

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A TALENT MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study focused on reimagining artificial intelligence as a talent management tool for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State. Three research questions and three hypotheses were answered and tested in the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design while the population of the study consisted of all the 138 Heads of Departments in the three public Universities in Rivers State out of which all the 138 lecturers were sampled for the study using purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for data gathering was a 15 item questionnaire named “Reimagining Artificial Intelligence as a Talent Management Tool for Enhanced Service Delivery and Global Competitiveness Questionnaire” (RAITMTESDGCQ) which was face and content validated by three experts in Educational Management at University of Port Harcourt while the reliability was estimated as 0.88 using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Out of the 138 copies of questionnaire administered, 107 copies from 81 males and 26 females which represented 78.0% were retrieved and used for analysis. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the study indicated that the most talent management function was screening of applicant’s CV which had a low mean score of 2.43. Similarly, prediction of staff turnover risks also had a low mean value as well as succession planning. This indicated a low level of adoption of AI for talent management in these institutions. The only function that showed a high level of application was organizing development programmes for staff. The highest perceived relevance of AI in talent management was for accuracy in the staff hiring process and simplifying staff data management process. The most pressing challenge in the use of this technology was identified as inadequate expertise in the use of AI and the high cost of AI-enabled tools and resources among others. The study recommended that University administrators need to be trained on the talent management functions of AI and this knowledge should be passed down to other staff for effective service delivery in the Universities.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Talent Management, Service Delivery, Global Competitiveness, Universities

Introduction

The contemporary management of human capital has become a strategic focal point for organizations globally, especially as they strive for enhanced institutional performance and global competitiveness (Zhang & Chen, 2024). This strategic imperative extends deeply into the academic environment, where Universities must effectively manage their staff mix which is their most vital asset, in order to ensure quality education and research outputs. This understanding has propelled a significant shift in Human Resource Management (HRM). The function of management people in any organization is rapidly transforming into intelligent talent management with the critical assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Talent Management (TM), in the modern sense, is enhanced by leveraging AI techniques and tools to optimize various aspects of the employee lifecycle, encompassing everything from recruitment and selection to employee development and engagement (Khan, 2024). This new tool has been significant in achieving organizational efficiency and goal attainment.

AI is a broad term that incorporates sophisticated technologies like machine learning, Natural Language Processing (NLP), robotics, and expert systems. The primary goal of these technologies in an organizational setting is to enhance automation, efficiency, and data-driven insights (Russell & Norvig, 2021). AI possesses the potential to improve talent management strategies by implementing advanced automated systems for workforce management (Faqihi & Miah, 2023). Formal organizations therefore are better positioned to manage their staff activities in a manner that contributes to organizational goals and objectives.

Across different organizations, there are different types of AI tools that are being utilized within the talent management cycle. AI applications are generally adopted for their ability to enhance efficiency and effectiveness within organizations (Adeyemo *et al.*, 2022) and the use of these technologies depend on the type of activities carried out by an organization. Current AI applications in talent management are concentrated in areas amenable to automation and large-scale data processing. However, there are other ways in which this technology is also used in the talent management process in any organization. One of the major areas where AI is influencing talent management in organizations is in the area of talent recruitment and selection. This is arguably the most common entry point for AI into the HR process. AI-driven recruitment tools can automate candidate screening, significantly reducing time-to-hire and improving the quality of hires through data-driven insights (Davenport *et al.*, 2020; Adeyemo *et al.*, 2022). In a related manner, AI can objectively evaluate candidate qualifications, which is particularly relevant in the University context where traditional methods are often time-consuming and prone to human prejudice, leading to suboptimal hiring outcomes (Obikeze & Onwe, 2022). This is one area of staff management in the University administration process that can benefit from the use of AI.

In a similar dimension, AI facilitates automated onboarding processes by streamlining tasks like document exchange and account setup, enabling new employees to integrate faster into the organization (Adeyemo *et al.*, 2022). This means that AI provides a platform for new staff to get along with the organization, especially where all the activities of the organization are

technology driven. Additionally, AI employs predictive analytics for employee performance and skill gap identification. Universities can utilize these insights to create focused and personalized staff development programs that address specific areas for improvement, moving away from generic training (Obikeze & Onwe, 2022). This means that the strength and weakness of each staff can be easily determined and corrected where necessary.

