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Mediating Role of Employee Engagement on the Relationship between Organizational Culture and Employee Performance in Higher Educational Institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria

[1]Dr. Habu Jingi Umar; & [2]Ibrahim Ahmadu

[1]Department of Office Technology and Management, Federal Polytechnic Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria and [2]Department of Business and Management, Federal Polytechnic Mubi, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study investigates the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance within higher educational institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria. While organizational culture has been widely acknowledged as a critical determinant of employee performance, limited empirical attention has been given to the psychological mechanisms through which culture influences performance in higher education, particularly in developing countries. Based on the Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands–Resources model, this study proposes employee engagement as a key explanatory mechanism linking organizational culture to employee performance. Adopting a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from academic and administrative staff across selected higher educational institutions in Adamawa State and analysed using Hayes' PROCESS macro for mediation analysis. The results reveal that organizational culture has a significant positive effect on employee performance and also significantly predicts employee engagement while employee engagement was found to exert a strong positive effect on employee performance and to partially mediate the relationship between organizational culture and performance, as evidenced by a statistically

significant indirect effect. These findings suggest that organizational culture enhances performance not only directly but also by fostering higher levels of employee engagement. The study recommends that the management of these institutions are to prioritize cultural practices and engagement-enhancing strategies as pathways to improving employee effectiveness and institutional performance. The study contributes to organizational behavior literature by empirically integrating Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands–Resources model within a higher education context, thereby deepening understanding of how cultural and psychological factors jointly shape performance outcomes.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Employee Engagement; Employee Performance; Higher Education; Mediation.

Introduction

In an era where higher educational institutions are pivotal engines of social and economic development, understanding the mechanisms that drive employee effectiveness has never been more critical. The performance of academic and administrative staff shapes not only teaching quality and research outcomes but also institutional reputation and student success. Underpinning this performance is the often-elusive construct of organizational culture—a set of shared values, beliefs, and practices that inform daily behaviours within institutions. This has been shown to significantly influence both engagement and performance outcomes in organizational settings (Liu & Hussain, 2025; Ismail et al., 2024). Organizational culture does not simply provide a backdrop for operations; it actively shapes how employees perceive their roles and how they mobilize their energy at work ((Nursalimah et al., 2025). When culture is positive, inclusive, and aligned with institutional goals, it tends to foster environments where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to engage deeply with their work (Nekula & Koob, 2021; Liu & Hussain, 2025). However, the pathway from organizational culture to employee performance remains insufficiently understood, especially in the context of higher education in developing regions like Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape the behavior of individuals within an organization (Schein, 2010). In higher educational institutions, this includes dimensions such as collaboration, innovation, and mission orientation, which influence how academic and non-academic staff interact and perform their roles. Employee engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind characterized by vigour (high energy and resilience), dedication (enthusiasm and commitment), and absorption (being fully immersed in work) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees are motivated to contribute to organizational goals, making

engagement a critical factor in performance outcomes. Employee performance encompasses the extent to which employees achieve their job-related tasks and contribute to organizational objectives (Koopmans et al., 2011). In higher education, this includes teaching quality, research productivity, and administrative effectiveness. A supportive organizational culture, characterized by collaboration, trust, and clear mission alignment, has been shown to enhance employee performance. Denison et al. (2014) found that organizations with adaptive and mission-driven cultures exhibit higher performance outcomes, including in educational settings. In Nigeria, Alade and Ogundele (2018) demonstrate that a positive organizational culture in tertiary institutions fosters better teaching and administrative performance. However, these studies often focus on southern Nigeria, leaving the northern context, particularly Adamawa State, underexplored.

Despite the ideal situation where supportive cultures catalyse high performance through engaged staff, the reality is often starkly different. Many higher educational institutions in Nigeria grapple with organizational environments marked by rigid hierarchies, limited communication, and conflicting subcultures that hamper employee motivation and engagement (Ajibade et al., 2025). Reports from Nigerian universities reflect persistent challenges related to low morale, unclear role expectations, and inadequate institutional support, all of which erode employees' willingness to invest discretionary effort in their work. Empirical evidence from neighbouring public university contexts indicates that employee engagement and productivity are undermined by issues such as economic instability, funding inadequacies, and frequent industrial actions, which collectively depress morale and reduce performance outputs (Ajibade et al., 2025). These contextual realities underline a fundamental problem: organizational culture alone does not guarantee improved employee performance unless employees are psychologically and behaviourally engaged with their work. These positions are consistent with research showing that culture's effect on performance is strengthened when engagement is high (Qomari, 2025).

Previous researches have acknowledged the relationships between organizational culture and either engagement or performance (Vasumathi et al., 2025), but seldom has it examined the mechanism through which culture influences performance in higher education settings. Studies in other sectors, such as cultural and creative enterprises, demonstrate that employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between organizational culture and performance outcomes (Sitorus et al., 2023; Wicaksono & Almadana, 2025; Qomari, 2025), suggesting that the effect of culture on performance is indirect and operates through human psychological processes. Employee engagement is increasingly recognized as a mediator in the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance. Saks (2019) argues that engagement acts as a mechanism through which a positive culture translates into improved performance by enhancing employees' motivation and commitment. In educational settings, studies like those by Anitha (2014) suggest that engagement mediates the impact of culture on performance, but this mediation is rarely examined in the Nigerian higher education context, particularly in regions like Adamawa State with unique challenges

(Ismail et al., 2024). Similarly, literature on strategic alignment in educational contexts outside Nigeria confirms that employee engagement plays a crucial intermediary role in turning strategic intent into measurable performance improvements (Qiao, 2025). Yet, within Nigerian higher education, there remains a notable gap: few studies have explicitly tested engagement as a mediator between culture and employee performance—and none have done so with rigorous empirical attention to faculty and administrative experiences in Adamawa State's universities. This gap is consequential because without understanding the mediating process, interventions aimed at enhancing performance may overlook the critical role of human motivation and psychological investment.

