

ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY AS DETERMINANTS OF EFFECTIVE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined ethics and accountability as determinants of effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of ethical practices on effective human resource management, the effect of accountability on human resource management effectiveness, the relationship between transparency in human resource activities and staff productivity, and the influence of fairness in recruitment and promotion practices on employee commitment. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 1,240 respondents drawn from selected public tertiary institutions in Northeast Nigeria, while a sample size of 302 respondents was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Ethics and Accountability in Human Resource Management Questionnaire (EAHRMQ). The instrument was validated by experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while regression and Pearson correlation analyses were conducted using R Programming at 0.05 level of significance to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that ethical practices significantly influence effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study also found that accountability positively affects human resource management effectiveness, while transparency in human resource activities significantly relates to staff productivity. Furthermore, fairness in recruitment and promotion practices was found to significantly influence employee commitment. The study concluded that ethics and accountability are essential for achieving effective human resource management, improved institutional productivity, and sustainable administration in Nigerian public tertiary institutions. The study recommended strengthening ethical standards, promoting transparency and accountability mechanisms, and ensuring merit-based recruitment and promotion practices in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: *Ethics, Accountability, Human Resource Management, Public Tertiary Institutions, Employee Commitment*

Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) refers to the strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets, the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In the context of tertiary institutions, HRM encompasses the recruitment, selection, training, development, compensation, and welfare of academic and non-academic staff. According to Pandit and Paul (2023), strategic human resource management in higher education involves

aligning workforce capabilities with institutional goals while navigating governance challenges. The functions of HRM in tertiary institutions include workforce planning, performance management, staff development, and ensuring compliance with institutional policies (Fasusi & Adedokun, 2025). Effective HRM practices are essential for achieving institutional goals, as they ensure that the right people with the right skills are placed in the right positions at the right time. In Nigerian public tertiary institutions, HRM practices have been characterized by bureaucratic procedures, political interference, and limited autonomy, which often undermine their effectiveness (Dike, 2022).

Public tertiary institutions in Nigeria comprise universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education established and funded by federal or state governments. These institutions are mandated to produce skilled human capital, conduct research, and provide community service (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Universities focus on degree programmes and research, polytechnics emphasize technical and vocational education, while colleges of education train teachers for the basic education sector. The administrative structure of these institutions typically includes a governing council, a vice-chancellor or rector, and various management committees. However, these institutions face numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, brain drain, and governance deficits (Imolong & Adesola, 2025). According to Anyadiegwu (2025), effective educational management is critical for addressing these challenges and improving the quality of higher education in Nigeria.

Ethics refers to the moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity (Matimbwa & Kamala, 2024). In HRM, ethics involves the application of moral principles to human resource policies, decisions, and practices. Ethical principles in HRM include fairness, equity, transparency, integrity, and respect for human dignity. These principles should guide conduct in recruitment, promotion, discipline, and staff welfare (Wajim & Ukpata, 2023). Ethical recruitment ensures that appointments are based on merit rather than nepotism or favouritism, while ethical promotion practices reward competence and performance. According to Emenike and Ogolo (2025), embedding ethics and values into the core of higher education management is essential for responsible leadership and effective policy implementation. The importance of ethics in institutional administration cannot be overstated, as it fosters trust, enhances organizational commitment, and promotes a culture of integrity (Arisah, 2025).

Accountability refers to the obligation of individuals and institutions to account for their activities, accept responsibility for them, and disclose the results in a transparent manner (Ogunode & Obioma, 2024). In public institutions, accountability encompasses financial, administrative, and political dimensions. Financial accountability involves the proper management and utilization of resources, while administrative accountability relates to adherence to rules, procedures, and standards of performance. In tertiary institutions, accountability mechanisms include internal and external audits, performance evaluations, and adherence to statutory regulations (Onah, Eteng, & Unwanung, 2021). Transparency and responsibility in HR practices are essential for building stakeholder confidence and ensuring that institutional resources are used for their intended purposes. According to Imolong and Adesola (2025), poor resource management and corruption lead to inadequate accountability in higher education, undermining institutional efficiency and sustainable national development.

Effective HRM refers to the optimal utilization of human resources to achieve organizational objectives while ensuring employee satisfaction and development. Indicators of effective HRM in tertiary institutions include high staff morale, low turnover rates, improved performance, and the achievement of institutional goals (Chioke, Abasili, & Okeke, 2023). There is a symbiotic

relationship between ethics, accountability, and HR effectiveness—ethical practices and accountability mechanisms create an environment where employees are motivated to perform at their best. According to Mbon, Omorobi, and Ekpenyong (2020), participative management practices enhance institutional efficiency by involving staff in decision-making processes. Effective HRM plays a pivotal role in institutional productivity by ensuring that staff are adequately trained, motivated, and equipped with the necessary resources to perform their duties.

