The Mediating Effect of Gender Inclusion on Performance of Public Universities in Northeastern Nigeria: Talent Management Strategies in Perspective

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Abstract
The teaching, research, and ranking of Nigerian universities are noticeably low, and this is made worse by a lack of talented professionals and women inclusiveness. The implementation of talent recruitment and gender inclusion strategies is one positive step that can change the narrative in this direction. This study examines talent management career advancement and the performance of universities: the mediating effect of gender inclusion in Nigeria. The researcher employed a quantitative method using a questionnaire to gather primary data from 359 academic staff surveyed across the selected institutions using cluster and stratified random sampling. Descriptive statistics and Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that talent management (career advancement) has a significant positive effect on the performance of universities. The results also revealed that gender inclusion partially mediates the relationship between talent management (career advancement) and performance. The implication is that, for universities to become more efficient, authorities should continue to invest in women talent promotional strategies to improve teaching, research, and performance. Authorities should internalize women advancement strategies such as child health care centres, child-early learning centers, flexible office hours as part of the operational strategies.

Keywords: Career Advancement; Gender Inclusion; Performance of Universities; Talent Management; Talent Management Strategies.

Introduction

The academic talents are the major influencer of performance and achievement of universities. This is so because a university's performance is based on its talents' dedication, research output, teaching, and learning environment. Talent management can offer a conceptual framework for enhancing performance over time, which universities need to combine with strategy, performance assessments, and day-to-day management tools

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(Bradley, 2016). The importance of both teaching and research activities from the standpoint of talent management is that universities locate and keep key, highly valuable faculty for both teaching and research to improve performance.

Talent management has significantly improved business value, talent pools, retention of top talent, profit maximization, and competitive advantage, among other things (Teherah, Behzad, Mohammad, & Hassan., 2020). It has also prompted a number of changes in the performance of business and educational organizations (Bradley, 2016). Altindag, Cirak, and Acar (2018), submits that Talent Management Strategy (TMS) is a crucial policy used to manage people and their skill set and enhance employee growth and performance. Talented employees are fundamental to the building of a knowledge-based economy, social development, and the performance of universities. Universities require talented people to succeed now and, in the future, (Bradley, 2016). They need to focus on inclusion strategies like women merit-based recruitment and promotion to increase and retain more women in academia (Widodo & Mawarto, 2020). The logical conclusion is that women and individuals who experience professional progression are more likely to remain with an organization longer and deliver their best work for institutional better performance (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019).

Studies have looked at talent management over the years using different and exclusive approaches that focus development on a select group of employees with high potential (Gallardo-Gallardo, 2012; & Swailes & Downs, 2014). Due to the emphasis on high-performing personnel, this has led to certain organizations becoming patriarchal in their operations, which has made it more difficult for them to apply women's talent management strategies to solve employee shortage and brain drain. If a country ignores the needs of more than half of the world's population, it cannot advance or achieve socioeconomic development. The 7.7 billion people who make up the world's population (Worldometer , 2020), more than half are women. Women make up 50% of the 1.3 billion inhabitants in Africa, and 49.4% of the 206 million people in Nigeria (Worldometer, 2020). The Sustainable Development Goals' impact rating of the world's universities submits that just 15.4% of senior professors in world universities are women (THE, 2019). The report also showed that only 1.95% of universities worldwide have anti-discrimination policies for women, 1.9% have maternity policies that support women's participation, 1.9% have facilities for women to access childcare, 1.9% have mentoring programs for women that have a large number of participants, and 1.9% have policies that protect reporting discrimination in higher education institutions. Regrettably, only a handful of African universities—including no more than two in Nigeria—were listed among the top 1,000 universities worldwide.

Women in higher educational institutions are confronted with obstacles in universities' hierarchical structures at all levels, but particularly when trying to advance into leadership positions (White & O'Connor, 2017). Finding the internal, external, structural, and cultural impediments impeding women's advancement in the educational field has been the primary focus of women and higher education literature to date. However, it is crucial to emphasize that there are few universities with women inclusive strategies and by sharing, the tales of how these institutions attained this success, other schools can take a leaf out of their book (White & O'Connor, 2017). Without a doubt, women have advanced significantly during the past few decades. However, despite the campaigns and slogans on women inclusion, women are still poorly represented in academe, especially in Africa (Nigeria inclusive), and this concern calls for inclusion of special TMS in addressing institutional barriers or performance (Mousa, Massoud, Ayoubi and Puhakka 2020; Avin, Keller, Lotker, Mathieu, Peleg, and Pignolet, 2015; Bruckmuller, , Susanne, Michelle K Ryan, Floor Rink, and Alexander

Haslam, 2014; and Yousaf and Schmiede, 2017). Out of the over 73,443 academic talents in Nigerian universities, only 23.6% are women while 76.4% are men (Nigeria University Digest, 2019). This is worsened in the northeastern region of Nigeria where only 17.5% of the total academic talents are women while 82.5% are men (Nigeria University Digest, 2019). In other regions or part of the country, out of 3,081 members of university of Ibadan, only 507 are women, or around 16%; at Obafemi Awolowo University, where there are 1,207 staff members, 210 women make up about 17.4% of the total. According to a survey done in the Nigerian states of Kwara and Osun, men hold 98% of the top jobs at the polytechnics and colleges of education in those two states, while women hold only 2% of those posts.