However, the adoption of AI is often contingent on user acceptance and perceived utility. Technologies that are viewed as user-friendly, efficient, and aligned with current HR processes such as tools for automating recruitment, managing employee records, or evaluating performance are more likely to be accepted by professionals (Nawaz et al., 2024), especially those who are into personnel management activities. In the context of the University, the level of application will likely correlate with the institution's technological infrastructure, available budget, and the technical literacy of its personnel management department. Studies abound in Nigeria that points to the integration of AI in recruitment and selection as a crucial step for tackling longstanding issues that have hindered the hiring process and for boosting institutional performance (Obikeze & Onwe, 2022). This must be addressed in order to put Nigerian Universities on the global landscape of excellence.

The basic relevance of AI's capacity is in its ability to transform efficiency into strategic benefits for an organization. by automating screening and evaluating candidates based on objective, established criteria, AI mitigates the subjective considerations and human prejudice that can lead to flawed or contestable hiring process (Obikeze & Onwe, 2022). This ensures that the organization attract and retain the most qualified personnel whether they are academic or administrative staff which is essential for upholding educational standards and improving overall service quality.

Similarly, AI generates personalized suggestions for on-the-job training, development opportunities, and even internal roles tailored to an employee's skills and aspirations (Beamery, 2025). This personalized learning experience not only enhances employee satisfaction and retention but also ensures that staff possess the most relevant skills to deliver high-quality services. Automating routine and repetitive tasks such as resume screening, interview scheduling, and data management can free up recruiters and managers to focus on more strategic activities, such as direct engagement with high-potential prospects and aligning the talent management process with the university's long-term educational goals in sight (Obikeze & Onwe, 2022). This strategic focus leads to better talent outcomes and more impactful service delivery that aligns with the goals and objectives of the University.

AI allows HR leaders to make better decisions faster by generating deeper talent insights (Beamery, 2025). Predictive analytics can forecast future trends, such as potential employee turnover or skills gaps, allowing employers and administrators to proactively address challenges and optimize talent management strategies to stay ahead of the curve (Vedapradha et al., 2024). This capability is crucial for building the dynamic, high-performing workforce necessary to compete globally. In the same manner, the efficiency gained by AI enables a shift from transactional to strategic personnel management. AI-driven insights ensure that the

recruitment and development processes are closely aligned with the university's goals and objectives, directly enhancing institutional performance and making the institution more attractive on the global stage (Obikeze & Onwe, 2022). This is important to keep Nigerian Universities on the global stage.

However, achieving this feat does not come without challenges. Khan (2024) systematically outlined several significant challenges that exists in the use of AI for talent management and one of this is related to the issue of data privacy. AI is only as good as the data they are trained on and this means that poor data quality leads to inaccurate insights and poor decisions. Similarly, AI systems handle vast volumes of sensitive employee data and data privacy and security concerns become paramount, requiring robust measures to ensure compliance with data protection regulations (Khan, 2024; Abdeldayem, 2020). This is one of the reasons why its adoption has been slow even within the University system.

A major concern also involves ethical considerations related to biases in AI systems. If the data used for training is historically biased, the AI will perpetuate and even amplify that bias in recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion decisions. The potential lack of human judgment in complex decisions further compounds this risk (Khan, 2024). Similarly, there can be labor reluctance to AI, and employees and other experts may harbor a lack of confidence in AI decision-making (Varghese, 2023). The fear of AI leading to job displacement or a depersonalized workplace often hinders its smooth adoption. Overcoming this requires building trust and ensuring the AI systems are transparent in their decision criteria (Avature, 2025). This is important in promoting acceptability.

The successful implementation of AI necessitates a skilled and adaptable workforce that can manage, maintain, and correctly interpret AI systems (Khan, 2024). Unfortunately, challenges often stem from limited skills, privacy concerns, and weak infrastructure (Phillips Consulting, 2025). There is often a significant skill gap among professionals, who must be retrained to work alongside and leverage AI effectively (Abdeldayem, 2020). The economic factors, such as the cost of technology and implementation, along with the difficulty of integrating new AI systems with older systems, present significant financial and technological barriers for Universities (Tuffaha, 2023), and this has remained insurmountable as a result of budgetary constraints.