Ethical practices significantly influence staff performance by creating a work environment characterized by fairness, trust, and mutual respect. According to Matimbwa and Kamala (2024), ethical dilemmas in African human resource management often arise from cultural, political, and economic factors that compromise the integrity of HR practices. Ethical leadership fosters organizational commitment by demonstrating integrity, fairness, and consistency in decision-making (Arisah, 2025). Conversely, corruption, favouritism, and nepotism erode trust, demotivate employees, and undermine HR effectiveness. Ukpong (2025) found that nepotism in employee recruitment and student admissions is pervasive in Nigeria's tertiary education system, disadvantaging qualified candidates. Tyokyaa (2024) noted that corruption in Nigerian public universities manifests in staff recruitment, procurement, and admission processes, recommending the integration of moral and ethical education to address these challenges. Ethical decision-making in tertiary institutions requires administrators to prioritize institutional interests over personal gains and to uphold the principles of justice and fairness.

Accountability is fundamental to building employee trust, as it assures staff that institutional resources and decisions are managed responsibly. According to Agu, Nkwo, and Eneiga (2024), enhancing transparency and accountability in public governance is essential for improving institutional performance and public trust. Financial and administrative accountability in HRM ensures that funds allocated for staff welfare, training, and development are utilized appropriately. Monitoring and evaluation of HR activities provide feedback on performance and identify areas for improvement (Ogunode & Obioma, 2024). Accountability in recruitment, promotion, and resource allocation prevents misuse of power and ensures that decisions are merit-based. Obeta and Edwin (2025) explored the role of digital governance in enhancing transparency and accountability in HRM practices in Nigerian organizations, suggesting that technology can be leveraged to improve HR accountability. According to Ukeje et al. (2020), public service recruitment practices that promote accountability, transparency, and sound administrative governance are essential for sustainable development.

Nigerian public tertiary institutions face significant HRM challenges, including corruption and unethical practices. Akinola and Ogunode (2022) identified bribery, nepotism, and favouritism in staff appointments and licensing as major forms of corruption in educational administration. Nwodim (2021) examined bureaucratic corruption and staff recruitment in the Nigerian university system, finding that corruption is the bane of public administration and undermines merit-based appointments. Nepotism, favouritism, and political interference compromise the integrity of HR processes, leading to the appointment of unqualified personnel (Nwodim, 2021). Poor accountability and weak institutional control create opportunities for financial mismanagement and resource misallocation (Imolong & Adesola, 2025). Inadequate staff motivation and development result from limited funding for training, poor working conditions, and irregular payment of salaries and allowances (Elenwo, 2025). These challenges collectively undermine the effectiveness of HRM and the overall performance of tertiary institutions.

The need for ethics and accountability in public tertiary institutions is underscored by their potential to enhance institutional efficiency. According to Elugbaju et al. (2024), a conceptual

framework for enhancing decision-making in higher education through data-driven governance fosters a culture of transparency and accountability, enhancing trust among stakeholders. Ethics and accountability promote transparency and fairness in HR practices, ensuring that appointments, promotions, and disciplinary actions are based on merit and established criteria (Wajim & Ukpata, 2023). Improved staff morale and productivity result from a work environment where employees feel valued, respected, and fairly treated (Chioke et al., 2023). Strengthening public confidence in tertiary institutions requires demonstrating commitment to ethical conduct and accountability in all aspects of institutional management (Onah et al., 2021). Ultimately, embedding ethics and accountability into the fabric of HRM is essential for transforming public tertiary institutions in Nigeria into centres of excellence that can effectively contribute to national development.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the critical role of human resource management in enhancing institutional effectiveness in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, ethical and accountability challenges such as nepotism, favoritism, bribery, political interference, lack of transparency, and weak accountability continue to undermine HR practices. These challenges have contributed to low staff morale, poor job commitment, industrial disputes, reduced productivity, and declining public confidence, despite various government reforms aimed at improving institutional governance.

