EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND GOAL ACTUALISATION IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES, SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between employee acknowledgment and goal actualization in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. It specifically examined how performance feedback, and promotions influence various outcomes, which include quality service delivery, and employee motivation. Grounded in Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which posits that motivation is driven by expected outcomes, the study employed a survey research design targeting a population of 25,031 academic and non-academic staff across five federal universities. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 394 respondents was determined, with data collected through a structured questionnaire. Analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and regression techniques. The findings revealed significant positive relationships: performance feedback was crucial for quality service delivery ($R^2 = .242$, $p < .001$). Promotions also had a positive effect on employee motivation ($R^2 = .169$, $p < .001$). The study concluded that effective employee acknowledgment mechanisms are essential for achieving organizational goals in Nigerian federal universities. The study recommended that school management needs to implement structured acknowledgment practices and foster a supportive environment to enhance employee engagement and institutional effectiveness.

Key words: *Employee Acknowledgment; Goal Actualization; Performance Feedback; Promotions; Quality Service Delivery; Employee Motivation; South East Nigeria.*

Introduction

Human resources are unequivocally recognized as a cornerstone of organizational success, pivotal for achieving efficiency, effectiveness, and strategic objectives. Effective Human Resource Management (HRM) extends beyond administrative functions like recruitment and payroll, encompassing the strategic development and motivation of employees to gain a competitive advantage (Natsir, Ode, Irfana, Pulungan and Sihite, 2024). Within HRM, employee acknowledgement and recognition represent a critical, yet frequently underutilized lever for optimizing human capital (Hancock, 2024). Modern organizations, including academic institutions, depend not only on robust infrastructure and strategic planning but fundamentally on the engagement, satisfaction, and commitment fostered through valuing employee contributions (Turner,

2020; Aithal and Aithal, 2023; Quader, 2024). Despite this theoretical importance, a significant gap often exists between recognizing the value of acknowledgement and its consistent practice. Global data underscores this deficit; for instance, Gallup reports that only about one-third of U.S. workers strongly agree they received recognition for good work in the past seven days (Gallup, 2024). This lack of appreciation is cited as a primary driver of employee turnover, with unrecognized employees being twice as likely to quit within a year (Coelho, 2024). Such disengagement carries substantial costs, including reduced productivity, lower profitability, and increased absenteeism, ultimately hindering organizational goal actualization (Emasealu, 2023).

In Southeast Nigeria, the concept of employee acknowledgment plays a crucial role in the goal actualization process within federal universities (Blessing Wey-Amaewhule and Clet-Anucha, 2024). These institutions are pivotal in shaping the educational landscape, and the motivation of faculty and staff is integral to their success. When employees feel recognized and valued for their contributions, it fosters a sense of belonging and commitment, which directly influences their ability to achieve both personal and institutional goals. Acknowledgment in various forms whether through verbal praise, formal recognition programs, or constructive feedback can significantly enhance job satisfaction and drive performance among university staff (Celestin, Vasuki, Sujatha & Kumar, 2024). The unique socio-cultural context of Southeast Nigeria emphasizes the importance of communal values and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. In this region, strong ties and collective goals often motivate individuals to strive for success not only for personal gain but also for the advancement of their institutions. By focusing on employee acknowledgment as a means to facilitate goal actualization, federal universities in Southeast Nigeria can create an environment that nurtures talent and promotes high-quality service delivery. This approach not only benefits individual employees but also contributes to the overall effectiveness and reputation of the universities, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes for students.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to examine the effect of employee acknowledgement on goal actualization in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria. Specifically, this study intends to:

1. Evaluate the effect of performance feedback on quality service delivery among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.
2. Analyze the effect of promotions on employee motivation among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the effect of performance feedback on quality service delivery among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria?
2. What effect do promotions have on employee motivation among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated to be tested at 0.05 significance level.

1. **H_{01}:** Performance feedback has no significant effect on quality service delivery among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.
2. **H_{02}:** Promotions have no significant effect on employee motivation among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

Content Scope

This study focused on examining the relationship between various employee acknowledgement practices and the achievement of institutional goals within the specific context of federal universities. It investigates how different forms of recognition contribute to or hinder the realization of organizational objectives in this academic setting.

