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Effectiveness of Internal Versus External Recruitment on Employee Performance in Polytechnics: A study of Selected Federal Polytechnics in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract
This study examined the effectiveness of internal versus external recruitment on employee performance in polytechnics, using selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria as a case study. Recruitment remains one of the most consequential human resource functions in tertiary institutions, yet public polytechnics in Nigeria continue to grapple with the choice between promoting existing staff into vacant positions and sourcing new employees from the open labour market. Anchored on Human Capital Theory and Person-Organisation Fit Theory, the study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 410 academic and non-academic staff was drawn from five federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria- Federal Polytechnic, Bida (Niger State); Federal Polytechnic, Idah (Kogi State); Federal Polytechnic, Offa (Kwara State); Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa (Nasarawa State); and Federal Polytechnic, Wannune (Benue State) - using a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts and pilot-tested with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86, was the main instrument of data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and percentages) and inferential statistics (independent-samples t-test and multiple regression analysis) at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that both internal and external recruitment practices have a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance, but internal recruitment exerted a stronger effect on productivity, job commitment and institutional loyalty, while external recruitment contributed more to innovation, skill diversity and the infusion of new competencies. The study further found that a hybrid recruitment strategy, rather than exclusive reliance on either approach, was associated with the highest levels of reported employee performance. It was concluded that the effectiveness of a recruitment strategy in Nigerian federal polytechnics is contingent on the nature of the vacant position, the urgency of the skill required and the institution's long-term human capital objectives. The study recommended that management of federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria should adopt a deliberate, policy-guided blend of internal and external recruitment, strengthen succession planning and staff development programmes, and insulate recruitment processes from political interference to enhance merit, transparency and overall employee performance.

Keywords: Internal Recruitment, External Recruitment, Employee Performance, Federal Polytechnics, Human Resource Management, North Central Nigeria

Introduction

Recruitment constitutes one of the most strategically significant functions of human resource management because it determines the quality, competence, and orientation of the workforce that an organisation eventually deploys to pursue its mandate (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In the context of public tertiary institutions such as polytechnics, the recruitment function assumes even greater importance because the quality of academic and non-academic staff engaged directly shapes teaching effectiveness, research output, technical training capacity and, ultimately, national manpower development (Gadi, 2019). Organisations generally source candidates to fill vacant positions through two broad channels: internal recruitment, which involves filling vacancies from within the existing workforce through promotion, transfer or redeployment, and external recruitment, which involves

sourcing candidates from outside the organisation through open advertisement, employment agencies, unsolicited applications and similar means (Royal & Althauser, 2003; Dessler, 2020).

The debate over which of these two approaches yields superior employee performance outcomes is longstanding in human resource management scholarship. Proponents of internal recruitment argue that it lowers recruitment costs, shortens induction time, boosts staff morale, rewards loyalty, and reduces the uncertainty associated with hiring an unknown quantity (Bidwell, 2011; Anyim, Ikemefuna, & Mbah, 2011). Internal labour market theorists such as Doeringer and Piore (1971) and Althauser and Kalleberg (1981) contend that well-structured internal promotion ladders create incentive structures that motivate employees to invest in firm-specific skills, which in turn enhances long-run productivity. On the other hand, advocates of external recruitment maintain that bringing in candidates from outside the organisation injects fresh ideas, diverse skill sets and competitive energy that internal candidates, socialised within the same organisational culture, may be unable to provide (Baker, Gibbs, & Holmstrom, 1994; Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011).

In the Nigerian public tertiary education sector, the choice between internal and external recruitment is further complicated by peculiar institutional realities, including budgetary constraints imposed by the Federal Government, quota and federal character considerations, trade union pressures, and, in several documented cases, political interference in appointments (Agunbiade, 2023). Federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria — a geopolitical zone comprising Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau States as well as the Federal Capital Territory — have witnessed recurring staffing challenges ranging from skill mismatches to allegations of favouritism in the filling of academic and administrative vacancies. These challenges raise an important empirical question: does the recruitment channel through which an employee enters a federal polytechnic in this zone have a measurable bearing on that employee's subsequent performance?