Empirically, Ahmad *et al.*, (2024) conducted analytics on future talent development in middle eastern public Universities. The study utilized a survey-based methodology, collecting data from 356 randomly selected respondents at public universities in the region. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via Smart PLS 4.0.4 and SPSS 29. The results indicated that employee perceptions of AI-driven HR analytics influence the development of talent and act as a mediating variable between these aspects. Specifically, constructs with high potential impact, such as predictive analytics and employee monitoring, demonstrated moderate power in explaining the role of big data in talent development. The study emphasizes the strategic need for integrating AI technologies through change management to develop a future-oriented workforce.

The study by Mwita and Kitole (2025) explored the potential benefits and challenges of artificial intelligence in human resource management in public institutions. Using a cross-sectional research design, the study collected data via questionnaires from a sample of 217 HR practitioners in Tanzanian public institutions through random sampling. The analysis used a descriptive approach to assess understanding, benefits, challenges, and risks. The findings showed that the top perceived benefits of AI in HRM are increased efficiency, better decision-making, and cost reduction, though utilization is hindered by lack of expertise, data privacy concerns, high costs, and resistance to change. While AI was seen to enhance recruitment and training, concerns over bias, transparency, and emotional intelligence limitations persist, particularly in high-risk areas like HRIS and Recruitment ($p < 0.05$).

On the other hand, Johansson and Herranen (2019) investigated the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in human resource management focusing on current state of AI and its impact on the traditional recruitment process. This thesis used a qualitative study employing semi-structured interviews conducted with eight international companies, viewing the subject through an interpretivism research philosophy with an inductive approach. The findings revealed that AI in recruitment is a relatively new area, with few companies utilizing it across the entire process. The most suitable applications were found to be routine recruitment activities such as pre-selection, communication with candidates, and sending out recruitment results. The main benefits were identified as speed and elimination of routine tasks, while the major challenge was the companies' overall readiness towards new technologies.

Similarly, Nwambuko (2025) examined Artificial Intelligence and human resource management practices focusing on the Nigerian experience. The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, collecting data from a sample of 400 HR professionals across public and private sectors via a structured questionnaire. The analysis showed that AI adoption is at a moderate level, with private and larger organizations utilizing it more highly than smaller and public sector institutions. Respondents strongly agreed that AI enhances efficiency, accuracy, and fairness in HR decision-making and recruitment (mean scores > 3.5). However, AI's role in improving employee engagement and satisfaction was viewed less favorably. Significant barriers identified include high costs, lack of technical expertise, data privacy/security concerns, algorithmic bias, and insufficient legal/ethical frameworks. These studies point to the fact that under proper regulations, AI holds a lot of potential for Universities talent management activities.

Based on the above, the aim of the study was to reimagine artificial intelligence as a talent management tool for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- find out the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State
- determine the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

- examine the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

The following research questions were then formulated to guide the study:

- What is the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State?
- What is the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State?
- What are the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State?

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State
3. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design as it focused on investigating a phenomenon that is currently ongoing. The population of the study consisted of all the 138 Heads of Departments in the three public Universities in Rivers State out of which the 138 Heads of Departments were sampled for the study using purposive sampling technique. The sample size was determined by taking 10% of the study population for ease of administration. The respondents were drawn using simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data gathering was a 15 item questionnaire named “Reimagining Artificial Intelligence as a Talent Management Tool for Enhanced Service Delivery and Global Competitiveness Questionnaire” (RAITMTESDGCQ). The questionnaire had two sections which were A and B for the collection of demographic data of the respondents and the second section contained the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was responded to using the four-point modified Likert scale format of Strongly Agree (SA) having a score of 4, Agree (A) having a score of 3, Disagree (D), having a score of 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) having a score of 1. These scores were summed up and the average was 2.50 which was the criterion mean score used for decision making. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three experts in Educational Management at University of Port Harcourt while the reliability was estimated as 0.88 using Cronbach Alpha statistics. Out of the 138 copies of questionnaire administered, 107 copies from 81 males and 26 females which represented 78.0% were retrieved and used for analysis.