The consequences of this gap extend beyond academic theorising; they influence policy and practice. When institutional leaders focus solely on structural reforms such as policy changes or resource allocation without nurturing the underlying cultural and engagement mechanisms, efforts often produce little improvement in employee performance. This oversight perpetuates cycles of low productivity, weakened institutional outcomes, and diminished educational quality. Therefore, the present study addresses an urgent need to articulate and empirically validate the mediating role of employee engagement in the organizational culture–employee performance relationship. By situating this inquiry within higher educational institutions in Adamawa State, this research not only extends existing theoretical frameworks (e.g., Job Demands–Resources (Demerouti et al., 2001) and Social Exchange theories (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)) into a new cultural and educational context but also provides actionable insights for policymakers and institutional leaders committed to fostering high-performance academic workplaces. Specifically, this study aims to test whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance in higher education. The objectives are to; assess the direct effect of organisational culture on employee performance, examine the influence of organizational culture on employee engagement, and determine whether employee engagement acts as a mediator in the culture–performance linkage. Addressing these aims matters academically because it refines models of human behaviour in organizational settings; practically, it informs higher education leaders about the psychological levers that translate cultural practices into enhanced performance; and in policy terms, it suggests targeted strategies to elevate institutional effectiveness.

Literature Review

This section deals with the review of relevant and related literatures on the research topic. This literature review explores the relationships between organizational culture, employee engagement, and employee performance in higher educational institutions, with a focus on Adamawa State, Nigeria. It aims to define these key concepts, synthesize existing research on their direct and indirect relationships, and identify gaps, particularly regarding the mediating role of employee engagement in this context. The review draws on global, African, and Nigerian studies, emphasizing higher education where possible, and highlights the need

for context-specific research in Adamawa State due to its unique socio-cultural and economic challenges. By establishing a theoretical and empirical foundation, this review informs the conceptual framework and hypotheses guiding the study.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is widely conceptualized as the collective set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that shape how members of an institution think, behave, and interact within an organization. At its core, organizational culture encompasses the shared meanings and patterns that differentiate one institution from another, serving as a guiding framework for acceptable behaviour and decision-making processes (Fernandes et al., 2023). Organisational culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that guide behaviour within an organisation. In Nigeria, organisational culture in universities is influenced by local traditions, hierarchical structures, and national policies. Research by Agboola (2011) in Ogun State found that cultural elements like leadership and communication impact university performance. This definition highlights culture as an enduring and pervasive force that directs how "things are done" within an organization, influencing members' perceptions and actions in ways that extend beyond formal policies and procedures. According to recent conceptual work, culture comprises tangible and intangible elements such as underlying assumptions, values that guide behaviour, and observable norms that collectively inform institutional identity and practice (StatPearls, 2025). In this regard, organizational culture goes beyond mere surface rituals, embedding deeper beliefs that help individuals interpret their roles and responsibilities within the institutional environment.

In the literature, organizational culture has been further defined by scholars as a dynamic system of shared meanings that develop over time through members' collective experiences and social interactions. Schein's seminal perspective posits culture as a multi-layered construct comprising basic assumptions, espoused values, and observable artefacts, which together shape how institutional members solve problems and adapt to internal and external challenges (Uttal, , 2024). This multi- layered view underscores that organizational culture is not static but evolves as meaning and practice are continually negotiated within the institution. Moreover, recent systematic reviews in the context of higher educational institutions (HEIs) emphasize that culture influences motivation, engagement, and performance outcomes by shaping leadership effectiveness and institutional priorities (Abdullah et al., 2025). Hence, culture is conceptualized not merely as a descriptive profile of institutional characteristics but as a substantive force that orchestrates how members coordinate their actions and align with collective goals.

The influence of organizational culture extends to fundamental organizational outcomes, including employee engagement and performance, by creating a sense of identity, shared purpose, and consistency in norms. Empirical research demonstrates that when employees internalize the values and expectations of their organizational culture, they exhibit higher commitment, discretionary effort, and alignment with institutional objectives, which

in turn enhance performance and overall effectiveness (Fernandes et al., 2023). Such views align with evidence suggesting that organizational culture fosters cohesion and shapes members' behavioural intentions, thereby reinforcing a work environment conducive to high performance. In higher education settings specifically, a strong culture can support academic and administrative staff to interpret institutional goals consistently, collaborate more effectively, and sustain motivation, which are critical for achieving educational excellence and institutional performance. Thus, organizational culture is best understood as an integrative construct that influences both individual and collective organizational outcomes through shared meaning systems and normative guidance.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a central construct in organizational research that reflects the depth of an employee's psychological and behavioural connection to their work and organization. At its core, employee engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by the energy, enthusiasm, and absorption that employees bring to their roles (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This definition highlights engagement as more than mere job satisfaction or commitment; it involves vigour (high levels of energy and resilience), dedication (strong involvement and sense of significance in work), and absorption (full concentration and immersion in work tasks). In its foundational articulation, engagement refers to "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances (Kahn, 1990; Sypniewska, Baran, & Kłos, 2023). This definition underscores that engagement is not merely about fulfilling job tasks but involves a deeper integration of the individual's identity, energy, and emotional commitment with their work roles. While Schaufeli's conceptualization originates from the work engagement literature, it has become widely accepted in broader employee engagement research because it captures how employees invest themselves physically, emotionally, and cognitively in their work activities (Grubert, et al., 2023). Scholars emphasize that this state is inherently motivational and is associated with sustained energy and purposeful effort, which are essential in demanding work contexts such as higher education institutions.