In addition to this notable poor representation of women talent in Nigerian universities, there are no studies to benchmark the mediating effect of gender inclusiveness on the relationship between talent management strategies (career advancement) and performance of universities in Nigeria. This gap serves as the foundation for this study, which looks at talent management strategies (career advancement) and performance of universities: the mediating effect of gender inclusion in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include:

a. To examine the impact of career advancement on the performance of public universities in the Northeastern region of Nigeria,
b. To examine the mediating relationship of gender inclusion on the performance of public universities in the Northeastern region of Nigeria.
c. To examine the impact of career advancement on performance through gender inclusion of public universities in the Northeastern region of Nigeria.

A literature review, methodology, data analysis and discussion, findings, suggestions, and a conclusion make up the remaining components of this article.

Literature Review

The management of talent is an offshoot of human resource management that focuses on different aspects of employee performance, such as skills, intelligence, creativity, ideas, attitude, qualification, and success (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). **Lynch (2007), opined that talent management strategies are essential to develop and improve employee performance and can enhance organizational excellence.** Collings and Mellahi (2009), submit that talent management is the architecture required to establish and maintain a competitive advantage with clear links between talent and strategy. The management of talent has prompted several changes in the performance of business organizations and effected great achievements in business value, talent pool, retention of high-quality employees, profit maximization, and competitive advantage, among others (Mackey, 2008). This study present talent management strategy as career advancement.

Career Advancement Strategy and Institutional Performance

This study views career advancement as career promotion and progression, which refers to a person moving up the organizational structure of an institution. Career advancement is a trajectory movement or following a well-defined path up the corporate ladder (Josphat, Abel & Nancy, 2021). Smit (2007) noted that the prospect of advancement may motivate women workers to put in extra effort. This is because employees strive to grow consistently in their workplace (Mullins, 2007). The recent reason employees leave a business is a lack of career advancement; whereas five years ago, it was unsatisfactory compensation (Hay Group, 2016). Nearly 70% of the poll stated that they were dissatisfied with their company's growth chances. Career development and training are at the top of the list of human resources strategies that businesses aim to emphasize yearly (Hay Group, 2016).

Lack of advancement can hurt a talent's chances of moving up the corporate ladder (Jufrizen & Delyana, 2017). Therefore, professional advancement is valued by employees since it leads to long-term success, higher salary, employment stability, and job satisfaction. A dedication to career advancement by institutions will allow them to stimulate a more motivated workforce and a high-performing institution (Golicha et al., 2022). It also enhances employees' education and training development, thus improving their skill sets and positioning them for promotion and career advancement. Career advancement has a positive and significant impact on employees and organization performance (Golicha et. al., 2022). Josphat, Abel, and Nancy (2021), submit that every organization (business and education) has a career path, whether good or bad. They outlined two criteria needed by an organization to develop a suitable culture to aid long-term performance. Firstly, an organizational career path should be strategically relevant to the mission and objectives of the organization; and secondly, an organizational career path needs to be strong to attract the attention, care, and respect of the people. The study revealed that career advancement has a positive influence on an employee's attitude to work and that there is a positive relationship between organizational career advancement and organizational performance.

Bella and Eeng (2020), noted that the chance for advancement can motivate workers to put in long hours. This is due to the fact that workers try to continuously improve at work. A person's perception of their employer's support for meeting their professional demands and recognizing their achievements through promotions and pay is a key factor in career advancement. Talents who have greater opportunities for professional advancement are more devoted to their employers and are less inclined to leave and hunt for work elsewhere (Bella and Eeng, 2020). When a company gives its employees the chance to progress in heir careers, both the business and the employee benefit. Employees who have more opportunities for professional advancement are more committed to their employer and are less likely to leave and seek employment elsewhere (Bella & Eeng, 2020). Universities must focus on the advancement and promotion of talents especially the women academic talent to strengthen their competitive edge. The logical conclusion is that women and individuals who experience professional progression are more likely to remain with an organization longer and deliver their best work, and talent retention affects good performance in institutions (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019).