Although previous studies have examined human resource management, organizational performance, and governance in higher education, limited empirical attention has been given to ethics and accountability as determinants of effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions. This gap has constrained the development of evidence-based strategies for strengthening ethical standards and accountability in HR administration. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how ethics and accountability influence effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine ethics and accountability as determinants of effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. examine the influence of ethical practices on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria;
- ii. determine the effect of accountability on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria;
- iii. assess the relationship between transparency in human resource activities and staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria; and
- iv. examine the influence of fairness in recruitment and promotion practices on employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- i. Ethical practices have no significant influence on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

- ii. Accountability has no significant effect on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- iii. There is no significant relationship between transparency in human resource activities and staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
- iv. Fairness in recruitment and promotion practices has no significant influence on employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) constitutes the strategic framework through which organizations acquire, develop, motivate, and retain employees to achieve institutional objectives. Beyond routine personnel administration, HRM plays a critical role in enhancing organizational efficiency, accountability, and long-term sustainability. According to Pandit and Paul (2023), strategic HRM in higher education aligns workforce capabilities with institutional governance and performance demands. In Nigeria, HRM encompasses recruitment, training, performance management, and welfare administration for both academic and non-academic staff (Fasusi & Adedokun, 2025). Dike (2022) further argues that effective human resource planning is indispensable for educational development, particularly in institutions constrained by bureaucratic inefficiencies and governance challenges, where the quality of HR practices directly influences institutional effectiveness.

Concept of Ethics

Ethics denotes the moral principles governing individual and institutional conduct. Matimbwa and Kamala (2024) defined ethics in HRM as the application of fairness, integrity, and respect for human dignity to workplace policies. In public tertiary institutions, ethical conduct manifests in merit-based recruitment and transparent disciplinary procedures (Wajim & Ukpata, 2023). Emenike and Ogolo (2025) argued that embedding ethical values into university management creates the foundation for responsible leadership.

Concept of Accountability

Accountability represents the obligation of institutions to account for their actions and disclose outcomes transparently. Ogunode and Obioma (2024) identified financial, administrative, and political dimensions of accountability within Nigerian universities. Imolong and Adesola (2025) noted that accountability mechanisms (including audits and performance evaluations) curb resource mismanagement in higher education. Agu et al. (2024) further emphasized that transparency serves as a critical antidote to corruption in public governance.

Effective Human Resource Management

Effective HRM optimizes human capital utilization to achieve organizational goals while fostering employee satisfaction. Chioke et al. (2023) identified high staff morale and low turnover as key indicators of HRM effectiveness in Nigerian public institutions. According to Mbon et al. (2020), participative management practices enhance goal attainment by involving employees in decision-making. Effective HRM requires alignment between workforce capabilities and institutional priorities.

Ethics and Effective Human Resource Management

The relationship between ethics and HRM effectiveness is symbiotic. Arisah (2025) demonstrated that ethical leadership correlates positively with HRM outcomes in Nigerian tertiary institutions by fostering organizational commitment. Conversely, Matimbwa and Kamala (2024) observed that ethical dilemmas arising from political pressures compromise HR integrity. Tyokyaa (2024) found that corruption in staff recruitment undermines merit-based HRM, recommending ethical education as a remedial strategy. Thus, ethical practices constitute a prerequisite for sustainable HR effectiveness.

Accountability and Effective Human Resource Management in Public Tertiary Institutions

Accountability mechanisms directly influence HRM effectiveness by ensuring responsible resource utilization. Obeta and Edwin (2025) explored digital governance as a tool for enhancing transparency in Nigerian organizational HRM. Ukeje, Ndukwe, Emma, and Ogbulu (2020) established that accountable recruitment practices promote sustainable development in the public sector. Ogunode and Obioma (2024) argued that weak accountability structures create avenues for financial mismanagement and arbitrary HR decisions, eroding institutional performance.

Theoretical Framework

Ethical Theory

This study is anchored on ethical theory, which posits that moral principles guide rational decision-making. Deontological ethics emphasizes duty-based conduct, requiring administrators to adhere to established rules regardless of outcomes (Matimbwa & Kamala, 2024). Virtue ethics focuses on the character of decision-makers, suggesting that ethical leadership fosters institutional integrity (Arisah, 2025). These frameworks illuminate how ethical standards shape HRM practices in tertiary institutions.