In addition to the psychological state perspective, employee engagement has been conceptualized in terms of the relational and behavioural dimensions that shape how employees interact with their organization. From this view, engagement is understood as the connection and commitment employees have toward organizational values, goals, and work roles, which motivates them to contribute discretionary effort and invest themselves in achieving institutional objectives (Mone & London, 2010). Definitions in contemporary research emphasize that employee engagement involves employees' emotional and psychological attachment to their work, organization, and its goals, manifesting in heightened effort, proactive behaviours, and discretionary contribution beyond formal job requirements (Musevenzo et al., 2024). This broader perspective situates engagement within a

motivational spectrum that includes affective commitment, intrinsic motivation, and proactive involvement, highlighting the role of organizational support, meaningful work, and leadership in fostering engagement. Empirical studies increasingly adopt this integrated understanding, linking employee engagement to psychological factors such as autonomy, relatedness, and perceived value congruence, which collectively shape employees' willingness to invest their personal resources in organizational success (Sypniewska, et al., 2023; Gede, & Huluka, 2024). This broader definition integrates emotional attachment, involvement, and empowerment, underscoring that engaged employees are not only absorbed in their tasks but also committed to the organization's mission, demonstrating proactive behaviour toward realizing institutional outcomes. Such relational dimensions align employee engagement with constructs like organizational citizenship behaviour and organizational commitment, but engagement remains distinct by emphasizing the active, energy-laden, and role-integrated involvement of employees (Kaur, 2023).

Recent research further elaborates employee engagement as a multidimensional motivational construct rooted in psychological presence, organizational support, and work experiences that extend beyond task execution (Schuck et al., 2017). From this perspective, engagement is shaped by cognitive, emotional, and behavioural energies that collectively influence how employees perceive and enact their roles within organizational contexts. The dominant conceptualization used in contemporary studies, particularly in fields like educational and public sector research, maintains that employee engagement reflects sustained involvement, dedication, and enthusiasm that foster not only individual performance but also collective institutional effectiveness. Recent research also situates employee engagement within theoretical frameworks such as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that engagement emerges when job and personal resources sufficiently support employees in meeting job demands, thereby facilitating sustained energy, commitment, and involvement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Under this model, engagement is not merely a static trait but a dynamic, motivational process that arises from the interaction between employees' internal capacities and organizational contexts, including support structures, leadership practices, and work design. Such theoretical perspectives underscore that employee engagement influences and is influenced by work experiences, situating it as both an outcome of organizational practices and a predictor of key performance and well-being outcomes. Engagement's multifaceted and multidimensional nature implies that it cannot be reduced to a single attribute such as job satisfaction; rather, it encompasses a comprehensive investment of the self in work roles and organisational life, which positively influences organisational outcomes including performance, adaptability, and resilience(Grubert, Steuber, & Meynhardt, 2023; Gede, & Huluka, 2024). Employee engagement is defined as a positive, work-related state characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model suggests that resources like supportive culture increase engagement, while demands like workload may reduce it. In

Nigeria, studies like Chukwu et al. (2017) on private universities in Delta State highlight engagement's role in improving performance, but research in public institutions or northern regions remains limited.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a foundational concept in organizational research, representing the degree to which an individual effectively and efficiently carries out the tasks and responsibilities associated with their role in ways that contribute to the attainment of organizational objectives. Contemporary definitions emphasize that employee performance encompasses both the behaviours employees exhibit while performing their work and the outcomes those behaviours generate in relation to organizational goals. For instance, employee performance has been defined as the "effectiveness and efficiency with which individuals carry out their core duties and responsibilities as outlined in their formal job description," reflecting essential human contributions to organizational operations and outcomes (Nusraningrum et al., 2024). This conceptualization situates performance not merely as output quantity or quality but as a nuanced expression of how employees translate their knowledge, skills, and effort into meaningful work that aligns with institutional goals. Hence, performance is understood not only in terms of what employees produce but also how they behave and perform within their work environments (Nusraningrum et al., 2024). Scholarship further elaborates employee performance as a multidimensional construct integrating task, adaptive, and contextual elements that collectively determine overall effectiveness in organizational contexts. Research synthesizing empirical studies in workplace performance identifies that performance involves meeting job expectations, contributing to team goals, and supporting positive organizational outcomes, with dimensions such as task performance (in-role behaviours), adaptive performance (adjustment to change), and contextual performance (behaviours that support the broader work environment) all playing critical roles (Pardhan & Jena, 2017; Eshete et al., 2025). This multidimensional perspective aligns with seminal work in industrial and organizational psychology, which distinguishes between core technical duties and extra-role behaviours that collectively shape how performance is exhibited and evaluated within organizations. Recognizing performance as multifaceted underscores that high performance is not a singular outcome but an integrated set of behaviours and contributions that advance organizational efficacy and sustainability.

In higher education settings, employee performance takes on additional significance, reflecting not just routine task execution but also contributions to institutional missions such as teaching quality, research productivity, community engagement, and service delivery. Performance in such contexts therefore often intersects with broader institutional goals such as; academic excellence, organizational innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction requiring employees to execute responsibilities with both technical proficiency and adaptive engagement. Consequently, employee performance is seen as a comprehensive assessment

of how well employees fulfil their duties, meet performance standards, and contribute to organizational success in substantive and contextually relevant ways (Eshete et al., 2025). This conceptualization is especially salient in studies examining performance in public sector or higher education institutions, where performance outcomes are intertwined with institutional reputation, community impact, and long-term development goals. As a result, employee performance is widely recognized as a critical predictor of organizational effectiveness, innovation, and competitive advantage in both theory and empirical research. Employee performance in higher education includes teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and administrative contributions. Performance measurement is complex due to diverse roles and qualitative outcomes like student satisfaction. In Nigeria, metrics often focus on publications and teaching evaluations, as noted by Umar et al. (2018), who studied staff performance in Adamawa State's colleges of education.

Organizational Culture and Employee Performance

Globally, organizational culture significantly influences employee performance. Denison et al. (2014) found that adaptive and mission-driven cultures enhance organizational outcomes, including in higher education. Tierney (1988) emphasized that cultures fostering collaboration improve faculty performance. In Africa, studies like Demissie (2022) at Hawassa University, Ethiopia, show that supportive cultures enhance academic performance. In Nigeria, Okeke et al. (2012) found that collaborative cultures in Rivers State universities correlate with better student and faculty outcomes. However, Amah & Ahiauzu (2013) note that hierarchical cultures may hinder performance if overly rigid.