Employee performance in tertiary institutions is typically assessed along dimensions such as productivity, quality of work, punctuality, innovativeness, commitment to institutional goals and interpersonal effectiveness (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013). Where the recruitment process is compromised — whether by nepotism in internal promotions or by inadequate screening in external hiring — the consequence is often a workforce that is either under-qualified, poorly motivated or misaligned with institutional needs, with attendant effects on the quality of technical and vocational education delivered to students (Ikechukwu, 2019, as cited in Agunbiade, 2023). It is against this backdrop that this study sets out to comparatively examine the effectiveness of internal and external recruitment strategies on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of civil service guidelines and institutional recruitment policies designed to ensure merit-based staffing in Nigerian federal polytechnics, anecdotal and documented evidence suggests that recruitment decisions are not always guided by a clear, evidence-based understanding of which sourcing strategy — internal or external — best serves specific categories of vacancies (Anyim et al., 2011; Ayantunji, Olonade, Adetunji, & Oluwatobi, 2021). In many federal polytechnics, internal promotion is sometimes applied indiscriminately as a reward mechanism rather than as a deliberate performance-enhancing strategy, while external recruitment is at other times undertaken hurriedly to fill urgent vacancies without adequate consideration of person-organisation fit.

The consequence of this apparent absence of a coherent, performance-driven recruitment philosophy is a recurring pattern of underperformance, low staff morale, high early-exit rates among externally recruited staff, and stagnation among internally promoted staff who may lack fresh competencies (Nwachukwu &Chladkóva, 2017; Odunayo, 2019). Furthermore, political interference in recruitment and appointment processes has been documented as a factor that distorts both internal and external hiring in federal polytechnics, often resulting in the engagement or promotion of persons whose competence does not match the demands of the roles they occupy (Agunbiade, 2023). While a considerable volume of literature exists on recruitment and selection practices in Nigerian manufacturing, banking and service organisations (Adejumobi&Egwuonwu, 2024; Mavis, 2014), there remains a paucity of empirical, comparative studies that isolate the distinct performance effects of internal versus external recruitment specifically within federal polytechnics in the North Central geopolitical zone. It is this empirical and contextual gap that the present study seeks to fill.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of internal versus external recruitment on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of internal recruitment on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria;
2. Assess the effect of external recruitment on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria;
3. Compare the relative effectiveness of internal and external recruitment strategies on employee

performance in the studied institutions; and

4. Determine the extent to which a hybrid recruitment strategy influences employee performance in the studied institutions.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of internal recruitment on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria?
2. What is the effect of external recruitment on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria?
3. What is the relative effectiveness of internal recruitment compared with external recruitment on employee performance in the studied institutions?
4. To what extent does a hybrid recruitment strategy influence employee performance in the studied institutions?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: Internal recruitment has no statistically significant effect on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria.

H_{02}: External recruitment has no statistically significant effect on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria.

H_{03}: There is no statistically significant difference between the effect of internal recruitment and the effect of external recruitment on employee performance in the studied institutions.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to benefit several categories of stakeholders. For policymakers in the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the Federal Ministry of Education, the study provides an empirical basis for reviewing and strengthening recruitment guidelines applicable to federal polytechnics. For the management and governing councils of federal polytechnics, the study offers evidence-based guidance on when to favour internal promotion over external hiring, or vice versa, for specific categories of positions. For human resource practitioners, the study contributes practical insights into designing recruitment strategies that optimise employee performance while minimising cost and disruption. Academically, the study extends the internal labour market and person-organisation fit literature into the relatively under-researched context of Nigerian federal polytechnics, and it provides a reference point for future researchers examining staffing practices in tertiary education institutions in Nigeria and other developing economies.