Universities Performance and Talent Management Strategies

Performance is an indicator of employees' and institutional inputs toward achieving educational goals (Asif et al., 2014). Universities need excellent performance to cope with the growing competition, inadequate funding by the government, and the desire of stakeholders to receive value for money. The different indexes used in measuring performance in universities include quality service, research, teaching, infrastructure, financial performance, and others. Performance indicators or indexes are data gathered from a database that expresses one's opinion or factual information regarding the operation of an organization or its constituent parts (Asif et al., 2014; Praise et al., 2020). Cave (1988), emphasized the importance of performance indicators and produced teaching and research performance metrics. Performance indicators have been classified as internal, external, and operational (Ball & Wilkinson, 1994). Universities have typically measured and compared performance internally and against peers using a set of performance indicators (Ball & Wilkinson, 1994). Ball and Wilkinson (1994), stressed that using a predetermined set of performance measures (i.e., a league of table method) is ineffective, and that universities must utilize metrics that are compatible with their mission and particular circumstances.

This study adopted composite performance indicators of Ball and Wilkinson (1994), and

Asif et. al. (2014), and they were used to examine institutional performance because the survey involves different universities. Composite performance indicators have many advantages, including the ability to group comparable indicators into a single category and simplify their structure (Asif et al., 2014). The incapacity to convey the current characteristics of academic work, privileged research, and teaching is one of the causes for faculty dissatisfactions with indicators (Taylor, 2001). In this study, composite indicators such as research, teaching, and service were used to capture institutional performance (IP). Research performance indicators include research publications, citations, academic resources, funding, community service, and more; teaching and service performance indicators as field medals, small class size, graduate employability, and more (Lukman et al., 2010; Asif et al., (2014). This research is limited to the first three composite performance indicators namely research, teaching and learning, and service.

Gender Inclusion and Talent Management Strategies

Many universities strive to give exceptional services through top-notch teaching and research, producing graduates who can work for both public and private organization. For many firms, the subpar quality of graduates on the job market has been a major concern in Nigeria. This is partially attributed to inadequate teaching, a weak research output, an unfavorable working environment, and lack of qualified academic talents. Promoting women inclusion strategies can help reduce these challenges in the academia. In academia, talent promotion process is characterized as being muscular and is informed by the research, commitment, and dedication of successful mid-level managers. Successful mid-level managers' credentials, research, and commitment are taken into account in universities during the promotion process, which is sexism-stereotyped as being male. The same qualities of strength, intelligence, competence, competition, and dedication are seen to characterize outstanding academic talent. It is thought that successful academics have similar strengths, intelligence, competence, competition, job commitment, and volume of work without strategies for women folks.

Feminist theorists, Engel (1972), and Collins (1990), contend that men and women in society play different roles. Due to their simultaneous responsibilities in the family and the home, women find it difficult to be fully committed, which gives men more time to pursue their careers. The male subordination of women through childcare and domestic duties has an impact on women's devotion to their skills and the dismantling of stereotypes. Women's vision, self-definition, and capacity are hampered by this issue. Academic workplaces are structured after the "ideal worker" model, which places less emphasis on time spent outside of paid employment. This practice gives opportunities for men to advance (Taiwo, 2011; & Olabisi, 2013). The job routes in academia are designed to reflect how males view success; they entail devoting a lot of time to tasks like research, teaching, and paper writing. Dual responsibility has made it difficult, if not nearly impossible, for women to possess equal merits and compete with their male counterparts in academe. Quality of time is expected to have a remarkable impact on progression and enhance talent skills in academia (Christiana, 2011; Taylor-Abdulai et al. 2014).

Women-focused TM initiatives ought to be ingrained in universities' operational routine. This is due to the fact that TM significantly and favorably affects IP (Davies and Davies, 2010). Organizations with TMS see a 30% boost in business and performance outcomes (Sharkey & Eccher, 2011). In Kenya, (James & Justus, 2012), TMS and IP have a favorable and substantial association. Women's inclusion in talent management strategies will contribute to the development of a large and long-lasting talent pool for universities. Therefore, through effective mentorship and career advancement of women, the operational assumptions that have consigned women in academia to family and unpaid employment

tasks must be changed. Bhasin (1993), and Taiwo (2014), submit, "women who educate the whole world must be considered as educators." This suggests that women are informed and skilled in the education of kids, communities, and societies; they must be valued as educators or given the same or even better opportunities as males to encourage their participation. Women have made significant progress over the years in many different sectors, but they are underrepresented in academia and typically hold less recognized positions (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005; Taiwo, 2011; Mousa, Massoud, Ayoubi & Puhakka, 2020).

In Nigerian universities, there are far fewer women representation I academics than men and this reflect in the number of women who get doctoral degrees (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2009). For example, only 25.5% of Ph.D. degrees in academia were awarded to women in 2010; this number fluctuates to 24% in 2011, 27% in 2012, 24.4% in 2013, 29.7% in 2014, and 23.9% in 2015 (Ministry of Education/Tertiary Institution, 2015). To catch up to their male counterparts in terms of research and publishing production, women in academia still lag behind (Taiwo, 2011). Women continue to be underrepresented at the Nigerian universities despite global policies, programs, and campaigns to promote gender equality through many organizations including UNESCO, SDG, women's support groups, and many more. Consequently, pursuing targeted strategies such as effective mentorship, more representation of women in recruitment, establishment of baby-care centers within institutions, among others provide women with opportunities to advance in their career.