Variable Scope

The study investigated two key employee acknowledgement mechanisms (performance feedback, and promotions) as independent variables. The impact of these mechanisms is measured against two dependent variables: quality service delivery, and employee motivation.

Geographical Scope

The study was specifically delimited to five selected Federal universities in South East Nigeria which includes: Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State.

Literature Review

Employee Acknowledgement

Employee acknowledgement, particularly in the context of university employees, serves as a pivotal mechanism for enhancing motivation, performance, and overall organizational effectiveness (Imran, Ghazwan and Firmansyah, 2025). In academic institutions, where both teaching and non-teaching staff contribute to the multifaceted objectives of education, research, and community service, recognizing employees' efforts is not merely a courtesy but a strategic imperative (Mustafa, Alzubi and Bashayreh, 2021). The significance of employee recognition in universities is underscored by its positive correlation with job satisfaction and performance. For instance, a study conducted in select tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria revealed that employee recognition significantly influences the performance of non-academic staff, highlighting the necessity of acknowledgment in fostering a committed workforce (Ghasi and Onyejiaku, 2019). Similarly, research at the University of Eldoret in Kenya demonstrated that recognition strategies positively affect the performance of non-teaching staff, emphasizing the universal applicability of such practices across diverse educational settings (Nyamboga, 2024).

Performance Feedback

Performance feedback, extending beyond its traditional evaluative function, represents a significant, albeit often underutilized, mechanism through which universities can convey acknowledgement and cultivate Perceived Organizational Support (POS) among their staff (Quinlan and Pitt, 2024). Performance feedback processes serve as a direct conduit for communicating acknowledgement and strengthening POS. Supervisor support, a core component of POS, is fundamentally characterized by the supervisor acknowledging employee contributions and demonstrating care for their well-being (Tenakwah, Erdiaw-Kwasie, Asiedu and Al Aina, 2024). Consequently, feedback provided by supervisors acts as a primary signal of recognition, directly influencing employees' sense of being valued. Supportive leader behaviors, which inherently involve feedback interactions, have been shown to significantly improve employee performance, further underscoring the value exchange perceived by employees (Lee, Choi and Kang, 2021).

Promotions

Promotions stand out as another significant dimension of employee acknowledgement, representing career advancement, increased responsibility, and often higher compensation for university staff (Tachie-Donkor, Mensah and Nsowah, 2024). Kelley's Attribution Theory provides a useful lens through which to examine this phenomenon, suggesting that employees interpret human resource management practices, such as promotion, by attributing intentions to the university's management, which subsequently influences their attitudes and behaviors (Bish, Shipton and Jorgensen, 2021). Therefore, the act of promotion can be seen by employees as a tangible signal of their value and contribution to the university's mission and objectives. The effectiveness of promotion as a form of acknowledgement, however, is likely contingent upon the perceived fairness and transparency of the processes governing these advancements (Abdulmumini, 2021).

Goal Actualization

Goal actualization in universities represents the multifaceted processes by which these institutions, comprising faculty, staff, and administrators, strive to realize their established objectives. This encompasses the transformation of strategic intentions into tangible outcomes across their diverse missions, including research, teaching, and service. The pursuit of these aims is not a static endeavor but an ongoing series of actions, adaptations, and resource deployments necessary to navigate the complex and evolving landscape of higher education (Blessing Wey-Amaewhule and Clet-Anucha, 2024).

Quality of Service Delivery

In contemporary academic institutions, the quality-of-service delivery among university employees is crucial for achieving organizational goals. Universities, as centers of knowledge creation and dissemination, depend on the efficiency and effectiveness of their staff to provide educational excellence, innovative research, and community engagement. Quality of service delivery refers to the degree to which employees meet established standards of excellence in their interactions with students, faculty, and external stakeholders, encompassing accuracy, timeliness, and relevance. This includes effective teaching, responsive administrative support, and impactful community service (Balzer, 2020).