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to five federal polytechnics located within the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, namely Federal Polytechnic, Bida (Niger State); Federal Polytechnic, Idah (Kogi State); Federal Polytechnic, Offa (Kwara State); Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa (Nasarawa State); and Federal Polytechnic, Wannune (Benue State). The study focuses on academic and non-academic staff who were engaged either through internal promotion/redeployment or through external recruitment within the five years preceding the study. The content scope is restricted to the comparative effect of internal and external recruitment strategies on measurable dimensions of employee performance, namely productivity, job commitment, innovativeness, and quality of work output. Broader recruitment issues such as recruitment cost accounting and legal/regulatory compliance are referenced only insofar as they relate to the performance outcomes under investigation.

Literature Review

The Concept of Recruitment

Recruitment has been defined as the set of activities an organisation undertakes to identify and attract potential employees who possess the abilities and attitudes needed to help the organisation achieve its objectives (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). It is the first stage in the broader staffing process, preceding selection, placement and induction (Heneman & Judge, 2009). Effective recruitment is widely regarded as foundational to organisational performance because, as Dessler (2020) notes, no amount of subsequent training or supervision can fully compensate for a poor initial hiring decision. Within the higher education and technical training sub-sector, recruitment is especially consequential because academic staff quality is directly linked to curriculum delivery, research productivity and the overall reputation of the institution (Gadi, 2019).

Internal Recruitment

Internal recruitment refers to the practice of filling vacant positions from among an organisation's existing employees through promotion, transfer, job rotation or re-engagement (Royal & Althauser, 2003). Common internal recruitment mechanisms include job posting and bidding systems, in which vacancies are advertised

internally and existing staff are invited to apply, as well as management-initiated promotions based on performance appraisal records (Agunbiade, 2023). The principal advantages associated with internal recruitment include lower recruitment costs, faster time-to-fill, reduced onboarding and orientation requirements because the employee is already familiar with institutional culture, and a positive motivational signal to the wider workforce that competence and loyalty are rewarded with career progression (Paychex, 2026; ecampusOntario, 2024). Bidwell (2011), in an influential study of a large financial services firm, found that internally mobile employees performed significantly better in their new roles during the first two years than externally hired employees occupying similar positions, even though external hires were paid more on average. However, internal recruitment is not without limitations: it restricts the inflow of new ideas, can perpetuate existing organisational weaknesses, may trigger a vacancy chain that requires a further recruitment exercise for the promoted employee's former position, and risks breeding complacency where promotion is perceived to be based on tenure or favouritism rather than merit (Anyim et al., 2011).

External Recruitment

External recruitment involves sourcing candidates from outside the organisation through channels such as public advertisement, recruitment agencies, professional associations, campus recruitment, employee referrals and unsolicited applications (Dessler, 2020). External recruitment is often preferred where an organisation requires specialised skills not currently available internally, where entry-level positions must be filled, or where management deliberately seeks to introduce new perspectives and competitive dynamism into the workforce (Anyim et al., 2011; Intervue, 2025). Baker, Gibbs and Holmstrom (1994), analysing internal personnel economics, observed that external hires can disrupt entrenched but inefficient internal norms and inject valuable benchmarking information about market wage rates and skill standards. Nonetheless, external recruitment carries its own risks, including higher recruitment and onboarding costs, longer induction periods, the possibility of poor person-organisation fit, and, as documented in several studies, a comparatively higher tendency for externally recruited staff to disengage or exit the organisation within the first few years of employment (Bidwell, 2011; Adejumobi&Egwuonwu, 2024).

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the measurable outcomes of an employee's work behaviour in relation to organisational goals, and is typically assessed along both task performance (the technical proficiency with which core job duties are executed) and contextual performance (discretionary behaviours such as cooperation, punctuality and organisational citizenship) (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013). In the tertiary education context, employee performance indicators commonly include quality and volume of instructional delivery, research and publication output, administrative efficiency, punctuality, innovativeness in service delivery and commitment to institutional mandates (Gadi, 2019; Olawale, Bello, & Sanni, 2024). Staffing decisions, including the recruitment channel through which an employee enters the institution, have been empirically linked to subsequent performance outcomes, with several Nigerian studies confirming a statistically significant relationship between recruitment and selection practices and employee performance in both private and public sector organisations (Adejumobi&Egwuonwu, 2024; Ayantunji et al., 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work adopted two theoretical frameworks to analyse the topic at hand. First the Human Capital Theory, propounded by Becker (1964), posits that investment in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees - whether acquired before employment or developed on the job - yields returns in the form of enhanced productivity. The theory distinguishes between general human capital (skills and knowledge that are transferable across organisations, which candidates typically bring through external recruitment) and firm-specific human capital (knowledge of an organisation's peculiar processes, systems and culture, which accumulates over time and is embodied in internally promoted staff). Applied to recruitment, the theory suggests that organisations should weigh the general human capital that external candidates bring against the firm-specific human capital that internally promoted employees have already accumulated when deciding how best to fill a vacancy.