Resource-Based View Theory

The resource-based view (RBV) theory submits that companies have resources that enable them to obtain a competitive edge, as well as a subset of those that contribute to superior long-term performance. Resources that are valuable and uncommon can help a company gain a competitive advantage. The advantage gained can be maintained for a long time until the organization can protect itself from resource imitation, transfer, or substitution. The resource-based view contends that to maintain a competitive edge, firms and talent managers should invest significant resources in talented employees (Petkovic & Dordevic, 2013; Acar & Yener, 2016). The development of superior resources, competencies, and skills creates a sustainable competitive advantage for organizations (Lewis & Kipley, 2012; Fatile et al., 2020). This study supports the view that superior performance can be achieved when universities give adequate attention and motivational schemes to gender inclusion talent management strategies. This study deploys the RBT theory based on its ability to pinpoint the specific levels of competencies capable of driving institutional goals, objectives, and performance. Non-substitutable resources position universities for long-term success, competitive advantage; improve the quality of research by institutions, enhance employee quality service delivery and improve organizational performance and global ranking (Fatile et al., 2020).

TMS will not only improve talent capacities but also, sharpen talent thinking ability and creativity for optimal decision making in universities. TMS develops women’s self- efficacy and performance outcomes on the job, influence knowledge, behavior, skills, ability, and competencies (Knott, 2016). The implementation of TMS gender inclusion strategies will enhances institutional performance. This study developed hypotheses to test if any significant mediating impact of gender inclusion on the relationship between TMS (career advancement) and IP as thus:

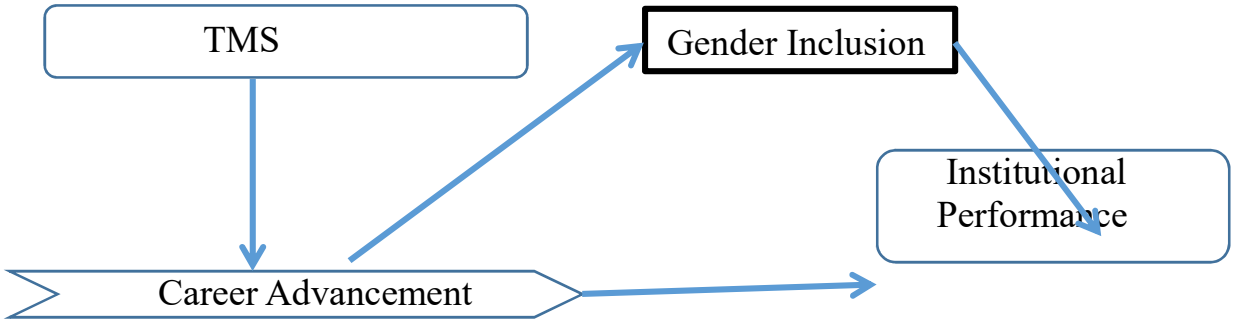
i. Career advancement has a significant impact on the performance of public universities in the Northeastern region of Nigeria.

ii. Gender inclusion has a significant positive relationship with performance of public universities in Northeastern region of Nigeria.

iii. Career advancement significantly impact performance through gender inclusion in public universities in the Northeastern region of Nigeria.

Study Model

Figure 1: Below shows one independent variable (i.e., Talent Management Strategy—career advancement), one mediating variable (i.e. gender inclusion - GI), and one dependent variable (i.e., Institutional Performance – IP). This suggested that TMS (career advancement) influence IP when mediated by gender inclusion.



Note: The study focus of TM consists of training and motivation as a mediator (Heinen and O'Neill, 2004

Methodology

This study adopted a positivist viewpoint of investigation using a quantitative method (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008: Creswell, 2009). The quantitative approach used questionnaire to collect data and was considered suitable by the research to formulate significant principles of knowledge, test theory, evaluate and accurately described connotation to an observable phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008: Creswell, 2009).

Sample and Data Collection

The study was conducted in the northeastern region of Nigeria. The northeastern region of Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical regions in the country created in May 1967. The region comprises a little less than one-third of the country's total land and is home to more than 23.6 million people, or roughly 13.5 percent of the overall population of the country (Nigerian Finder, 2022). The Fulanis and the Kanuris make up the majority of the people in the region. The region's residents are mostly farmers and cattle rearers, and the region is rich

in agriculture, food, crops, and livestock. The region has six states, namely Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. The study purposively selected the public universities located in the capital cities of the six northeastern states in Nigeria namely: Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, Bauchi State; Gombe State University, Gombe; Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State; Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State; University of Maiduguri, Borno State; and Yobe State University, Damaturu, Yobe State. The institutions were selected based on access to information and safety.