The relationship between organizational culture and employee performance has been extensively examined in contemporary research, with a consensus that culture serves as a fundamental contextual factor shaping how employees behave, make decisions, and deliver results. Organizational culture is typically understood as the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that guide members' behavior and define "how things are done" within an institution, influencing employees' attitudes and actions (Abdullah et al., 2025). A strong culture provides a coherent framework that aligns individual efforts with the broader strategic objectives of the organization, enabling employees to interpret expectations clearly and act in ways that support performance goals. Within this conceptual framing, organizational culture is not limited to superficial rituals or formal procedures; rather, it embeds deeply into daily work processes and social interactions, shaping how employees perceive their roles and responsibilities relative to organizational success. Empirical evidence broadly supports that when employees perceive organizational culture as supportive and value-aligned, they are more likely to exhibit high performance, exhibit discretionary effort, and contribute to collective outcomes that enhance organizational effectiveness (Abdullah et al., 2025).

Research investigating the culture–performance nexus underscores that the mechanisms linking culture to employee performance are both direct and indirect. Organizational culture

influences performance by fostering shared meaning, reinforcing normative behaviours, and shaping motivational climates that encourage productivity and adaptability. For instance, studies have found that cultural elements such as involvement, consistency, and mission significantly contribute to employee performance by promoting engagement and a sense of purpose among workers (Iskamto, 2023; Ningsih, Akib, & Nasrullah, 2024). Similarly, organizational culture has been empirically shown to explain measurable portions of performance variance in organizational settings, indicating that employees in environments with strong cultural support for collaboration and innovation tend to demonstrate higher task proficiency and efficiency (Iskamto, 2023; Komar, 2021). These findings suggest that culture operates not only as a backdrop for performance but as an active source of behavioural guidance that can stimulate performance outcomes.

However, scholars also emphasize the complexity and context-dependence of the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance. The strength and nature of this relationship can vary across institutional contexts, industry sectors, and cultural environments, with some research highlighting that additional organizational factors such as leadership practices, support systems, and job demands can moderate or mediate cultural effects (Bashayreh, 2019). Furthermore, systematic reviews show that organizational culture influences performance through multiple pathways, promoting motivation, enhancing employee engagement, and enabling supportive climate conditions that collectively elevate performance levels (Bashayreh, 2019; José, Palma-Moreira, & Au-Yong- Oliveira, 2025). This multidimensional perspective underscores that organizational culture should not be viewed as a monolithic predictor of performance but rather as an integrative construct that interacts with other organizational processes and employee experiences to shape performance outcomes.

Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

Organizational culture and employee engagement are deeply interconnected constructs in organizational research, with scholars consistently affirming that culture provides the contextual foundation within which engagement is cultivated. Organizational culture is defined as the shared values, norms, beliefs, and practices that guide members' behaviours and shape their interpretations of work environments and expectations. Within this cultural context, employee engagement emerges as the psychological and emotional connection that employees develop toward their work and organization. Research increasingly shows that a positive, supportive organizational culture fosters stronger employee engagement by creating an environment of trust, shared purpose, and mutual respect, which enables employees to commit their energy, creativity, and efforts to organizational goals. For example, Ashley and Brijball Parumasur (2024) found a significant positive relationship between organizational culture dimensions (such as involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission) and the core facets of employee engagement (vigour, dedication,

and absorption), demonstrating that culture shapes how fully employees engage in their work roles.

Scholars also emphasize that the influence of organizational culture on employee engagement operates through multiple psychological and structural pathways, underscoring how cultural elements can enhance or inhibit engagement. A supportive culture that emphasizes empowerment, inclusiveness, and open communication tends to elevate employees' sense of belonging and psychological safety, which are key antecedents of engagement. Studies in diverse organizational settings reveal that employees who perceive alignment between personal and organizational values report higher levels of engagement, as culture reinforces meaning and purpose in work roles. For instance, evidence from higher education contexts and broader organizational environments indicates that when institutional values are clear, consistently communicated, and reinforced through leadership actions, employees are more likely to feel energized and committed to their work (Tshifhiwa, & Morukhu, 2025). This aligns with broader theoretical frameworks which posit that cultural alignment not only influences observable behaviours but also affects internal motivational states that underpin engagement.

Contemporary research further underlines that organizational culture does not simply affect engagement as a direct antecedent but also interacts with other organizational processes and resources to shape engagement outcomes. For example, supportive cultural practices such as recognition, participative decision-making, and developmental opportunities, which can strengthen employee engagement by providing psychological and social resources that enhance job meaningfulness and role clarity. Similarly, studies have shown that cultures emphasizing adaptability and learning contribute to employees' willingness to invest effort and sustain engagement over time, particularly in dynamic and complex organizational environments (Khoiri, Burhan, & Suharto, 2024). This multidimensional influence highlights that culture functions as an enabling context for engagement, affecting not only individual attitudes but also the relational and environmental conditions that support sustained involvement and enthusiasm in work. Thus, conceptualizations of the organizational culture– engagement relationship reflect a nuanced interplay where culture shapes, and is shaped by, the experiential and psychological landscape in which engagement is developed.

Organisational culture influences engagement by shaping the work environment. The JD-R Model posits that cultural resources like recognition foster engagement. Kuh & Whitt (1988) argue that cultures promoting autonomy enhance engagement in academia. Globally, supportive cultures increase engagement, as seen in Bakker & Bal (2010). In Nigeria, Amah (2018) found that participative cultures boost engagement, but bureaucratic structures and job insecurity, as reported by National Bureau of Statistics (2017), may suppress it.

Employee Engagement and Employee Performance

Employee engagement and employee performance are intrinsically linked constructs in contemporary organizational research, where engagement is understood to significantly

influence how employees perform their roles, fulfil duties, and contribute to organizational success. Employee engagement refers to the degree of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural involvement that employees exhibit toward their work and organization, indicating the extent to which they invest personal resources such as effort, enthusiasm, and commitment into their roles. When employees are engaged, they demonstrate higher dedication, initiative, and willingness to go beyond minimum requirements, which research suggests positively correlates with performance outcomes such as productivity, quality of work, and goal attainment. For example, Anitha (2014) found that employee engagement significantly impacts employee performance, with engaged employees more likely to demonstrate heightened reliability, task focus, and discretionary effort that directly enhance individual and organizational performance metrics (Anitha, 2014).