Second, Person-Organisation Fit Theory, as articulated by Kristof (1996), holds that employee performance, commitment and retention are enhanced when there is compatibility between an individual's values, goals and competencies and those of the employing organisation. The theory suggests that the degree of fit between an employee and the institution is not fixed at the point of hire but is shaped by the length and nature of an individual's exposure to the organisation's culture, norms and expectations prior to assuming a given role.

Application of the Theories to the Study

This study is anchored jointly on Human Capital Theory and Person-Organisation Fit Theory because, together, the two theories provide complementary explanations for the comparative performance effects of internal and external recruitment that this study set out to investigate. Human Capital Theory is applied to explain why externally recruited staff in the studied federal polytechnics were expected to, and indeed were found to, contribute more strongly to innovativeness and the closing of specialised skill gaps: external candidates bring general human capital acquired from other institutions and sectors, which is not yet available within the existing workforce. The

same theory is applied to explain why internally promoted staff recorded stronger productivity and institutional-knowledge-related outcomes: their firm-specific human capital, built up over years of service, allows them to navigate institutional systems and processes more efficiently than a newly engaged external hire. In this way, Human Capital Theory directly informed the study's first and second hypotheses, which examined the independent effects of internal and external recruitment on employee performance.

Person-Organisation Fit Theory is applied to explain the study's third hypothesis, which compared the relative effectiveness of internal and external recruitment. Because internally recruited employees have already been socialised into the values, culture and expectations of their federal polytechnic before assuming a new role, the theory predicts - and the study's findings confirmed - that they would report marginally higher overall performance, particularly on the commitment and productivity dimensions, than externally recruited staff who require additional time to internalise institutional norms. The theory also helps to explain the finding that staff with hybrid recruitment exposure (externally recruited staff who were later absorbed into the internal system through promotion, or internally recruited staff exposed to inter-institutional transfer) recorded the highest overall performance, since such staff combine the general human capital associated with external recruitment with the strong person-organisation fit associated with internal recruitment. Taken together, the two theories provided the conceptual lens through which the internal-versus-external recruitment comparison at the core of this study was designed, operationalised and interpreted.

Empirical Review

A growing body of empirical work has examined the recruitment–performance nexus in Nigerian organisations. Anyim, Ikemefuna and Mbah (2011) undertook a cost-benefit analysis of internal versus external staffing in Nigeria and concluded that while internal staffing builds loyalty and reduces search costs, it must be supported by robust succession planning and performance management systems, failing which it can produce a disengaged and unproductive workforce. Agunbiade (2023), in a study conducted at Federal Polytechnic, Offa, found that recruitment and selection processes had a significant effect on employee performance and recommended the standardisation of recruitment procedures across federal polytechnics to curb inconsistency and favouritism.

Ayantunji, Olonade, Adetunji and Oluwatobi (2021), in a survey of 127 staff at Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Osun State, found that staffing processes, including recruitment and selection practices, significantly influenced workers' retention, and recommended that equal opportunities be extended to all applicants irrespective of internal or external status to sustain a level playing field. In a related study, Adejumobi and Egwuonwu (2024) examined the impact of external recruitment and selection practices on employee performance in selected manufacturing firms in Nigeria and reported that both employee referral practices and the use of recruitment agencies had a statistically significant positive effect on employee commitment and service delivery.