Employee Motivation

Employee motivation is a pivotal determinant of organizational success, particularly within the higher education sector. Universities, as knowledge-driven institutions, rely heavily on the commitment and performance of their academic and non-academic staff to achieve their strategic objectives. The unique environment of universities, characterized by intellectual autonomy and academic freedom, necessitates a nuanced understanding of motivational dynamics (Mansoor and Hussain, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Vroom's Expectancy Theory. Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) offers a robust framework for understanding employee motivation, making it highly suitable for this study. The theory posits that an individual's motivation to perform is influenced by the expectation that their effort will lead to desired performance (expectancy), the belief that this performance will result in specific outcomes (instrumentality), and the value they place on these outcomes (valence). In the context of Federal Universities in South East Nigeria, Performance feedback is crucial in helping employees understand how their efforts contribute to institutional goals. Constructive feedback reinforces the expectancy component by clarifying the relationship between effort and performance. It also affects instrumentality by demonstrating how performance leads to specific outcomes. This aligns with the first objective, evaluating the relationship between performance feedback and Quality Service Delivery. Promotions also serve as tangible rewards that can significantly boost employee motivation. When promotions are perceived as fair and based on performance, they enhance the valence component, as employees value the outcome. This encourages them to invest more effort, believing it will lead to desired advancements. This directly relates to the fifth objective, analyzing the effect of promotions on employee motivation.

Empirical Studies

Stephen (2024) conducted a study examining the relationship between reward systems (measured by salary, allowance, and promotion) and employees' commitment (disaggregated into affective and normative commitment) in selected public universities in Southwest, Nigeria. This study adopted a descriptive research design. The population encompassed all 10,553 academic staff within these universities. A sample size of 385 academic staff was determined using Yamane's (1964) formula, selected through proportionate and random sampling techniques. Data analysis employed Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that salaries have a positive and significant effect on employee

commitment in the studied public universities. Furthermore, allowances were found to have a positive effect on employee commitment; however, this positive effect was statistically significant only for affective commitment, while its effect on continuance and normative commitment was positive but insignificant. Based on these findings, the study established that the reward system possesses the capacity to influence employee commitment within public universities in Southwest, Nigeria.

Sikira, Madaba and Filbert (2024) determined the impact of recognition on employees' performance in the manufacturing industries in Tanzania, specifically using Tanga Cement Company as a case. The study employed a descriptive research design. Using a simple random sampling method, data was collected from 50 respondents through questionnaires. The analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics processed with SPSS. The results showed that media representation enhances employees' motivation to perform better, signifying the value of visibility and validation. Personal recognition was found to cultivate greater dedication among employees, consistent with motivation theories. Furthermore, receiving recognition letters validated employees' hard work, leading to increased job satisfaction and loyalty. Recognition programs were also observed to boost employee morale, positively influencing productivity and teamwork. Public recognition fostered commitment and positive perceptions about work, the workplace, and colleagues, contributing to a positive work environment. The study highlighted that verbal appreciation from supervisors and co-workers is the most impactful form of recognition due to its immediacy and personal nature. Receiving formal recognition certificates was also identified as significant in enhancing work performance.

Ogolo and Nwaonumah (2024) assessed the relationship between reward systems and business education lecturers' commitment to job responsibilities (specifically effective teaching, conducting research, and participating in community development services) in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria, during the 2023/2024 academic year. The study adopted a correlation research design. The population comprised 7 business education administrators and 90 business education lecturers from Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, University of Port-Harcourt, and Federal College of Education (Tech.), Omoku. The entire population of 97 individuals was used as the sample size (census sampling). Data were collected using two structured instruments developed for the study, which were validated by three experts (one in Educational Measurement and Evaluation, two in Business Education). Reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha, yielding coefficients of approximately 0.81 and 0.76 for the two clusters, with an average index of 0.79. Out of 97 questionnaires distributed, 86 properly filled copies (80 from lecturers, 6 from administrators) were returned, representing an 89% response rate. Data analysis utilized bivariate analysis with Spearman Correlation to answer research questions and test null

hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. The results revealed a positive and significant relationship between the reward system and business education lecturers' commitment to effective teaching, as well as their commitment to conducting research in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. However, the relationship between the reward system and lecturers' commitment to participating in community development services was found to be positive but not statistically significant.