The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Answer to Research Questions

RQ1: What is the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores on the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male n=81		Female n=26		Mean Set	
		Mean	\bar{X}_1 SD	Mean	\bar{X}_2 SD	X \bar{X}	Decision
1	Screening of applicants CV for filling available vacancies	2.44	0.89	2.42	0.82	2.43	Low Level
2	Prediction of staff turnover risks	2.40	0.92	2.45	0.81	2.43	Low Level
3	Organizing development programmes for staff	2.66	0.88	2.62	0.76	2.64	High Level
4	Analyzing of staff performance on the job	2.37	0.94	2.40	0.83	2.39	Low Level
5	Succession planning of personnel related matters	2.33	0.95	2.41	0.82	2.37	Low Level
	Average	2.44	0.92	2.46	0.81	2.45	Low Level

Table 1 showed that the overall level of AI application in talent management within public Universities in Rivers State was considered to be at a low level, with an average mean score of 2.45 which was below the criterion mean score used for making decision. Most functions, including the screening of applicant's CV had a low mean score of 2.43, prediction of staff turnover risks also had a low mean value of 2.43 as well as succession planning having a low mean score of 2.37, which were all rated to a low level. The only function showing a high level of application is organizing development programmes for staff with a score of 2.64, indicating AI is minimally integrated, primarily focused on staff development rather than core recruitment or performance analysis.

RQ2: What is the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores on the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male n=81		Female n=26		Mean Set	
		Mean	\bar{X}_1 SD	Mean	\bar{X}_2 SD	X \bar{X}	Decision
6	Accuracy in the staff hiring process	2.95	0.66	2.92	0.64	2.94	Agree
7	AI is useful in streamlining the talent acquisition process	2.77	0.72	2.74	0.78	2.76	Agree
8	Enhancement of institutional reputation	2.81	0.70	2.78	0.77	2.80	Agree
9	It is useful in attracting high potential employees	2.97	0.65	2.89	0.68	2.93	Agree
10	Simplifies staff data management process	2.92	0.67	2.94	0.67	2.93	Agree
	Average	2.88	0.68	2.85	0.71	2.87	Agree

Table 2 indicated that the lecturers agree that AI is highly relevant to the talent management process, scoring a strong overall average mean of 2.87. The highest perceived relevance is for accuracy in the staff hiring process with a score of 2.94 and simplifying staff data management process with a score of 2.93, which ties with its usefulness in attracting high potential employees with a score of 2.93. Even the lowest scoring item, AI is useful in streamlining the talent acquisition process had a good mean score of 2.76 which is rated as Agree, suggesting a comprehensive recognition of AI's benefits across various talent functions.

RQ3: What are the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation scores on the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male n=81		Female n=26		Mean Set	
		Mean	\bar{X}_1 SD	Mean	\bar{X}_2 SD	X \bar{X}	Decision

11	Inadequate expertise in the use of AI	2.82	0.94	2.95	0.86	2.89	Agree
12	High cost of AI-enabled tools and resources	2.85	0.93	2.92	0.89	2.89	Agree
13	Resistance to change from manual to automated talent management process	2.47	0.91	2.40	0.94	2.44	Disagree
14	Data privacy concerns among users of AI	2.78	0.95	2.89	0.90	2.84	Agree
15	Inadequate policy support to encourage institutional use of AI	2.80	0.95	2.93	0.87	2.87	Agree
Average		2.74	0.94	2.82	0.89	2.78	Agree

Table 3 established that the lecturers generally agree that significant challenges exist in using AI for talent management, with an overall average mean score of 2.78. The most pressing challenges identified are inadequate expertise in the use of AI with a score of 2.89 and the high cost of AI-enabled tools and resources with a mean value of 2.89 which was followed by inadequate policy support 2.87 and data privacy concerns with a score of 2.84. Notably, lecturers disagree that resistance to change from manual to automated processes with a score of 2.44 was a major challenge.