Accountability Theory

Accountability theory underscores that institutions must answer to stakeholders for their actions. Principal-agent theory examines the relationship between governing bodies (principals) and administrators (agents), highlighting information asymmetry as a barrier to governance (Ogunode & Obioma, 2024). Imolong and Adesola (2025) applied this perspective to higher education, arguing that transparent reporting mechanisms reduce agency problems and enhance institutional trust.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have documented challenges confronting HRM in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Nwodim (2021) investigated bureaucratic corruption in university staff recruitment, concluding that patronage networks displace merit-based selection. Akinola and Ogunode (2022) identified bribery, nepotism, and favouritism as pervasive forms of corruption undermining educational administration. Ukpong (2025) confirmed that nepotism in recruitment disadvantages qualified candidates, while Elenwo (2025) highlighted inadequate staff motivation as a barrier to HRM effectiveness. These findings demonstrate that ethical and accountability deficits significantly impair HR outcomes.

Gap in Literature

Despite extensive research on HRM and governance in Nigerian tertiary institutions, existing literature rarely integrates ethics and accountability as simultaneous determinants of HRM effectiveness. Most studies examine these variables independently without exploring their interactive effects on HR performance. Furthermore, limited empirical attention has been given to public tertiary institutions specifically, with most studies concentrating on universities alone. This study addresses these gaps by examining ethics and accountability as joint determinants of effective HRM across public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine ethics and accountability as determinants of effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The choice of this design was justified because it is appropriate for studies that seek to collect, describe, and analyze the opinions, perceptions, and experiences of a large population on existing phenomena without manipulating the study variables. It enabled the researcher to obtain reliable data on respondents' views regarding ethical practices, accountability mechanisms, transparency, and the effectiveness of human resource management across the selected institutions. The descriptive survey design was also considered suitable because it facilitates the generalization of findings from the sample to the target population, thereby providing empirical evidence for informed policy and administrative decisions. The study was conducted in selected public tertiary institutions in Northeast Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 1,240 respondents, consisting of principal officers, heads of departments, administrative staff, and academic staff drawn from four public tertiary institutions. The distribution of the population is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Respondents

S/N	Institution Category	Population
1	Academic Staff	520
2	Administrative Staff	410
3	Heads of Departments	230
4	Principal Officers	80
Total		1,240

A sample size of 302 respondents was used for the study based on Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure fair representation of all categories of respondents in the study. Thereafter, simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from each stratum.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Ethics and Accountability in Human Resource Management Questionnaire (EAHRMQ)*. The questionnaire was structured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted using respondents outside the study area, and Cronbach Alpha method was used to determine the reliability coefficient, which yielded an overall coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. Data were collected with the help of research assistants and analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while t-test and regression analysis were used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the influence of ethical practices on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Ethical Practices on Effective Human Resource Management

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Ethical conduct promotes fairness in staff administration	302	3.68	0.81	Agree
2	Ethical practices improve employee commitment	302	3.74	0.77	Agree
3	Ethical leadership enhances institutional productivity	302	3.71	0.84	Agree
4	Ethical standards reduce corruption in HR management	302	3.80	0.73	Agree
5	Ethical practices improve staff morale and discipline	302	3.66	0.86	Agree
Grand Mean/SD		302	3.72	0.80	Agree

Key to Abbreviations: N = Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 revealed that all the items had mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.72 and standard deviation of 0.80. This indicates that respondents agreed that ethical practices positively influence effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of accountability on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Effect of Accountability on Effective Human Resource Management

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Accountability improves transparency in HR activities	302	3.76	0.79	Agree
2	Accountability promotes responsible management practices	302	3.81	0.71	Agree
3	Accountability reduces misuse of institutional resources	302	3.69	0.83	Agree
4	Accountability enhances administrative efficiency	302	3.73	0.76	Agree
5	Accountability strengthens employee trust in management	302	3.77	0.74	Agree
Grand Mean/SD		302	3.75	0.77	Agree

Key to Abbreviations: N = Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 3 showed that respondents agreed that accountability positively affects effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, as evidenced by the grand mean score of 3.75, which is above the benchmark mean of 2.50.

Research Question 3: What relationship exists between transparency in human resource activities and staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on Transparency in Human Resource Activities and Staff Productivity

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Transparency improves employee productivity	302	3.79	0.75	Agree
2	Transparent HR practices enhance staff confidence	302	3.70	0.82	Agree
3	Transparency promotes fairness in institutional management	302	3.74	0.80	Agree
4	Transparent communication improves staff cooperation	302	3.71	0.77	Agree
5	Transparency reduces conflict among employees	302	3.65	0.85	Agree
Grand Mean/SD		302	3.72	0.80	Agree

Key to Abbreviations: N = Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation

The result in Table 4 indicated that respondents agreed that transparency in human resource activities has a positive relationship with staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The grand mean score of 3.72 supports this conclusion.