Afolashade, Jimoh, Raji, Fowowe-Ogunmilugba, Oduola and Adewuyi (2024) investigated the influence of emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and reward systems on the job commitment of workers in Nigeria, specifically focusing on Ogun State. The study highlighted the importance of employee commitment for organizational productivity, especially amidst economic challenges in Nigeria. It adopted a descriptive ex-post-facto research design. The population consisted of workers in Ogun State. A multi-stage sampling technique was used: ten organizations (five Ministries of Civil Service, five Private Companies) were randomly selected using stratified random methods, followed by the random selection (balloting) of twenty-five employees from each organization, totaling 250 participants. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire comprising four standardized instruments: Organizational Commitment Scale (alpha = 0.77), Emotional Intelligence Scale (alpha ranging from 0.87 to 0.90), Job Satisfaction Scale (reliability coefficient = 0.80), and Reward System Questionnaire (reliability coefficient = 0.88). Data analysis involved Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and Multiple Regression at a 0.05 significance level. The results from the PPMC analysis showed positive significant relationships between job commitment and emotional intelligence ($r=.764$, $p<.05$), job satisfaction ($r=.666$, $p<.05$), and reward system ($r=.570$, $p<.05$). The multiple regression analysis indicated that the independent variables jointly and significantly predicted job commitment ($R=.783$, $R2=.613$, Adjusted $R2=.608$, $F(3,186)=98.056$, $p<.05$), explaining 61.3% of the variance. Emotional intelligence made the highest significant relative contribution ($\beta=.557$, $t=8.647$, $p<.05$), followed by job satisfaction ($\beta=.217$, $t=3.545$, $p<.05$), and the reward system ($\beta=.017$, $t=1.348$, $p<.05$ - note discrepancy in text/table significance).

Ekpe and Ofeimun (2024) examined the effect of reward systems on employees' job commitment at private secondary schools in Southern Nigeria, noting that poor reward systems often lead to labour-management conflicts and sanctions against some private schools. The study aimed to determine if good reward systems could improve the situation. A survey research design was employed, collecting data through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 341 private secondary school teachers in the southern region of Nigeria. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that adequate compensation, exemplified by leave allowance, had a significant influence on teachers' job commitment within these private secondary schools.

Methodology

This study employed a survey research design to investigate the effect of employee acknowledgement practices on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee performance, quality service delivery, and employee motivation in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria. The study specifically examined the effects of verbal acknowledgement on job satisfaction, reward systems on organizational commitment, public recognition on employee performance, performance feedback on quality service delivery, and promotions on employee motivation. The population comprised 25,031 academic and non-academic staff of selected Federal Universities in the South East, from which a sample size of approximately 394 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A multistage sampling technique involving purposive, stratified, quota, and systematic random sampling was used to select respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into sections and measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated by experts, while reliability was established through a pilot test involving 30 respondents using Cronbach's alpha. Data were collected through face-to-face questionnaire administration and Google Forms. The data were analysed using SPSS version 27.0, with frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation used for descriptive analysis, while regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses. The hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance, with the null hypothesis rejected where the p-value was less than or equal to 0.05 and retained where the p-value was greater than 0.05.

Results and Discussions

Analysis of Data Related to Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the effect of performance feedback on quality service delivery among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Performance Feedback and Quality Service Delivery

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Performance Feedback					
1	I receive timely feedback on my performance from my supervisors.	339	2.81	1.132	Rejected
2	The feedback I receive helps me improve my job performance.	339	3.13	1.127	Accepted
3	I feel comfortable discussing my performance with my manager.	339	3.37	1.109	Accepted
4	I believe that performance feedback is essential for my professional growth.	339	4.21	0.866	Accepted
Quality Service Delivery					

5	I leverage academic conferences and workshops to increase my professional visibility.	339	3.86	0.999	Accepted
6	I strive to deliver high-quality service to students and colleagues.	339	4.41	0.764	Accepted
7	I receive the necessary support to deliver quality service effectively.	339	3.18	1.124	Accepted
8	I am aware of the standards expected for quality service delivery in my role.	339	4.34	0.781	Accepted
Grand Mean		**339**	**3.66**	**1.000**	**Accepted**