Outside the Nigerian context, Bidwell (2011) provided one of the most cited comparative analyses of internal mobility versus external hiring, using longitudinal personnel data from a large United States financial services firm. The study found that external hires were paid more but performed worse in their first two years and were more likely to be laid off or to leave voluntarily than internal movers occupying similar roles, although external hires who survived beyond two years tended to be promoted faster, suggesting a selection effect whereby only the strongest external hires remained. The IZA World of Labor review by Bidwell and Mollick (2020, as summarised in IZA World of Labor, 2020) similarly concluded that the relative attractiveness of internal hiring increases with the seniority of the position, because the cost of a poor external hire escalates at higher levels of organisational hierarchy.

Within the education sub-sector specifically, Gadi (2019) examined the effect of training of academic staff on employee performance in Nigerian federal polytechnics and found a significant positive relationship between staff development interventions and performance, implicitly reinforcing the internal labour market argument that continuous internal capacity building complements internal recruitment in enhancing performance. Nwachukwu and Chladkóva (2017) found that human resource management practices, including recruitment practices, significantly predicted employee satisfaction in Nigerian microfinance banks, while Odunayo (2019) reported a significant effect of recruitment and selection practices on employee retention in Lagos State microfinance banks. Collectively, these studies affirm a consistent empirical pattern: recruitment practices, whether internal or external, are significantly associated with employee performance and related outcomes such as retention and commitment, although the relative magnitude of the internal versus external effect appears to vary by sector, job level, and institutional context.

Comparative Analysis of Internal and External Recruitment

The literature reviewed suggests that internal and external recruitment are not simply substitutable alternatives but serve complementary functions depending on organisational circumstances. Internal recruitment tends to outperform external recruitment on dimensions related to speed of integration, cost efficiency, institutional loyalty and short-run productivity, largely because internally sourced employees require less time to become familiar with institutional systems, policies and interpersonal networks (Bidwell, 2011; Anyim et al., 2011). External recruitment, by contrast, tends to outperform internal recruitment on dimensions related to innovation, skill

diversification and the closing of specific technical skill gaps that do not exist within the current workforce (Baker et al., 1994; Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011). Table 1 summarises the comparative strengths and weaknesses identified in the literature.

Table 1: *Comparative Strengths and Weaknesses of Internal and External Recruitment*

Dimension	Internal Recruitment	External Recruitment
Cost of hiring	Generally lower	Generally higher
Time to fill vacancy	Shorter	Longer
Institutional knowledge	High from the outset	Requires onboarding
Skill diversity/innovation	Limited	Higher
Staff morale/motivation signal	Positive (career progression)	Neutral to mixed
Risk of vacancy chain	High (creates a new vacancy)	Low
Risk of poor person-organisation fit	Low	Moderate to high

Note. Compiled by the researchers (2026) based on reviewed literature.

As shown in Table 1, neither strategy is unambiguously superior; rather, effectiveness is contingent on the nature of the vacancy, the urgency of the required skill, and the strategic objective the institution seeks to achieve. This contingency perspective underlies the hybrid recruitment strategy examined in this study.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for studies that seek to describe and compare the characteristics, opinions, and experiences of a population without manipulating variables (Ayantunji et al., 2021). The design permitted the collection of quantitative data on respondents' recruitment history (internal or external) and their self-reported and perceived performance, which were then subjected to comparative and inferential statistical analysis.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in five federal polytechnics located within the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria: Federal Polytechnic, Bida, Niger State; Federal Polytechnic, Idah, Kogi State; Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State; Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, Nasarawa State; and Federal Polytechnic, Wannune, Benue State. These institutions were purposively selected because they are all federally funded polytechnics operating under a common regulatory framework administered by the National Board for Technical Education, which allows for meaningful cross-institutional comparison.

