships among two or more educational institutions and relevant stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, resources and practices that can improve the quality and standards of education, as well as the institution's innovation and sustainability are referred to as institutional networking.

Institutional networking refers to the purposeful relationships and collaborative arrangements through which universities interact with other institutions and stakeholders to pursue common objectives and access complementary resources. Čamber-Tambolaš and Vujicic (2019) viewed institutional networking as cooperation among educational institutions aimed at encouraging educators and all other subjects of the educational process to engage in

the continuous exchange of their professional expertise, insights and knowledge as the basis of their mutual learning and development. Similarly, Pohlenz, Berndt and Hartmann (2025) considered university networks as institutionalised alliances through which universities pursue common objectives and enhance the effectiveness of higher education. However, organisational characteristics have the tendency to influence the formation of collaboration networks in higher education (Zinilli, Pierucci, & Reale, 2024).

Institutional networking has become increasingly important in the current educational landscape, characterised by fierce competition, demographic shifts, and a search for qualified talent. In higher education, networking can take several forms, including university-industry collaboration, inter-university partnerships, research collaborations, staff engagement, and international academic relations. These relationships may contribute to institutional development by expanding access to knowledge, expertise, professional opportunities, and external resources. University networks can provide mechanisms through which higher education institutions pursue common objectives and access capabilities that may not be available within the individual institutions (Pohlenz, Berndt, & Hartmann, 2025). This is why universities are required to establish and maintain relationships with other knowledge-producing institutions to provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, industry engagement and access to external resources. They are no longer assessed solely on resources physically owned or internally controlled but also on their ability to access external knowledge and participate in productive relationships, which can influence their capacity to achieve sustainability.

Knowledge networks and university collaboration can facilitate knowledge transfer and access to complementary expertise that may not exist within a single institution (Huggins, Johnston, & Strides, 2012; Pedro, Alves, & Dias, 2020). This relationship is particularly important for private universities that operate in an environment characterised by fierce competition to attract both talent and students and the need to continue to demonstrate relevance, academic quality and institutional value in pursuit of their sustainability. They operate in a system that relies primarily on tuition fees paid by students, and these relationships help harness opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaborative research, staff development, professional exposure, industry engagement and access to external resources. Institutional networking may strengthen the competitive position of these universities, and partnership with reputable universities and research organisations can increase institutional exposure and create opportunities for joint research, staff exchange and academic development.

The ability of a university to establish and sustain relationships may largely depend on the quality and capabilities of the talent it attracts. Collings, Mellahi and Cascio (2019) viewed talent attraction as the deliberate suite of organisational strategies, policies, and practices including employer branding, transparent recruitment, and competitive reward systems, designed to generate high-quality candidate pools to execute institutional objectives. Talent attraction is not merely a human resources activity concerned with filling vacant positions. It involves an institution's ability to attract competent personnel through transparent recruitment, competitive compensation, career opportunities, employer reputation, and a supportive work environment. In higher education, employer attractiveness may be influenced by the value proposition offered to prospective employees, including professional

opportunities, institutional reputation, and the social environment of work (Prakash, Yadav, Singh, & Aarti, 2022). For a university, talent attraction can provide access to the intellectual, professional competence, knowledge, experience, professional relationships and reputational resources possessed by employees.

Organisational characteristics, particularly research capability, influence the formation of collaboration ties among universities (Zinilli et al., 2024). As an entity, a university does not independently create research collaborations, attend professional events, negotiate partnerships or maintain relationships with industry. These activities are undertaken by the university's staff. Academic and non-academic staff serve as the connections between their universities and the external environment through their research collaborations, industry contacts, conference participation and professional memberships. This shows that importance of talent attraction and institutional networking among the private universities for establishing and sustaining relationships for growth and competitive advantage among universities in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

Statement of the Problem

Institutional networking has become essential to private universities' ability to access knowledge, expertise, research opportunities, industry relationships, and other valuable resources beyond the four walls of their institution. Through these relationships, universities are able to strengthen research collaboration, promote knowledge exchange, and enhance staff and student development. Despite the importance of networking to institutions, institutional networking in higher education remains an area of concern. In addition, available literature showed that private universities compete for qualified talent, while simultaneously seeking stronger relationships with professional bodies, research organisations, alumni, industries and other universities. However, existing studies on the variables of this study have largely focused on institutional networking-as a function of an institution's own characteristics or its capacity for institutional alliance-building. Alos, studies on talent attraction focused majorly on recruitment outcomes and employers' image. Without asking whether the two are related. The question that motivates this study is: how does a private university's capacity to attract talent relate to its institutional networking? That is, whether a university's ability to attract competent personnel is associated with its capacity to develop and sustain institutional networks. Hence, this study explored talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The major purpose of this study was to investigate talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in Southwest, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the paper are:

1. examine the level of talent attraction in private universities in South-West, Nigeria;
2. ascertain the perceived level of institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria; and
3. examine the relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study was guided by these research questions:

1. What is the level of talent attraction in private universities in South-West, Nigeria?
2. How do staff perceive the level of institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria?
3. What is the relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The main hypothesis guiding this study is stated below:

H_0: There is no significant relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in South-West Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive and correlational survey research designs. These designs were considered appropriate because they allowed the researchers to measure natural relationships between variables without manipulation. The population of the study comprised 2,106 senior academic staff and 363 senior non-academic staff across the 52 private universities in South-West, Nigeria. Using a purposive and proportionate random sampling technique, 414 senior academic and non-academic staff participated in the study. A total of 500 copies of the questionnaire were administered. The instrument was validated by professionals in the Department of Educational Management, at the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using a Cronbach's alpha method and the coefficient obtained was .841. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, mean, and standard deviation; while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 significance.