Scholars also emphasize that the relationship between engagement and performance is supported by robust theoretical foundations that position engagement as a motivational and psychological precursor of performance outcomes. From the perspective of social exchange theory and the job demands– resources (JD-R) model, engagement emerges when employees perceive that job resources (such as support, autonomy, and recognition) adequately meet job demands, leading to higher energy, involvement, and persistence in work tasks. Empirical studies in higher education and other sectors further corroborate that engaged employees consistently exhibit better task execution, adaptive problem-solving, and collaboration, key elements of both individual and collective performance. For instance, research conducted in Ethiopian public universities indicates that core facets of engagement vigour, dedication, and absorption have a significant and favourable effect on performance outcomes, illustrating that engagement amplifies employees' capacity to perform effectively in complex organizational settings (Gede & Huluka, 2024). These results align with broader literature showing that engagement moves beyond simple positive attitudes to encompass sustained performance-enhancing behaviours, which are critical in demanding contexts like higher education institutions where mission fulfilment depends on both quality teaching and effective administrative functions.

Importantly, contemporary studies recognize that the impact of employee engagement on performance is multidimensional, influencing task performance, organizational citizenship behaviours, and overall institutional effectiveness. Engaged employees are not only more productive but also more likely to demonstrate proactive behaviours that support continuous improvement and innovation behaviours that are crucial in the dynamic environments of higher educational institutions. For example, broader organizational research underscores that engagement contributes to enhanced performance through improved motivation, reduced absenteeism, stronger alignment with organizational goals, and higher job satisfaction, which collectively translate into measurable performance gains (Anitha, 2014; Gede & Huluka, 2024). In sum, employee engagement functions as a vital psychological and behavioural mechanism through which individual contributions are amplified and sustained, making it a critical antecedent of performance outcomes in both general

organizational contexts and specifically within higher education. This conceptual understanding underscores why engagement is widely treated as a mediator in models linking organizational antecedents (like culture) to performance outcomes: engagement captures the motivational and discretionary aspects of work that bridge organizational context and employee performance. Engaged employees exhibit higher performance across sectors. Harter et al. (2002) found engagement correlates with productivity. In higher education, Bakker & Bal (2010) showed that engaged teachers have better teaching outcomes. In Nigeria, Adisa et al. (2018) reported that engaged lecturers in tertiary institutions have higher research output and teaching quality. Chukwu et al. (2017) found similar results in Delta State's private universities.

Mediating Role of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance, serving as the mechanism through which cultural factors translate into enhanced performance outcomes. Engagement is defined as the psychological investment and emotional involvement of employees in their work roles, reflecting vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In the context of higher educational institutions, organizational culture provides the norms, values, and shared expectations that shape employees' perceptions of their work environment. When the culture is supportive, inclusive, and aligned with institutional goals, employees are more likely to internalize organizational values and commit their effort and attention to meaningful work, thereby improving performance outcomes. The literature emphasizes that engagement functions not just as a by-product of culture but as the active conduit that converts cultural inputs into tangible performance behaviours, making it central to understanding the culture–performance link (Liu & Hussain, 2025).

Empirical studies underscore the mediating effect of employee engagement in diverse organizational settings. Gede (2025) demonstrated in Ethiopian higher education institutions that employee engagement fully mediated the effect of strategic alignment on organizational performance, highlighting its role as a key psychological and behavioural mechanism. Similarly, Liu and Hussain (2025) found that organizational culture significantly affects performance through engagement, indicating that cultural attributes alone are insufficient to improve performance without fostering employee engagement. These findings align with theoretical frameworks such as the social exchange theory and the job demands–resources (JD-R) model, which posit that engagement emerges from employees' perception of supportive work contexts and, in turn, motivates sustained effort and discretionary behaviours. In higher education, this suggests that faculty and administrative staff translate cultural alignment into enhanced teaching quality, research productivity, and service delivery primarily through engagement.

Finally, the conceptualization of engagement as a mediator highlights important practical implications for managing performance in higher education institutions. By nurturing a

culture that emphasizes recognition, empowerment, collaboration, and value congruence, institutions can enhance engagement levels, which subsequently boost both individual and collective performance outcomes (Gede, 2025; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Liu & Hussain, 2025). This multidimensional influence underscores that engagement is not merely an outcome of organizational culture but a dynamic mechanism that strengthens the culture–performance link. Consequently, institutional strategies aimed at improving employee performance should prioritize interventions that enhance engagement such as participative decision-making, professional development, and psychological support ensuring that cultural initiatives effectively translate into measurable performance gains.

Employee engagement is a plausible mediator, as it translates cultural values into performance outcomes. Social Exchange Theory suggests that supportive cultures foster engagement, which drives performance. Anitha (2014) in India found that engagement mediates the culture-performance relationship. In Nigeria, Ogbonnaya & Valizade (2016) showed that engagement mediates between high-performance work practices and job outcomes, suggesting applicability to cultural contexts. Adamawa State's cultural diversity and economic challenges shape its higher education institutions. Sesay & Onah (2017) highlight how insurgency disrupts socio-economic development, likely affecting workplace culture and engagement. Funding shortages and security issues, as noted by Umar et al. (2018), create stressful environments that may reduce engagement and performance in Adamawa's colleges of education.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the integration of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, providing a robust foundation for examining how organizational culture influences employee performance through the mediating role of engagement. Social Exchange Theory posits that employees reciprocate supportive, value-driven organizational environments with commitment, loyalty, and discretionary effort, highlighting the psychological and relational mechanisms that underpin engagement and performance (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Complementing this, the JD-R model emphasizes that organisational resources, including cultural support, recognition, and empowerment, foster employees' vigour, dedication, and absorption, thereby enhancing performance outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). By combining these frameworks, the study accounts for both the motivational processes (engagement as a mediator) and the structural-environmental conditions (culture as a predictor) that drive employee performance, providing a theoretically coherent rationale for the hypothesized relationships. This integration is further justified empirically, as numerous studies have demonstrated that engagement mediates the effects of culture and organizational support on performance across sectors, including education, highlighting the framework's applicability and explanatory power in higher educational institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria (Gede, 2025; Liu & Hussain, 2025). Overall, the theoretical

framework offers both conceptual clarity and practical relevance, enabling a nuanced understanding of the pathways through which culture and engagement interact to influence employee performance.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model for the study is shown in Fig. 1.