The academic talents or workforces were considered from different ranks or cadres (that is Graduate Assistant to Professor) selected using cluster and stratified random sampling across faculties and schools within each of the institutions. A total population of 5,397 academic talents was obtained as population size and updated up to the time of data collection (Nigeria University Digest, 2019).

The respondents were informed that requested information will only be used for academic study, and employee names and departments will be changed to pseudo names. A sample size of 359 was selected randomly from the population using Taro Yamani's formula (1967). The sample size distribution is presented in Table 1 below.

Table1: Population of Academic Employees

S/N	Institutions	Population of Academic Staff	Sample Size
1	University of Maiduguri, Borno State	1856	124
2	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	856	57
3	Yobe State University, Yobe State	769	51
4	Modibbo Adama University	744	50
5.	Gombe State University,	604	40
6	Taraba State University	568	37
	Total	5,397	359

Source: Nigeria University Digest 2019 and author's computation.

Research Measures

This study used questionnaire to collect first-hand data or information referred to as primary data. The questionnaire was used to collect biographical data, talent management strategy (career advancement), gender inclusion as mediating variable and institutional performance. The questions on the career advancement were generated by rephrasing and modifying the content and context of the questions of Liversage (2015), and Knott (2016); the questions on institutional performance were generated by modifying the content and context of the questionnaire of Knot (2016), and the questions on gender inclusion were generated by modifying the content and context of questionnaire of Maina (2016). The researcher modified the content, context, and the number of questions, and had them vetted by experienced academics in higher education academic planning and administration, business and human resource management, education, and organizational behaviour. The questionnaire was structured, with no follow-up questions. The instrument was selected and considered effective in obtaining the needed information because the academic staff members of the sampled universities are literate, enlightened, and competent. The same questions were administered to all respondents in the institutions studied.

To distribute the questionnaire to the chosen sample size across all institutions, the author hired research assistants. A survey was given out to 359 respondents, of whom 337 completed it and returned it; six were disqualified due to missing or inaccurate information. This represents a 92.2% response rate. The high response rate was as a result of adequate follow-up. The respondents were given a questionnaire each with a follow-up visit for collection after seventy-

two hours. The respondents understood the need for the study because they were in an informed and skilled environment, and 72 hours was adequate time for them to complete the questionnaire before it was collected. The questionnaire consists of four sections. Section A: demographic. The demographic data of the study is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive data

Variables	Options	Code	Freq.	Percent.
Gender	Male	1	243	73.4
	Female	2	88	26.6
	Total		331	100
Age	Under 26	1	16	4.8
	26-35	2	65	19.6
	36-45	3	140	42.3
	46-55	4	78	23.6
	56-65	5	28	8.5
	Above 65	6	4	1.2
	Total		331	100
Rank of employee	Assistant lecturer	1	76	23.0
	Lecturer 11	2	96	29.0
	Lecturer 1	3	52	15.7
	Senior Lecturer	4	50	15.1
	Professorial	6	57	17.2
	Total		331	100
Work experience	Below two years	1	50	15.1
	2-5 years	2	74	22.4
	6-9 years	3	92	27.8
	10 years above	4	115	34.7
	Total		331	100
Employee qualification	Bachelor	1	69	20.8
	Master	2	105	31.7
	Doctorate	3	157	47.4
	Total		331	100
Level of importance on TMS	Low	1	96	29.0
	Moderate	2	201	60.7
	High	3	34	10.3
	Total		331	100
Need to improve TMS	Not urgently	1	27	8.2
	Urgently	2	192	58.0
	Very urgent	3	112	33.8
	Total		331	100

Source: Field survey (2023)

Section B questions on career advancement aspect of talent management strategies. Section c contains questions on the gender inclusion as a mediator, and section d contains questions on institutional performance (IP). were asked; all on a Five-Point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Moderate (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (5); and this forms the basis for measurement of variables. The scores' order was chosen based on the subject

matter and the expected outcome. The researchers collected a letter of introduction from his department (Graduate School) of his institution, introducing them and purpose of research to the selected institutions. The letter addressed to authorities of each institution was presented to gain access. Additionally, consent letters were given to respondents for confidentiality and privacy purposes, and the respondents were informed that the survey is purely for the fulfillment of graduate studies and their participation is voluntary. Collected data were analysed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (Smart PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is used to analyse composite-based path models or data. It was used because data involve more than a single-item measurement, testing of a theoretical framework from a predictive perspective that aimed at a better understanding of increasing complexity by exploring theoretical extensions, and the latent variables scores to be used for follow-up analysis (Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2017).