***Source**: Researcher's Computation using SPSS, 2025*

The findings presented in Table 1, with a grand mean of 3.66, suggest an overall accepted positive effect of performance feedback on quality service delivery. Respondents showed a very strong commitment to delivering high-quality service (Item 30, M=4.41) and a clear awareness of service standards (Item 32, M=4.34). There was also strong agreement on the importance of feedback for professional growth (Item 28, M=4.21). However, a significant issue was highlighted in Item 25, which was rejected with a mean score of 2.81 (SD=1.132), indicating that employees perceive feedback as not being timely. While employees feel the feedback they do receive is helpful (Item 26, M=3.13) and they are comfortable discussing performance (Item 27, M=3.37), the lack of timeliness appears to be a major deficiency in the performance feedback process.

Research Question 2: What effect do promotions have on employee motivation among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Promotions and Employee Motivation

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Remark
Promotions					
1	I believe that promotions are based on merit at my University.	339	2.94	1.203	Rejected
2	I feel that there are opportunities for career advancement in my role.	339	3.09	1.196	Accepted
3	I am aware of the criteria used for promotion within my department.	339	3.27	1.157	Accepted
4	I believe that my performance will be recognized in future promotion decisions.	339	3.31	1.171	Accepted
Employee Motivation					
5	My work environment encourages me to stay motivated.	339	3.49	1.104	Accepted
6	I am driven to achieve my goals because of the support I receive.	339	3.61	1.082	Accepted
7	I believe that my contributions are	339	4.09	0.913	Accepted

	essential to the success of my team.				
8	Recognition and rewards play a significant role in my motivation to work.	339	4.33	0.833	Accepted
Grand Mean		**339**	**3.52**	**1.082**	**Accepted**

***Source**: Researcher's Computation using SPSS, 2025*

The analysis in Table 2 examines the effect of promotions on employee motivation, yielding a grand mean of 3.52, which is accepted. The items measuring employee motivation (Items 37-40) all returned high mean scores, with overwhelming agreement that recognition and rewards are significant motivators (Item 40, M=4.33) and that employees believe their contributions are essential (Item 39, M=4.09). In terms of promotions, employees are generally aware of the criteria (Item 35, M=3.27) and believe there are opportunities for advancement (Item 34, M=3.09). However, a key point of dissatisfaction was found in Item 33, which was rejected with a mean score of 2.94 (SD=1.203). This indicates a significant perception among employees that promotions are not based on merit, which could undermine the motivational potential of career advancement opportunities.

Hypotheses Testing

Decision Rule: Reject the null hypothesis if $p \leq 0.05$, indicating a statistically significant effect. The R^2 value determines the strength of the effect.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: Performance feedback have no significant effect on quality service delivery among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.

H_{i1}: Performance feedback have a significant effect on quality service delivery among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.

Table 3a: Model Summary of Hypothesis One

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.492[a]	.242	.240	.63155

a. Predictors: (Constant), Performance Feedback

Table 3b: ANOVA[a] of Hypothesis One

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	42.887	1	42.887	107.514	.000[b]
Residual	134.426	337	.399		
Total	177.313	338			

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Service Delivery
b. Predictors: (Constant), Performance Feedback

Table 3c: Coefficients[a] of Hypothesis One

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.956	.167		11.713	.000
	Performance Feedback	.531	.051	.492	10.369	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Quality Service Delivery
***Source**: Researcher's Computation using SPSS, 2025*

The analysis testing the effect of performance feedback on quality service delivery found a significant positive relationship, $F(1, 337) = 107.514$, $p < .001$. Performance feedback explained 24.2% of the variance in quality service delivery ($R^2 = .242$). The regression coefficient ($B = .531$) was statistically significant ($t = 10.369$, $p < .001$). Thus, the null hypothesis that performance feedback has no significant effect on quality service delivery is rejected.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: Promotions have no significant effect on employee motivation among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.

H_{i2}: Promotions have a significant effect on employee motivation among employees in Federal Universities, South East, Nigeria.