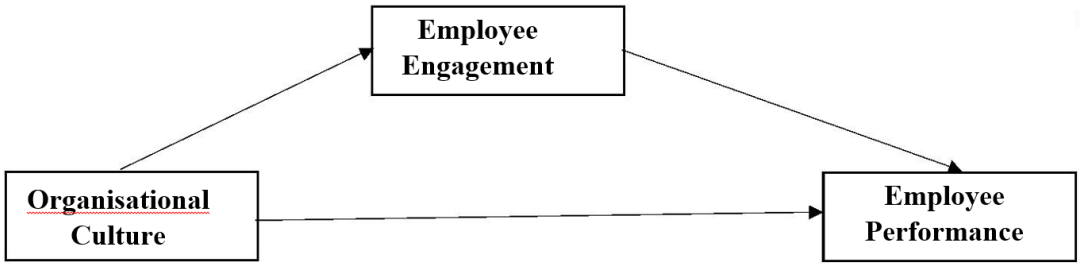


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Research

The proposed model posits that organizational culture (independent variable) influences employee performance (dependent variable) directly and indirectly through employee engagement (mediator). Contextual factors like insecurity may moderate these relationships. The model integrates Denison's Culture Model, the JD-R Model, and Social Exchange Theory to explain how culture fosters engagement, which drives performance. The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the recognition that organizational culture shapes the work environment and behavioural expectations, which in turn influence employee engagement, ultimately affecting employee performance in higher education institutions. Drawing on over two decades of organizational research and practice, it is evident that culture provides the normative and psychological context within which employees interpret their roles, while engagement serves as the motivational and cognitive mechanism that translates cultural inputs into observable performance outcomes (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Liu & Hussain, 2025). The framework is justified theoretically by the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that resources embedded in organizational context such as supportive culture enhance employees' energy, dedication, and absorption, fostering optimal performance, and by Social Exchange Theory, which explains how employees reciprocate positive organizational environments with heightened commitment and discretionary effort. Empirically, studies across educational and organizational settings demonstrate that employee engagement consistently mediates the relationship between culture and performance, reinforcing its role as a critical conduit through which organizational values, practices, and social norms are operationalized into tangible institutional outcomes (Gede, 2025; Anitha, 2014). Thus, this conceptual framework provides both theoretical coherence and practical relevance, offering a structured lens for examining how culture-driven engagement mechanisms can be leveraged to improve performance in higher education institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Methodology

Adamawa State, situated in north-eastern Nigeria, is geographically positioned along the Benue River and has an approximate population of 336,648, as recorded in the 2010 census. The state capital, Yola, spans a territorial area of roughly 1,213 square kilometres, with an elevation of 1.5 meters above mean sea level. Geospatial coordinates place the region between latitudes 9°14'N and 12°28'E, exhibiting a relative humidity range of 20-30%. Climatically, the state falls within Nigeria's Guinea Savannah zone, characterized by well-defined wet and dry seasons. This research adopts a descriptive design to examine perceptions and assess formulated hypotheses. The target population consists of both academic and non-academic staff from selected higher education institutions in Mubi, Adamawa State. Given the finite nature of the population, the study determine the sample size using Yamane's formula for finite population correction. The study employed a convenience sampling technique to select the final participants for data collection. Primary data were exclusively utilized, gathered through a structured questionnaire. Prior to its deployment, the research instrument has undergone rigorous validation, including face and content validity assessments conducted by a panel of subject-matter experts. Additionally, the collected survey data were analysed using SPSS version 27, supplemented by Hayes' Process Macro for SPSS to facilitate advanced statistical testing.

Model Specification

The study used empirical models to test the mediating role of employee engagement on the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance among academic and administrative employees in Higher Educational Institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The linear regression model is stated as follows:

$ORGC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EPER + \varepsilon'$……. (3.1)

$ORGC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EPEG + \varepsilon'$ ……...…… (3.2)

$EPEG = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EPER + \varepsilon'$ ……..…… …. …..…… (3.3)

$ORGC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EPEG + \beta_2 EPER + \varepsilon$…….....(3.4)

Where:

β_0 = constant.

B_1 , β_2 , = Regression Coefficients.

EPER = Employee Performance.

ORGC = Organisational Culture.

EPEG = Employee Engagement.

ε' = Error term.

Data Analysis

This study used the partial least square technique and the analysis was based on the 290 copies of questionnaire retrieved from the respondents in Adamawa State University and

Federal Polytechnic Mubi. The result of the Hayes Process Macro 4.2 is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Model Summary of the Mediation of Employee Engagement (EPEG) on the Relationship between Organizational Culture (ORGC) and Employee Performance (EPER)

Model I Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.8782	0.7712	0.0392	970.7892	1.0000	288.0000	0.0000
Model	**coeff**	**se**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
constant	0.8114	0.1037	7.8241	0.00000	0.6073	1.0155
ORGC	0.8212	0.0264	31.1575	0.00000	0.7693	0.8731

Model II Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.9936	0.9873	0.0028	11141.5	2.00000	287.00000	0.00000
Model	**coeff**	**se**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
constant	0.1620	0.0306	5.2897	0.0000	-0.2223	-0.1017
ORGC	0.2432	0.0148	16.4539	0.0000	-0.2723	-0.2141
EPEG	1.3501	0.0158	85.4159	0.0000	1.3190	1.3812