The researchers regressed the independent variable Talent Management Strategy (Career advancement – TMSCA) on dependent variable Institutional Performance (IP) mediated by gender inclusion (GI) as:

$Y = \square_0 + X_1 + \mathbf{GI}$

where Y = IP, $\square$ = Beta, 0 = Constant, X_1 = TMSCA, GI = mediating variable motivation. The mediating variable is predicted to have a significant positive mediation on the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

Data Analysis

The selected public universities for this study include; Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, Bauchi State; Gombe State University, Gombe; Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State; Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State; University of Maiduguri, Borno State; and Yobe State University, Damaturu, Yobe State. Composite Reliability (CR) was used to evaluate the internal consistency of the model, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to evaluate convergent validity, and Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) was used to assess the discriminant validity using cross-loadings. All of them are contained in PLS-SEM, which was chosen to clarify how the constructs relate to the model and whether the hypotheses are confirmed by empirical data (Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni, and Lehmann, 2018; Sarstedt, Ringle, Henseler and Hair, 2014).

Discriminant Validity

Because items with loading less than 0.708 are not statistically significant, the outer loadings of the reflective measurement indicators' assessment ranged from 0.710 to 0.841, as indicated in Table 3 below. This reveals an adequate correlation of each indicator's reliability (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017; & Ghasemy, 2020). The researchers used PLS Algorithm to determine the Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) of the constructs' validity. For the model to be valid and dependable, it needed Cronbach Alpha and CR of 0.7 and higher. The researchers focused on CR, a more accurate measure of internal consistency, because it takes into account the model's factor loading weight scores and the Average Variance Extracted, CR has proven to be more accurate than Cronbach's alpha (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). According to the findings, all of the reflective constructs have high levels of internal consistency because their CR values are all above the criterion value of 0.7.

The degree to which the construct converges to explain the change in its items is known as convergent validity. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is the validity metric employed in this study to examine the construct validity. A score of 0.50 or above, which indicates that the construct accounts for at least 50% of the variation of the items, is required for AVE to be acknowledged or accepted. Table 3 below shows the result of the AVE from the survey. The outcome demonstrates that the constructs' AVE is acceptable because all variables have AVEs

that are higher than 0.5 and range from 0.560 to 0.665 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017; Ghasemy, 2020). This shows that the constructs accounted for more than 50% of the variance in the items.

The Discriminant Validity (DV) reports the extent to which one construct is empirically different from other constructs. The AVE of each construct should be compared to the square inter-construct correlation, according to Fornel and Larcher (1981). All shared constructs' variances shouldn't exceed their AVEs. This proposition has been criticized in literature (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2015). Henseler (2015) proposed that the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation should be used. The HTMT is the average of the average correlated item measuring the same construct divided by the mean of the correlated items across all constructs. A high HTMT value denotes the absence of discriminant validity. However, a lower but more conservative threshold value of 0.85 is recommended when the conceptions are conceptually dissimilar (Henseler *et al.,* 2015). The researchers used the Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) to determine the correlation and discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2015). Because the AVE is higher than the variance correlation with any other construct in the model, the HTMT result demonstrates that the data are accurate, dependable, and valid for prediction. The results are presented in Table 3 above.

Table 3: Measurement of Indicators, Composite Reliability, and AVE

Construct	Factor	Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE	CRONBACH
Career advancement	CA1	0.740	0.790	0.540	0.788
	CA2	0.739			
	CA4	0.738			
	CA5	0.734			
Gender Inclusion	CA6	0.722			
	GI 1	0.717	0.813	0.565	0.807
	GI 2	0.744			
	G1 5	0.772			
	G1 6	0.714			
	G1 7	0.808			
Construct	**Factor**	**Loadings**	**Composite Reliability**	**AVE**	**CRONBACH**
IP	P1	0.709	0.892	0.562	0.889
	P4	0.802			
	P5	0.802			
	P6	0.717			
	P7	0.735			
	P9	0.739			
	P10	0.778			
	P11	0.711			

Source: Authors' Calculations (2023)

Table 3: The cross-factor loading shows the construct correlation results. Only statistically significant variables that are above a threshold of 0.708 are shown in Table 3's findings; factors below this level were not taken into consideration (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2017; Ghasemy, 2020).
The validity and reliability are consistent with the rigidity and certainty for further extrapolation and discussion of the findings based on the data shown in Table 4 above.

Table 4: HTMT and DV

Constructs	TMSCA	GI	IP
TMSCA	1		
GI	0.510	1	
IP	0.329	0.722	1

Source: Authors' Calculations

The information from table 4 above demonstrates that TMS career advancement explained 32.9% of the variance in IP and 72.2% of the variance in IP when mediated by gender inclusion. Six distinct public universities were included in the study. The six institutions share comparable training rules and an incentive structure, with a small difference between state-owned and federally-owned institutions.