Test of Hypotheses

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State

Table 4: z-test analysis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	81	2.44	0.92	105	0.09	1.96	0.05	Fail to Reject
Female	26	2.46	0.81					

Table 4 indicated that while the value of z-cal. was 0.09, the value of z-crit. was 1.96 and as such, the decision was to fail to reject the null hypothesis and this implied that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the level of AI application in talent management in public Universities in Rivers State.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

Table 5: z-test analysis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	81	2.88	0.68	105	0.23	1.96	0.05	Fail to Reject
Female	26	2.85	0.71					

Table 5 showed that while the value of z-cal. was 0.23, the value of z-crit. was 1.96 and as such, the decision was to fail to reject the null hypothesis and this implied that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the relevance of AI to the talent management process for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State.

HO₃: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

Table 6: z-test analysis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Male	81	2.74	0.94	105	0.37	1.96	0.05	Fail to Reject
Female	26	2.82	0.89					

Table 6 revealed that while the value of z-cal. was 0.37, the value of z-crit. was 1.96 and as such, the decision was to fail to reject the null hypothesis and this implied that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female academics on the challenges of using AI for talent management for enhanced service delivery and global competitiveness in public Universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The responses from the respondents indicated that the overall level of AI application in talent management within public Universities is considered to be at a low level. The finding showed that most core talent management functions, including the screening of applicant's CV, prediction of staff turnover risks, and succession planning, were all rated to a low level. Conversely, the empirical information revealed that the only function showing a high level of application is organizing development programmes for staff, suggesting that AI is minimally integrated, primarily focused on staff development rather than core recruitment or performance analysis. This finding aligns with the empirical information from Johansson and Herranen (2019), who revealed that AI in recruitment is a relatively new area, with few organizations utilizing it across the entire talent management process. They found the most suitable applications were for routine recruitment activities such as pre-selection and communication, which somewhat supports the limited, low-level applications seen in this study.

The findings from the study established a strong positive perception, as lecturers agree that AI is highly relevant to the talent management process. The finding showed that the highest perceived relevance is for accuracy in the staff hiring process and simplifying staff data management process, which ties with its usefulness in attracting high potential employees. Even the lowest scoring item, AI is useful in streamlining the talent acquisition process, was still rated as Agree, suggesting a comprehensive recognition of AI's benefits across various talent functions. This high perceived relevance is strongly supported by external empirical evidence. The findings from the study of Nwambuko (2025) showed respondents strongly agreed that AI enhances efficiency, accuracy, and fairness in HR decision-making and recruitment. Similarly, the study by Mwita and Kitole (2025) found the top perceived benefits of AI in HRM are increased efficiency, better decision-making, and cost reduction. Furthermore, the empirical information from Ahmad et al., (2024) indicated that employee

perceptions of AI-driven HR analytics influence the development of talent and emphasizes the strategic need for integrating AI technologies.

Furthermore, the result from this study established that lecturers generally agree that significant challenges exist in using AI for talent management. The finding showed that the most pressing challenges identified are inadequate expertise in the use of AI and the high cost of AI-enabled tools and resources. This was closely followed by inadequate policy support and data privacy concerns. Conversely, the empirical information revealed that lecturers disagree that resistance to change from manual to automated processes was a major challenge. These findings are overwhelmingly supported by other studies. Both Nwambuko (2025) and Mwita and Kitole (2025) strongly support the primary barriers, listing high costs, lack of technical expertise, and data privacy/security concerns as significant hurdles. Additionally, Nwambuko (2025) further supported the need for governance by identifying insufficient legal/ethical frameworks. Similarly, the findings from Johansson and Herranen (2019) somewhat negates the current finding on resistance, as they cited the organizations' overall readiness towards new technologies as a major challenge which was not what this study found out.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the adoption of AI for talent management activities remains low, despite the fact that it has a lot of benefits that it can offer to the talent management process and this can be attributed to several challenges which the respondents identified such as inadequate expertise and high cost of using AI among other challenges. These barriers must be dealt with, before these institutions can optimize the talent management capabilities of AI.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in line with the findings of the study:

1. University administrators need to be trained on the talent management functions of AI and this knowledge should be passed down to other staff for effective service delivery in the Universities.
2. Personnel management functions of the Universities should be digitalized in order to maximize the talent management capabilities of AI in the Universities.
3. Universities should institutionalize an AI policy that will guide the management of academic and staff related activities for the attainment of the goals and objectives of University education.

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