Standardized coefficients

Model III Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.8149	0.6640	0.0744	569.2156	1.0000	288.0000	0.0000
Model	**Coeff**	**se**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
constant	0.9334	0.1427	6.5394	0.0000	0.6525	1.2144
ORGC	0.8655	0.0363	23.8582	0.0000	0.7941	0.9369

Model IV Summary

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
0.8655	0.0363	23.8582	0.0000	0.7941	0.9369	0.8149

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs
0.2432	0.0148	-16.4539	0.0000	-0.2723	-0.2141	-0.2290

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
EPEG	1.1087	0.0314	1.0447	1.1713

Completely standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
EPEG	1.0439	0.0242	0.9953	1.0892

Source: result computed using Haye's Process Macro

Table 1 shows the analysis of the Mediating Role of Employee Engagement (EPEG) in the Relationship between Organizational Culture (ORGC) and Employee Performance (EPER) that was examined using Hayes' PROCESS Macro. The analysis followed the standard mediation procedure by estimating the total effect of organizational culture on employee performance, the direct effect of organizational culture on employee performance after accounting for employee engagement, and the indirect effect transmitted through employee engagement. The total effect of organizational culture on employee performance was examined in Model III and Model IV, which indicate that organizational culture exerted a strong, positive, and statistically significant total effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.8655$, SE = 0.0363, t = 23.8582, $p < .001$). The 95% confidence interval did not include zero (LLCI = 0.7941, ULCI = 0.9369), confirming the stability of the effect while the model explained 66.4% of the variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.6640$), suggesting that organizational culture is a influential determinant of performance outcomes among academic and administrative staff. This finding implies that institutions characterized by shared values, clear mission orientation, and supportive norms are more likely to experience higher levels of employee performance.

The analysis further revealed that organizational culture significantly predicted employee engagement. In Model I, organizational culture demonstrated a strong positive effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.8212$, SE = 0.0264, t = 31.1575, $p < .001$), with the confidence interval excluding zero (LLCI = 0.7693, ULCI = 0.8731). The model exhibited a high explanatory power, accounting for 77.1% of the variance in employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.7712$). This result indicates that organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping employees' psychological connection to their work, reinforcing the notion that a supportive and well-aligned institutional culture fosters higher levels of vigour, dedication, and absorption among employees. When both organizational culture and employee engagement were entered simultaneously into the regression model predicting employee performance (Model II), employee engagement emerged as a highly significant predictor of employee performance ($\beta = 1.3501$, SE = 0.0158, t = 85.4159, $p < .001$), with a narrow confidence interval (LLCI = 1.3190, ULCI = 1.3812). This model explained an exceptionally large proportion of variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.9873$), highlighting the central role of engagement in translating organizational inputs into performance outcomes. Remarkably, the direct effect of organizational culture on employee performance, after controlling for employee engagement, remained statistically significant but was substantially reduced in magnitude ($\beta = 0.2432$, SE = 0.0148, t = −16.4539, $p < .001$). This reduction from the total effect ($\beta = 0.8655$) to the direct effect ($\beta = 0.2432$) indicates that a

considerable portion of the influence of organizational culture on employee performance operates through employee engagement.

The indirect effect of organizational culture on employee performance through employee engagement was found to be statistically significant, as evidenced by the bootstrapped confidence intervals. The indirect effect estimate was 1.1087 (BootSE = 0.0314), with a 95% bootstrapped confidence interval ranging from 1.0447 to 1.1713. Because the confidence interval does not include zero, the indirect effect is statistically significant. Similarly, the completely standardized indirect effect was significant (effect = 1.0439, BootSE = 0.0242, BootLLCI = 0.9953, BootULCI = 1.0892), confirming the robustness of the mediation effect. Taken together, these findings provide strong empirical support for partial mediation, indicating that while organizational culture directly influences employee performance, a substantial portion of this influence is transmitted indirectly through employee engagement. This suggests that organizational culture enhances employee performance primarily by fostering higher levels of psychological and behavioural engagement among employees.

Discussion

This study set out to examine the mechanisms through which Organizational Culture (ORGC) influences Employee Performance (EPER) in higher educational institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria, particularly through the mediating role of Employee Engagement (EPEG). The findings demonstrated that organizational culture exerts a positive and significant total effect on employee performance, that culture significantly predicts employee engagement, and that this engagement significantly predicts performance outcomes. The direct effect of culture on performance diminished substantially when engagement was included in the model, and the indirect (mediated) effect of engagement was statistically robust, indicating partial mediation. This pattern accords with theoretical expectations from the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, while also extending empirical evidence in organizational behaviour and higher education research.

First, the strong positive total effect of organizational culture on employee performance aligns with a broad literature emphasizing culture as a systemic driver of organizational outcomes. Qomari and Yuliantini (2024) found that strong organizational culture enhances employee performance in Indonesian organizations by shaping motivation and work behaviours, while Aggarwal (2024) showed that cultural dimensions like mission clarity and adaptability positively affect performance outcomes, mediated by perceived organizational support. These findings echo early conceptualizations that culture embodies shared meaning systems that orient employee behaviours toward institutional goals (Schein, 2010), reinforcing the view that organizational culture is not a static backdrop but an active determinant of employee effectiveness.

Second, the present study's finding that organizational culture significantly predicts

employee engagement corroborates and extends existing scholarship. Ismail et al. (2024) reported that culture positively affects engagement in higher education settings, particularly when norms of collaboration and inclusivity are salient. Similarly, research in the banking context has shown that workplace conditions associated with supportive culture increase engagement, which then fosters performance (Opoku et al., 2023). These patterns align with the JD-R model, which posits that job resources including cultural support, autonomy, and feedback buffer job demands, thereby fostering engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Engagement, conceptualized as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind characterized by energy, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2002), thus functions as a key psychological resource that employees draw upon when their work environment signals value and support.