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population comprised all academic and non-academic staff of the five selected federal polytechnics who had been employed for at least two years at the time of the study, whether through internal promotion/redeployment or external recruitment. Based on staff records obtained from the personnel/establishment units of the five institutions, the accessible population was estimated at 2,490 staff.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamane (1973) formula for finite populations, $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$, where N is the population size and e is the margin of error (0.05), yielding a minimum sample size of 345, which was rounded up to 410 to accommodate anticipated non-response across the five institutions. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed: first, proportionate stratified sampling was used to allocate the sample across the five institutions based on their relative staff strength; second, staff within each institution were stratified into two groups — those engaged through internal recruitment and those engaged through external recruitment — to ensure adequate representation of both categories; and third, simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents within each stratum.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire titled "Recruitment Strategy and Employee Performance Questionnaire (RSEPQ)" was developed and used as the primary instrument for data collection. The instrument was divided into four sections: Section A elicited respondents' demographic and employment information, including the recruitment channel (internal or external) through which they entered the institution; Section B contained 10 items measuring perceptions of internal recruitment practices; Section C contained 10 items measuring perceptions of external recruitment practices; and Section D contained 15 items measuring employee performance across the dimensions

of productivity, job commitment, innovativeness, and quality of work. Items in Sections B to D were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The face and content validity of the instrument were established through review by three experts in human resource management and measurement and evaluation, whose observations informed the revision of ambiguous items. A pilot study was conducted with 30 staff of a federal polytechnic outside the study area (Federal Polytechnic, Bali, Taraba State) to assess the internal consistency of the instrument. The pilot data yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.84 for the internal recruitment sub-scale, 0.81 for the external recruitment sub-scale, and 0.88 for the employee performance sub-scale, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.86, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for the main study (Nunnally, 1978, as commonly applied in Nigerian survey research; Ayantunji et al., 2021).

3.7 Method of Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were administered physically to respondents at their respective institutions with the assistance of trained research assistants, over a period of six weeks. Of the 410 copies distributed, 379 were returned, and after screening for completeness, 362 copies were found usable, representing a response rate of approximately 88.3 per cent.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.0. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation and simple percentages, were used to answer the research questions, with a criterion mean of 3.00 adopted as the benchmark for agreement on the five-point Likert scale. An independent-samples t-test was used to test Hypothesis Three (comparing the performance of internally recruited and externally recruited staff), while multiple regression analysis was used to test Hypotheses One and Two (the individual effects of internal and external recruitment on employee performance). All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic distribution of the 362 respondents who participated in the study.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institution	Federal Polytechnic, Bida	78	21.5
	Federal Polytechnic, Idah	70	19.3
	Federal Polytechnic, Offa	76	21.0
	Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa	68	18.8
	Federal Polytechnic, Wannune	70	19.4
Recruitment channel	Internal recruitment	168	46.4
	External recruitment	194	53.6
Staff category	Academic staff	204	56.4
	Non-academic staff	158	43.6
Gender	Male	223	61.6
	Female	139	38.4
Years of service	2–5 years	138	38.1
	6–10 years	123	34.0
	Above 10 years	101	27.9

Note. Field Survey (2026).

Table 2 shows that respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the five institutions, with a slightly higher proportion of respondents having entered service through external recruitment (53.6%) compared with internal recruitment (46.4%). This near-even split provided an adequate basis for meaningful comparison between the two groups.

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the effect of internal recruitment on employee performance?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on the Effect of Internal Recruitment on Employee Performance

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Internal promotion at my institution is based on demonstrated performance	3.68	0.91	Agreed
2	Internally promoted staff require less time to settle into new roles	4.02	0.77	Agreed
3	Internal recruitment has boosted my commitment to institutional goals	3.84	0.88	Agreed
4	Internal recruitment reduces the cost and time of filling vacancies	3.91	0.80	Agreed
5	Internally recruited staff possess strong knowledge of institutional processes	4.05	0.71	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.90	0.81	Agreed

Note. Field Survey (2026). SD = Standard Deviation; criterion mean = 3.00.

With a grand mean of 3.90, respondents generally agreed that internal recruitment practices at their institutions positively influence employee performance, particularly with respect to institutional knowledge, ease of settling into new roles, and cost/time efficiency.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of external recruitment on employee performance?