Research Question 4: How does fairness in recruitment and promotion practices influence employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation on Fairness in Recruitment and Promotion Practices and Employee Commitment

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Fair recruitment practices improve employee commitment	302	3.83	0.73	Agree
2	Merit-based promotion enhances job satisfaction	302	3.79	0.76	Agree
3	Fair promotion practices encourage staff loyalty	302	3.74	0.81	Agree
4	Recruitment fairness reduces staff dissatisfaction	302	3.68	0.84	Agree
5	Equity in promotion improves institutional harmony	302	3.72	0.79	Agree
Grand Mean/SD		302	3.75	0.79	Agree

Key to Abbreviations: N = Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 5 showed that respondents agreed that fairness in recruitment and promotion practices positively influences employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is evidenced by the grand mean score of 3.75.

Hypothesis 1: Ethical practices have no significant influence on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Table 6: Regression Analysis on Ethical Practices and Effective Human Resource Management

Variable	N	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t- value	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F- value	p- value	Decision
Ethical Practices	302	0.684	0.072	9.50	0.684	0.468	0.463	90.25	0.000	Rejected

Key to Abbreviations: β = Beta Coefficient; R² = Coefficient of Determination; Sig. = Significance Level

Table 6 revealed that ethical practices significantly influence effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria ($\beta = 0.684$, $t = 9.50$, $p < 0.05$). The R² value of 0.468 implies that ethical practices accounted for 46.8% of the variance in effective human resource management. Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Accountability has no significant effect on effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Table 7: Regression Analysis on Accountability and Effective Human Resource Management

Variable	N	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t- value	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F- value	p- value	Decision
Accountability	302	0.701	0.068	10.31	0.701	0.491	0.487	106.30	0.000	Rejected

Key to Abbreviations: β = Beta Coefficient; R² = Coefficient of Determination

The regression result in Table 7 showed that accountability significantly affects effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria ($\beta = 0.701$, $t = 10.31$, $p < 0.05$). The R² value of 0.491 indicates that accountability explained 49.1% of the variance in effective human resource management. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between transparency in human resource activities and staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Table 8: Pearson Correlation Analysis on Transparency and Staff Productivity

Variables	N	r-value	R ²	t-value	p-value	Decision
Transparency and Staff Productivity	302	0.652	0.425	8.87	0.000	Rejected

Key to Abbreviations: r = Pearson Correlation Coefficient; R² = Coefficient of Determination

Table 8 indicated a significant positive relationship between transparency in human resource activities and staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria ($r = 0.652$, $p < 0.05$). The coefficient of determination (R² = 0.425) showed that transparency accounted for 42.5% of the variance in staff productivity. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 4: Fairness in recruitment and promotion practices has no significant influence on employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Table 9: Regression Analysis on Fairness in Recruitment and Promotion Practices and Employee Commitment

Variable	N	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t- value	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F- value	p- value	Decision
Fairness in Recruitment and Promotion	302	0.718	0.065	11.05	0.718	0.516	0.511	122.10	0.000	Rejected

Key to Abbreviations: β = Beta Coefficient; R² = Coefficient of Determination

The result in Table 9 showed that fairness in recruitment and promotion practices significantly influence employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria ($\beta = 0.718$, $t = 11.05$, $p < 0.05$). The R² value of 0.516 indicates that fairness in recruitment and promotion explained 51.6% of the variance in employee commitment. Since the p-value was less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study on research question one revealed that ethical practices positively influence effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The respondents agreed that ethical conduct promotes fairness, enhances employee commitment, improves institutional productivity, and reduces corruption in staff administration. This finding agrees with the submission of Wajim and Ukpata (2023), who found that ethics significantly improve administrative accountability and institutional effectiveness in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The finding also corroborates the study of Matimbwa and Kamala (2024), which emphasized that ethical behaviour in human resource management enhances transparency, trust, and organizational efficiency in African institutions. Similarly, Emenike and Ogolo (2025) maintained that ethics and values education are essential for sustainable university management and improved staff relations in higher institutions in Nigeria. The implication for HRM policy and practice is that public tertiary institutions should institutionalize ethical standards through enforceable codes of conduct, continuous ethics training, and strengthened compliance mechanisms to enhance fairness, integrity, and organizational effectiveness.