Furthermore, this study's observation that the direct effect of culture on performance diminishes when accounting for engagement supports the argument that engagement mediates culture's impact on performance. This is consistent with multiple empirical studies demonstrating that cultural effects on performance are often realized through internal psychological mechanisms. A study in African contexts found that engagement mediates the effect of HR practices on performance in service sectors, highlighting engagement's role as a conduit for organizational influences (Anitha, 2014; Rich et al., 2010). Similarly, in Ethiopian educational institutions, engagement was shown to act as a pivotal link between strategic alignment (a proxy for cultural clarity) and performance (Anitha, 2014; Song, 2025). These studies echo the present results and emphasize that culture alone is not sufficient to drive performance unless employees are psychologically and behaviourally engaged with their work.

From a Social Exchange Theory (SET) perspective, these results are theoretically sensible. SET posits that employees engage in reciprocal exchanges where positive organizational provisions (supportive culture) elicit positive employee responses (e.g., engagement and performance) as forms of reciprocation (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When organizational culture signals fairness, respect, and shared purpose, employees may feel obliged to reciprocate with higher engagement and discretionary effort, leading to enhanced performance outcomes. Such reciprocity logic extends SET beyond direct exchanges with supervisors to encompass broader cultural features that shape the context of social interactions and expectations within institutions.

The findings also enrich the JD-R model by demonstrating how cultural resources may activate engagement as a central psychological mechanism. In the JD-R model, job resources not only reduce strain but also stimulate motivation and provide meaning in work, enhancing engagement and, consequently, performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The current results illustrate this dynamic: organizational culture provided psychological resources that facilitated engagement, which in turn explained a significant portion of performance variation. This underscores the importance of understanding culture not merely as a structural feature but as a set of motivational resources that can buffer demands

and enhance employee investment in work tasks.

However, there are points of divergence that merit attention. While many studies such as Qomari (2024) and Ismail et al. (2024) found similar mediating roles for engagement, some research in non-education sectors has shown that other psychological mechanisms like perceived organizational support or job satisfaction can also mediate or moderate culture–performance linkages (Albrecht et al., 2015; Saks, 2019). Aggarwal (2024) highlighted that employee motivation, distinct from engagement per se, sometimes exhibits stronger mediation effects depending on the dimension of culture examined. These nuances suggest that while engagement is a robust mediator, the specific pathways through which culture affects performance may vary depending on contextual factors, measurement approaches, and sectoral dynamics.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance within higher educational institutions in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to assess the direct effect of organizational culture on employee performance, examine the influence of organizational culture on employee engagement, and determine whether employee engagement serves as a mediating mechanism through which organizational culture translates into improved performance. Addressing these objectives responds to persistent concerns about employee effectiveness in Nigerian higher education and the limited empirical attention given to psychological mechanisms underpinning performance in this context.

The findings provide clear and compelling evidence that organizational culture is a significant predictor of employee performance because Institutions that are characterized by supportive values, shared norms, and mission alignment tend to record higher levels of performance among academic and administrative staff. More importantly, the results demonstrate that organizational culture also exerts a strong positive influence on employee engagement, confirming that cultural environments shape how employees emotionally and cognitively connect with their work. When employee engagement was introduced into the model, its effect on performance was substantial, while the direct effect of organizational culture on performance declined noticeably. The significant indirect effect confirms that employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between organizational culture and employee performance. In essence, culture enhances performance not only directly but, more critically, by fostering higher levels of employee engagement.

Theoretically, these findings advance understanding in organizational behaviour by reinforcing and extending both Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model. From an SET perspective, the results affirm that employees reciprocate supportive and value-driven organizational cultures with greater engagement and performance-enhancing behaviours. From the JD- R standpoint, organizational culture

operates as a key job resource that energizes employees, sustain dedication, and enables absorption in work tasks, thereby driving performance outcomes. By empirically validating employee engagement as a mediating mechanism, this study strengthens integrative theoretical models that link organizational context, psychological states, and performance outcomes, particularly within higher education settings in developing economies. Beyond theory, the findings open important directions for future research since scholars are encouraged to explore additional mediators and moderators such as leadership style, perceived organizational support, psychological safety, or job satisfaction that may further explain or condition the culture– performance relationship. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable in capturing how organizational culture and engagement evolve over time and how changes in these constructs influence performance trajectories. Comparative studies across regions, institutional types, or national contexts could also deepen understanding of how contextual factors shape these relationships.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations that warrant consideration. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and future studies could employ longitudinal or experimental approaches to strengthen causal claims. The reliance on self-reported data raises the possibility of common method bias, suggesting the need for multi-source data, including supervisor ratings or objective performance indicators. Additionally, the focus on higher educational institutions in Adamawa State may limit generalizability, highlighting the importance of replication in other educational and organizational contexts. In conclusion, this study advances knowledge by demonstrating that employee engagement is a critical mechanism through which organizational culture influences employee performance in higher education. By foregrounding the psychological processes that connect cultural environments to performance outcomes, the research offers a more nuanced and actionable understanding of how institutions can foster high-performing academic workplaces. In doing so, it contributes meaningfully to theory, informs practice, and lays a solid foundation for future inquiry into the dynamics of organizational culture, engagement, and performance.

Despite the contributions, several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal or experimental designs would better clarify the directional pathways among culture, engagement, and performance. Second, reliance on self-reported data raises concerns about common method variance, which might inflate observed relationships. Future research could integrate objective performance data or multi-source reporting (e.g., supervisor ratings) to strengthen validity. Third, while this study focused on higher education in Adamawa State, contextual factors such as socio-economic conditions, institutional policies, and labour market dynamics may shape cultural interpretations and engagement differently than in other regions. Comparative studies across states or countries would enhance generalizability.

Building on these findings, future research should explore additional mediators and moderators like; perceived organizational support, trust, and psychological safety may help

explain culture's influence on engagement and performance beyond what engagement alone captures. Moreover, studies could examine the role of leadership styles (e.g., transformational or inclusive leadership) as moderators that strengthen or weaken the culture–engagement–performance chain, given their significance in shaping cultural interpretations and employee experiences. Finally, longitudinal designs could clarify how culture and engagement evolve over time and how shifts in cultural practices influence performance trajectories.

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