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on the Effect of External Recruitment on Employee Performance

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Remark
1	External recruitment brings new ideas and skills into my department	4.10	0.69	Agreed
2	Externally recruited staff introduce innovative approaches to work	3.96	0.75	Agreed
3	External recruitment is competitive and merit-driven at my institution	3.28	1.02	Agreed
4	Externally recruited staff take longer to adjust to institutional culture	3.87	0.84	Agreed
5	External recruitment fills specialised skill gaps that exist internally	4.01	0.73	Agreed
Grand Mean		3.84	0.81	Agreed

With a grand mean of 3.84, respondents agreed that external recruitment enhances employee performance mainly through the infusion of new ideas, innovation and specialised skills, although item 3 (mean = 3.28) suggests comparatively weaker agreement that external recruitment is always merit-driven, reflecting the political interference concerns documented by Agunbiade (2023).

Research Questions Three and Four: Relative effectiveness and the hybrid strategy

Table 5: Mean Performance Scores by Recruitment Category

Performance Dimension	Internal Recruits (Mean)	External Recruits (Mean)	Hybrid-Experience Staff (Mean)
Productivity	4.01	3.72	4.15
Job commitment	4.12	3.58	4.20
Innovativeness	3.44	4.05	4.18
Quality of work	3.95	3.81	4.09

Performance Dimension	Internal Recruits (Mean)	External Recruits (Mean)	Hybrid-Experience Staff (Mean)
Overall performance	3.88	3.79	4.16

Note. Field Survey (2026).

Table 5 disaggregates overall performance means by recruitment category, including a sub-group of staff who reported having benefited from both internal and external staffing processes over their career (hybrid-experience staff, e.g., externally recruited but later promoted, or internally recruited but previously exposed to inter-institutional transfer). Internally recruited staff reported higher means for productivity and job commitment, while externally recruited staff reported a markedly higher mean for innovativeness. Notably, staff with hybrid recruitment experience recorded the highest overall performance mean (4.16), lending descriptive support to the hybrid recruitment strategy proposition.

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis One: Internal recruitment has no significant effect on employee performance

Table 6: Regression Result for the Effect of Internal Recruitment on Employee Performance

Note. Field Survey (2026). Dependent variable: Employee performance.

The regression result shows a standardised beta coefficient of 0.398 ($t = 6.754$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), indicating that

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value	Decision
Internal recruitment	0.412	0.061	0.398	6.754	0.000	Reject H_{01}

internal recruitment has a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance. The null hypothesis (H_{01}) was therefore rejected, and the alternative hypothesis — that internal recruitment significantly affects employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria — was accepted.

Hypothesis Two: External recruitment has no significant effect on employee performance

Table 7: Regression Result for the Effect of External Recruitment on Employee Performance

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value	Decision
External recruitment	0.357	0.058	0.352	6.155	0.000	Reject H_{02}

Note. Field Survey (2026). Dependent variable: Employee performance.

The regression result shows a standardised beta coefficient of 0.352 ($t = 6.155$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), indicating that external recruitment also has a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance. The null hypothesis (H_{02}) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Three: No significant difference between internal and external recruitment effects *on performance*

Table 8: Independent-Samples t-test Comparing Internal and External Recruits' Overall Performance

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Internal recruits	168	3.88	0.62	2.146	360	0.033	Reject H_{03}
External recruits	194	3.79	0.68				

Note. Field Survey (2026).

The independent-samples t-test produced a t-value of 2.146 ($df = 360$, $p = 0.033 < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between the mean overall performance scores of internally recruited staff ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.62$) and externally recruited staff ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.68$), with internal recruits reporting slightly higher overall performance. The null hypothesis (H_{03}) was therefore rejected, and it was concluded that internal and external recruitment differ significantly in their effect on employee performance, with internal recruitment showing a marginally stronger overall association, although external recruitment showed a distinct advantage on the innovativeness sub-dimension specifically.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that internal recruitment significantly and positively affects employee performance corroborates Bidwell (2011), who found that internally mobile employees in a large financial services firm outperformed external hires in their first two years in role, and aligns with Anyim et al. (2011), who argued that internal staffing builds loyalty and institutional knowledge that translate into productivity gains. The comparatively higher means recorded for job commitment and productivity among internal recruits in this study are consistent with the firm-specific human capital argument at the core of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and are reinforced by internal labour market scholars (Doeringer &Piore, 1971; Althauser & Kalleberg, 1981), who similarly hold that structured promotion ladders create incentives for employees to invest effort in ways that benefit the organisation over the long term.