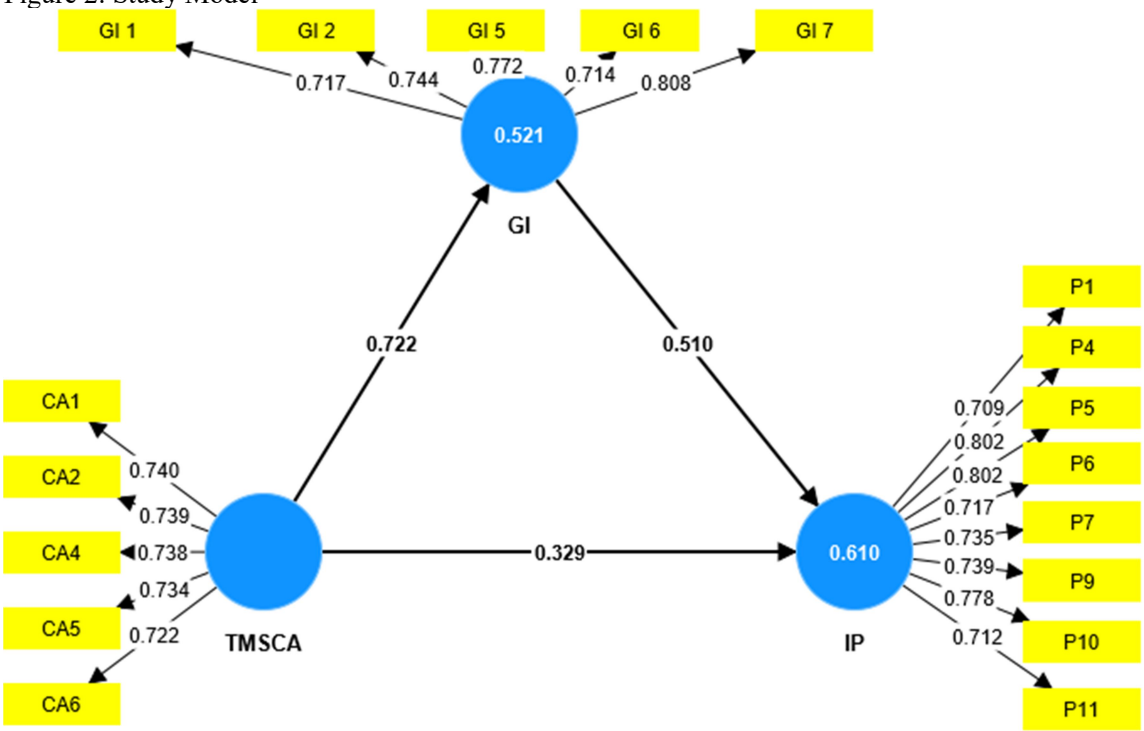
Table 5: Path coefficient of the constructs

Path Coefficient of Constructs						
	B	Sample Mean	Std. Dev.	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
TMSCA -> IP	0.329	0.329	0.055	6.020	0.000	Supported
GI -> IP	0.510	0.511	0.065	9.283	0.000	Supported
TMSCA -> GI	0.722	0.725	0.028	26.183	0.000	Supported

Source: author's computation

The findings in Table 4 above shown that career advancement explained more variance in IP when gender inclusion (72.2%) served as a mediator. The findings in table 5 above also indicated that gender inclusion acted as a positive mediator in the association between institutional performance and talent management strategies (career advancement) career advancement accounts for 32.9% of performance on a direct relationship and 72.2% of performance when mediated with gender inclusion. Only variables with thresholds over 0.708 were taken into account by the researcher and model (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2017). However, career advancement item 2 with 0.703 threshold was accepted because its outer weight is above 0.5 (Ghasemy, 2020).

Figure 2: Study Model



Results and Findings

This study used PLS-SEM 4.0 to test models and hypotheses through a study sample, mean score computation, and PLS-SEM algorithm to examine the statistical significance of the constructs and path coefficient.

The study's validity and reliability for the indicator loading of all items are greater than 0.708, indicating both validity and reliability (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2017; Ghasemy, 2020). The reflective measurement model outer loadings of the study indicators ranged from 0.709 to 0.808 as reported in figure 1. This indicates an acceptable correlation and statistically significant since item loadings are not less than 0.708 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2017; Ghasemy, 2020). The results of the Composite Reliability (CR) for all the reflective constructs are above 0.7 threshold value and this shows a high level of internal consistency of all the constructs. The researchers emphasized CR because of its better indicator of internal consistency (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; and Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2017).

The construct validity was examined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) method by the researchers. To be accepted, AVE needs to be at least 0.5. Based on the data analysed in Table 7, the AVE construct values range from 0.540 to 0.565, which is acceptable because the value of

each item is greater than 0.5 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2017; Ghasemy, 2020). This shows that the constructs explained 50% and above of the items' variance.

The findings, as shown in Table 7, demonstrate a substantial positive link between TMS (career advancement) and IP at a p-value of 0.000 and a significant mediating association between TMS (career advancement) and IP at a p-value of 0.000. The appropriateness of the data was examined using a bootstrapping sample of 5000, and since the Alpha is 0.000, the hypothesis H0 was rejected and alternative hypotheses were accepted. This demonstrates the correlation between the variables and the results.