Table 4a: Model Summary of Hypothesis Two

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.411[a]	.169	.167	.74291

a. Predictors: (Constant), Promotions

Table 4b: ANOVA[a] of Hypothesis Two

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	37.749	1	37.749	68.423	.000[b]
Residual	185.952	337	.552		
Total	223.701	338			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Motivation
b. Predictors: (Constant), Promotions

Table 4c: Coefficients[a] of Hypothesis Two

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.219	.193		11.497	.000
	Promotions	.486	.059	.411	8.272	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Motivation
***Source**: Researcher's Computation using SPSS, 2025*

Finally, the linear regression for the effect of promotions on employee motivation showed a significant result, $F(1, 337) = 68.423$, $p < .001$. Promotions accounted for 16.9% of the variance in employee motivation ($R^2 = .169$). The regression coefficient ($B = .486$) was found to be statistically significant ($t = 8.272$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that promotions have no significant effect on employee motivation is rejected.

Discussion of Finding

The investigation into the first hypothesis revealed a significant positive effect of performance feedback on quality service delivery. This suggests that the provision of regular, constructive feedback is a critical driver for enhancing the quality of services provided by university staff. From the perspective of Vroom's Expectancy Theory, performance feedback clarifies both the expectancy and instrumentality links. It helps employees understand what is expected of them (effort-performance link) and how their performance contributes to desired outcomes (performance-outcome link), such as better student experiences or more efficient administrative processes. Effective feedback provides a clear roadmap for improvement, empowering employees to refine their skills and align their efforts with institutional standards for quality. This finding is consistent with the study by Arowolo and Akinbo (2022), which, although finding a negative effect for some specific appraisal methods, concluded that performance evaluation as a whole significantly affects employee outcomes. The result also resonates with the findings of Rwothumio, Okaka, Kambaza and Kyomukama (2021), who found a positive relationship between performance appraisal and the outputs of academic staff. The importance of feedback is further highlighted by Daniel and Ibrahim (2019), who concluded that performance appraisal management, particularly continuous feedback, positively influences employee productivity. Similarly, Mbiti, Arasa and Kinyili (2019) found that effective performance appraisal procedures significantly boost university performance, which is intrinsically linked to the quality of service delivered.

Finally, the second hypothesis, which proposed a significant effect of promotions on employee motivation, was confirmed by the analysis. This finding underscores that opportunities for career advancement are a powerful motivator for employees in the university system. In the framework of Vroom's Expectancy Theory, promotion represents a highly valent outcome for many employees. The prospect of achieving a promotion strengthens their motivation to exert effort, as they believe that high performance (instrumentality) will lead to this desired career progression. The desire

for increased responsibility, status, and financial reward associated with a promotion energizes employees to perform at their best. This finding is supported by a body of literature. For example, Tachie-Donkor, Mensah and Nsowah (2024) found a statistically significant positive relationship between job promotion opportunities and employee commitment, a key component of motivation. The result also aligns with the work of Haryono, Supardi and Udin (2020), who concluded that job promotion has a strong positive effect on work motivation and job performance. Similarly, Chukwu (2019) found that timely and transparent promotions had a significant influence on reducing employee turnover intention, which is often linked to low motivation. However, the current study also revealed dissatisfaction with the perceived meritocracy of promotions, a sentiment echoed by Duru, Eze, Yusuf, Danjuma and Saleh (2023), who noted that while promotion opportunities positively influence performance, perceived inequities can undermine this effect. This suggests that while promotions are a significant motivator, their effectiveness is contingent on the fairness and transparency of the promotion process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ultimately, the thread that weaves through the fabric of a thriving university is the simple, yet profound, act of acknowledgement. This study confirms that a deliberate and multifaceted approach to recognizing employee contributions is not merely a courtesy but a strategic imperative for goal actualization in Federal Universities in South East, Nigeria. While employees demonstrate remarkable intrinsic commitment, the findings reveal critical deficiencies in the implementation of reward systems, public recognition, and performance feedback. Addressing these gaps is paramount, as fostering an environment where every staff member feels seen, valued, and supported is the most direct path to unlocking the full potential of the institution and achieving its educational mission.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proposed

1. Federal Universities should transform their appraisal systems from annual, bureaucratic exercises into dynamic, continuous feedback cultures.
2. Federal University Governing Councils and the Federal Ministry of Education should enact binding promotion reform policies that mandate transparent, criterion-based promotion boards with representation from academic peers, external assessors, and staff union observers.

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