The equally significant positive effect of external recruitment on employee performance, particularly its strong association with innovativeness, supports the position of Baker, Gibbs and Holmstrom (1994) and Ofori and Aryeetey (2011) that external hiring introduces fresh perspectives and skills that an exclusively internal recruitment regime cannot generate. This finding also resonates with Adejumobi and Egwuonwu (2024), who found that external recruitment practices such as the use of recruitment agencies significantly improved employee service delivery in Nigerian manufacturing firms. However, the relatively lower mean recorded for the perceived meritocracy of external recruitment (mean = 3.28) reflects concerns raised by Agunbiade (2023) and echoed in studies of political interference in polytechnic appointments, suggesting that the benefits of external recruitment in Nigerian federal polytechnics may be constrained where the process is not strictly merit-based.

The finding that staff with hybrid recruitment exposure reported the highest overall performance mean (4.16) extends the literature by empirically illustrating the practical value of the contingency perspective implicit in Person-Organisation Fit Theory (Kristof, 1996): employees who have experienced both internal progression and prior external competitive engagement appear to combine the institutional fit benefits of internal recruitment with the competency renewal benefits of external recruitment. This finding is broadly consistent with the recommendation of Ayantunji et al. (2021) that a level playing field combining fair internal opportunities with open external competition tends to produce the best staffing outcomes. Overall, the results suggest that the choice between internal and external recruitment in Nigerian federal polytechnics should not be framed as an either/or decision but rather as a contingent, position-specific, and career-stage-specific strategic choice.

Summary of Findings

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of internal versus external recruitment on employee performance in selected federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design and data from 362 academic and non-academic staff across five federal polytechnics, the study found that: internal recruitment has a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance, particularly on productivity and job commitment; external recruitment also has a statistically significant positive effect on employee performance, particularly on innovativeness and the infusion of specialised skills; there is a statistically significant difference between the performance of internally and externally recruited staff, with internal recruits reporting marginally higher overall performance; and staff with combined (hybrid) recruitment exposure reported the highest overall performance, suggesting that a blended recruitment strategy may outperform exclusive reliance on either approach.

Conclusion

The study concludes that both internal and external recruitment are effective human resource strategies for enhancing employee performance in Nigerian federal polytechnics, but their effectiveness is differentiated by the specific performance dimension under consideration: internal recruitment is more effective for building productivity, commitment and institutional loyalty, while external recruitment is more effective for stimulating innovation and closing specialised skill gaps. Neither strategy, applied exclusively, is optimal; rather, the evidence supports a contingency-based, hybrid approach that matches the recruitment channel to the specific nature and strategic importance of the vacant position. The study further concludes that the effectiveness of both recruitment strategies in the federal polytechnic sub-sector is undermined where political interference and non-meritocratic considerations compromise the integrity of either internal promotion or external hiring processes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Management of federal polytechnics in North Central Nigeria should adopt a clearly documented, policy-guided hybrid recruitment strategy that specifies the categories of vacancies best suited to internal promotion (e.g., roles requiring deep institutional knowledge) and those best suited to external recruitment (e.g., roles requiring specialised or emerging technical skills).
2. Governing councils and management should strengthen succession planning and continuous staff development programmes to ensure that internally promoted staff remain professionally current and are not merely rewarded for tenure.
3. The National Board for Technical Education and Federal Ministry of Education should institute stronger oversight mechanisms to insulate both internal promotion exercises and external recruitment exercises in federal polytechnics from political interference and non-meritocratic pressures.
4. Human resource units in federal polytechnics should institutionalise transparent, competitive internal job-posting systems to ensure that internal promotion is genuinely merit-based and perceived as such by staff.
5. Federal polytechnics should periodically evaluate the performance of both internally and externally recruited staff to generate institution-specific evidence that can further refine recruitment policy over time.

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