4.0 Results

Out of the 500 copies of the questionnaire administered, only a total of 408 valid responses, comprising 356 academic staff (87.3%) and 52 non-academic staff (12.7%) were obtained. Consequently, the 408 copies were analysed and interpreted in this section.

Question 1: What is the level of talent attraction in private universities in South-West, Nigeria?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Talent Attraction Items

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The university's recruitment process is transparent.	2.69	.855
2	The university offers competitive compensation packages.	2.44	.743
3	Clear career progression opportunities are communicated to prospective employees.	2.44	.759
4	Vacancies are widely advertised to attract qualified candidates.	2.78	.839
5	The institution is widely regarded as a desirable place to work.	2.42	.734
6	The university makes deliberate efforts to attract competent staff.	2.64	.886
	Composite Talent Attraction Score	**2.57**	**.442**

Keys: High (x ≤4); Moderate (x ≤ 3); Low (x ≤ 2); Ver Low (x ≤ 1)

Table 1 shows the level of talent attraction in private universities in South-West, Nigeria. The results revealed that talent attraction is perceived as moderate with item means ranging from 2.42 to 2.78 and with a composite mean of 2.57 (SD = .44). Hence, the level of talent attraction in private universities in South-West, Nigeria is moderate.

Question 2: How do staff perceive the level of institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Institutional Networking Item

S/N	Item Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	The university facilitates partnerships with industries.	2.32	.816
2	The university organises networking events for staff.	2.47	.758
3	The university actively engages alumni in mentorship activities.	2.30	.719
4	The university collaborates with international universities to enhance academic quality.	2.22	.725
5	The university participates in joint research projects with other institutions.	2.22	.680
6	The university implements staff exchange programmes with other institutions.	2.00	.683
7	The university provides networking opportunities that improve staff career prospects.	2.25	.911
8	The university regularly invites industry experts to share professional insights	2.00	.782
9	The university provides platforms for interaction between students and potential employers	2.12	.757
10	The university's networking platforms help students secure job or internship opportunities.	2.09	.749
	Composite Networking Score	2.20	.363

Keys: High (x ≤4); Moderate (x ≤ 3); Low (x ≤ 2); Ver Low (x ≤ 1)

Table 2 shows that institutional networking was relatively low, with item means ranging from 2.00 to 2.47 and a composite mean of 2.20 (SD = .36). Thus, the level of institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria is perceived to be low.

Note: The research question three was transformed to hypothesis and tested in the next sub-section.

Test of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking among private universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Talent Attraction and Institutional Networking

	Talent Attraction	Institutional Networking
Talent Attraction	1.000	r = .172 p < .001
Institutional Networking	r = .172 p < .001	1.000

Table 3 shows a positive statistically significant but weak relationship (r = .172, p < .001) between talent attraction and institutional networking. Therefore, the study rejects the null hypothesis. This implies that significant relationship existed between talent attraction and institutional networking among private universities in South-West, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This study found that the level of talent attraction was moderate; and the level of institutional networking were perceived to be low in South-West, Nigeria. This implies that the levels of talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities are not high. This aligns with the finding of Lagoke, Adesola and Soname (2021) who reported a low level of interaction between industry stakeholders and universities. Similarly, Jimoh (2022) found the level of talent attraction among academic staff to be low; and significant operational variance between public and private universities, with private universities leveraging higher managerial flexibility and customized compensation frameworks to offset the talent attraction edge historically held by prestigious federal institutions.

The study also found a positive, significant but weak relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking. This suggests that private universities with stronger talent attraction practices may be more likely to report higher levels of institutional networking. The weak relationship also suggests that talent attraction may be one of several factors associated with a university's networking capacity. This may be why Prakash et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of deliberate institutional strategies in attracting quality academic personnel. However, attracting competent employees into a university does not automatically translate into strong institutional networks. Supporting the finding of this study Ogbari, Owoeye and Oluyemi (2018) found that talent attraction alone does not improve job performance. The researchers asserted that perceived organisational support acts as a critical mediator and that talent attraction strategies will fail to yield results unless lecturers feel continuous structural, financial, and administrative support from university management. Likewise, Ugwulali, Adejuwon and Ojomolade (2023) who examined financial sustainability dynamics and university sustainability found that networking positively affects university sustainability. Equally, Zinilli et al (2024) reported that organisational characteristics and research capabilities influence the formation of collaboration networks in the universities. This may be based on the fact that a university may successfully attract qualified personnel while lacking the financial or administrative capacity to support international collaboration, staff exchange, and joint research or industry partnerships.

Conclusion

Individual staff members may possess professional contacts, research collaborations, industry relationships, and memberships in professional associations, but these personal connections may remain individual assets unless the university harnesses them to form formal

institutional partnerships. Thus, talent attraction and institutional networking are crucial for the growth, survival and building sustainable institutional relationship among private universities. Consequently, this study examined the relationship between talent attraction and institutional networking in private universities in South-West, Nigeria. The study found a positive, statistically significant but weak relationship between the two variables. The study therefore concluded that attracting competent personnel may provide useful human resources foundation for institutional networking, but talent attraction alone is not sufficient to build a substantial institutional network. Private universities require additional systems such as organisational structures, leadership support, resources and deliberate partnership strategies to convert employees' expertise and professional connections into sustainable institutional relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The management of private universities should support their staff to participate in professional associations, conferences, collaborative research, industry engagement, and other activities that can expand institutional visibility and external relationships. This will attract talented to private universities.
2. Private universities should make conscious efforts to strengthen formal mechanisms for converting staff professional contacts and expertise into institutional partnerships.
3. Private universities should incorporate relevant professional exposure, collaborative experience, industry engagement, and research networks into talent attraction considerations, with particular attention to positions with strategic academic and administrative responsibilities.

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