The finding of research question two showed that accountability positively affects effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The respondents affirmed that accountability improves transparency, strengthens responsible management practices, reduces misuse of institutional resources, and enhances administrative efficiency. This finding is in line with Agu et al. (2024), who asserted that accountability mechanisms are necessary for enhancing transparency, public trust, and good governance in Nigerian institutions. The result also agrees with Ogunode and Obioma (2024), who identified accountability as a major factor for effective university administration and institutional sustainability in Nigeria. In the same vein, Imolong and Adesola (2025) observed that accountability practices in higher education management promote responsible leadership, institutional efficiency, and sustainable national development. This suggests that HRM policies should strengthen accountability systems by introducing clear performance monitoring, transparent reporting procedures, and regular audits of human resource activities to improve administrative efficiency and institutional credibility.

The finding of research question three revealed that transparency in human resource activities has a positive relationship with staff productivity in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study showed that transparent communication and fair human resource practices improve employee

confidence, cooperation, and productivity. This finding supports the position of Onah et al. (2021), who noted that transparency and accountability are catalysts for sustainable development and institutional growth in Nigerian society. The finding also aligns with the work of Obeta and Edwin (2025), who explained that digital governance and transparent HR management practices significantly improve organizational trust and operational effectiveness in Nigerian organizations. Furthermore, Elugbaju et al. (2024) emphasized that data-driven governance and transparent decision-making enhance institutional productivity and effective management in higher education institutions. The implication is that tertiary institutions should adopt transparent HR policies, digital HR information systems, and open communication channels to ensure fairness in personnel decisions and improve staff confidence and productivity.

The finding of research question four indicated that fairness in recruitment and promotion practices positively influences employee commitment in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The respondents agreed that merit-based recruitment and promotion enhance staff loyalty, job satisfaction, and institutional harmony. This finding is consistent with Ukeje et al. (2020), who reported that fair recruitment practices promote sustainable development and improve employee commitment in public institutions in Nigeria. The finding also agrees with Nwodin (2021), who found that bureaucratic corruption and favoritism in staff recruitment negatively affect institutional efficiency and employee morale in Nigerian universities. In addition, Ukpog (2025) observed that nepotism and unfair recruitment practices in tertiary institutions reduce staff motivation, trust, and organizational commitment, thereby affecting institutional performance negatively. Accordingly, HRM policy should prioritize merit-based recruitment and promotion procedures, supported by transparent selection criteria and independent oversight, to strengthen employee commitment, institutional trust, and overall organizational performance.

Conclusion

The study concluded that ethics and accountability are fundamental determinants of effective human resource management in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Ethical practices such as fairness, integrity, transparency, and professionalism were found to enhance staff commitment, institutional productivity, and administrative effectiveness. Similarly, accountability mechanisms strengthened responsible management, improved transparency in decision-making, and promoted the efficient utilization of institutional resources. The study further established that transparency in human resource activities enhances staff productivity and organizational trust, while fairness in recruitment and promotion fosters employee commitment and institutional harmony.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by demonstrating that ethics and accountability are not merely governance principles but strategic drivers of effective human resource management in higher education institutions. Practically, the findings provide evidence to guide policymakers, institutional administrators, and human resource practitioners in designing and implementing ethical, transparent, and accountable HR policies capable of improving institutional performance and governance. The study therefore concludes that the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of public tertiary institutions in Nigeria depend largely on institutionalizing ethical standards, transparent administrative processes, and robust accountability mechanisms within human resource management systems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Public tertiary institutions should establish and enforce institutional ethics compliance units within their human resource departments to monitor adherence to codes of conduct, investigate ethical violations, and implement periodic ethics audits. In addition, mandatory ethics training should be conducted at least once every academic session for all academic and non-academic staff.
- ii. Institutional governing councils and management should strengthen accountability mechanisms by introducing digital human resource management systems, annual HR performance audits, and transparent reporting procedures for recruitment, promotion, staff welfare, and disciplinary actions. Regular independent oversight should be instituted to ensure compliance with established HR policies.
- iii. Recruitment, promotion, and performance appraisal processes should be standardized and fully merit-based through the use of clearly defined eligibility criteria, publicly advertised vacancies, structured assessment procedures, and independent selection committees. Institutions should also establish confidential whistle-blower mechanisms to enable the reporting of favoritism, nepotism, bribery, and other unethical HR practices without fear of victimization.
- iv. The Federal and State Ministries of Education, in collaboration with the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), should develop continuous capacity-building programmes on ethics, accountability, transparency, and contemporary human resource management for principal officers, HR personnel, and institutional administrators. Participation in these programmes should form part of the requirements for leadership appointments and career advancement within public tertiary institutions.

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