In addition, the direct effect of TMS career advancement) on IP resulted in a significant positive R^2 (R Square) of 0.610 and 0.521 when mediated by motivation on the relationship between TMS (career advancement) and IP. The R^2 determines the predictive capacity of the model. The direct model has adjusted R^2 of 0.608 while the indirect model has adjusted R^2 of 0.519. The R^2 of 95% shows (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt and Ringle, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2017; Ghasemy 2020).

Table 6: THE F^2 EFFECT

F^2	IP	GI
TMSCA	0.329	0.722
GI	0.510	0

The direct model showed that TMS (career advancement) has 32.9% effect or prediction on IP and 72.2% effect or prediction on IP when mediated by gender inclusion. The path coefficient of the construct loadings shows that TMS (career advancement) is positively significant at 1% (0.01) as presented in Table 7. Gender inclusion positively mediates the relationship between TMS (career advancement) and IP at 1% (0.00).

The descriptive data revealed that 73.4% of the academic employees in the institutions are male, while 26% are female. This further buttress the need for more women representation strategies because the population of women is below the average population of male representation. 4.8% of the academic employees in public universities in the region are under 26 years of age, 19.6% are within the age bracket of 26 and 35 years, 42.3% are within the age bracket of 36 and 45 years, 23.6% are within the age bracket of 46 and 55 years, 8.5% of the employees are within the age bracket of 56 and 65 years, and 1.2% of the academic employees are above 65 years of age. The results showed that 23.0% of the respondents are assistant lecturers, 29.0% are lecturer 11, 15.7% are lecturer 1, 15.1% are senior lecturers, and 17.2% are professorial. 15.1% of the academic employees have experience of fewer than two years at the institution, 22.4% have two to five years of experience, 27.8% have six to nine years of experience, and 34.7% have ten years or more of experience at the universities. 20.8% of the academic employees have bachelor's degrees, 31.7% of the academic members of staff in the region have master's degrees, and 47.4% have doctorate degrees. The results showed that 29.0% of the academic employees agreed that the level of importance placed by the management of the selected institutions on talent management strategies is low, 60.7% of the respondents agreed that the level of importance placed by the management on talent management strategies is moderate, and 10.3% of the academic employees agreed that the level of importance placed on talent management strategies by the management of the institutions is high. 11.5% of the respondents agreed that the need for TMSs improvement in institutions of higher learning is not urgent, 50.7% showed that it is urgently needed, and 37.8% showed that the need to improve talent

management strategies in institutions of higher learning is very urgent.

Discussion and Implications

The findings of the study revealed that TMS (career advancement) is positively related to IP. The results also showed that gender inclusion positively mediates the relationship between TMS (career advancement) and IP. This means that gender inclusiveness has partial or complementarily mediation on the relationship between career advancement and performance. It implies that public universities need to promote women advancement strategies in academia to improve research, teaching, and service performance. This study submits that gender inclusiveness strengthens TMS (career advancement) and improves performance in universities. The findings support the views of Kloot (2004), Selman (2016), Erica (2016); Tomas et al., (2020); Sharna (2021); and Vincent, Charles, & Jane, (2022).

Authorities of universities should dedicate time and resources to promoting women advancement strategies to enhance performance. Career advancement has a positive significant influence on institutional performance. However, extant literature and studies have not been able to address the inclusiveness of women TMS as a solution strategy to institution's poor performance in academe (i.e., gender equality). The study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the crucial importance of bridging the gap between career advancement and institutional performance through women inclusive strategies.

Authorities and owners of universities should ingrain a rewards system for women talent creativity through public recognition, awards, and steady promotion as part of the operational policy. It is imperative that institutions adopt this aspect of talent management inclusive strategy to enhance individual's contribution. Unit and department heads should acknowledge, encourage, ad recommend women subordinates by publicly recognizing individual women's commitment to their academic accomplishments and actualization of departmental goals

Authorities of universities should internalize specific women talent programs such as child health care centres, child-early learning centers, flexible office hours as part of the operationalstrategies. This will reduce the family and child care responsibility of women and enhance women's time investment in the job and research

To improve the retention of women in senior positions, an agent of change should help provide support and encouragement to other women, more transparent organizational processes, structures, and changes must be implemented in hiring practices. Additionally, the universities policies on discrimination and harassment against women's talents should be ingrained into the operational strategies. This will encourage equal gender rights and safety within the work environment thereby promoting women's retention in academe

Limitations and Further Research

This study has certain limitations. First, the scope and sampling size is the primary limitation of the study. This study only tested public universities in one region out of six regions in Nigeria. Second, the instruments were closed-ended and denied respondents' chances of expressing themselves; hence, was limited by structured questionnaires.

A similar study should be conducted, using other mediating variables such as government allocation on the relationship between talent management and performance of universities.

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