

The Impact Of Employee Training Programs And Leadership Support On Job Performance: Mediating Role Of Employee Motivation

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the relationship between employee training programs, leadership support, and job performance, with employee motivation as a mediating variable. Specifically, the study investigated how training programs and leadership support influence job performance directly and indirectly through employee motivation. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The population comprised employees of small and medium-scale enterprises in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, from which a sample size of 256 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that employee training programs (Mean = 3.62) and leadership support (Mean = 3.58) were at high levels, while employee motivation (Mean = 3.48) and job performance (Mean = 3.52) were moderate to high. Correlation analysis showed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between training programs and job performance ($r = 0.674, p < 0.05$), and between leadership support and job performance ($r = 0.712, p < 0.05$). Mediation analysis indicated that employee motivation partially mediated both relationships, accounting for 34% of the training-performance effect and 41% of the leadership support-performance effect. The study concludes that well-designed training programs and supportive leadership significantly enhance job performance, both directly and through their positive influence on employee motivation. It recommends that organizations should invest in comprehensive training initiatives, develop people-oriented leadership capabilities, and implement motivation-enhancing practices to optimize workforce performance.*

Keywords: Employee training, leadership support, job performance, employee motivation, mediation, SMEs

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In contemporary organizational environments characterized by rapid technological change, intensified competition, and evolving workforce expectations, understanding the factors that drive employee job performance has become a critical priority for business success and sustainability. Organizations worldwide recognize that their human capital represents a primary source of competitive advantage, and that investing in employee development and effective leadership yields substantial returns in productivity, innovation, and organizational effectiveness (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2020). In Nigeria, small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) constitute the backbone of economic activity, contributing significantly to employment generation, poverty reduction, and GDP growth. However, the job performance of employees within these enterprises remains a topic of concern due to various challenges, including inadequate training opportunities, weak leadership practices, and low employee motivation. This study focuses on employees of firms operating in Oshimili South Local Government Area (LGA) of Delta State, Nigeria, to explore the relationships among training programs, leadership support, motivation, and job performance.

Employee training programs refer to systematic efforts designed to enhance employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to their job functions and organizational objectives. Training encompasses both technical skill development and soft skills enhancement, including communication, problem-solving, and teamwork capabilities (Noe, 2020). Contemporary research demonstrates that effective training programs not only improve task performance but also increase employee confidence, adaptability, and engagement. As organizations face disruptive technologies and changing market demands, continuous workforce development through structured training initiatives becomes essential for maintaining competitive positioning and operational excellence.

Leadership support represents another crucial determinant of employee performance. Supportive leadership involves behaviors through which managers provide guidance, resources, encouragement, and recognition to their team members. Leaders who demonstrate genuine interest in employee development, create psychological safety, and model positive work behaviors significantly influence their subordinates' motivation and performance outcomes. Recent evidence suggests that the quality of leader-member exchange and the extent to which employees perceive their leaders as supportive directly shape their willingness to exert effort and commitment to organizational goals.

Employee motivation, defined as the psychological forces that determine the direction, intensity, and persistence of effort expended by individuals toward work-related goals, serves as a critical mechanism through which training and leadership influence performance. Motivated employees demonstrate higher energy, engagement, and commitment to their tasks, resulting in superior

performance outcomes. Motivation theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, derived from the inherent satisfaction of work itself, and extrinsic motivation, stemming from external rewards and recognition (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Both forms of motivation are shaped by organizational practices, including training opportunities and leadership behaviors.

The mediating role of motivation in the training-performance and leadership-performance relationships has attracted increasing research attention. Theoretical frameworks suggest that training programs enhance motivation by building competence and self-efficacy, while supportive leadership fosters motivation through recognition, trust, and empowerment. When employees feel competent and valued, their motivation increases, leading to improved performance. Understanding this mediation mechanism is essential for designing effective human resource interventions that optimize workforce outcomes.

In the context of Oshimili South Local Government, which encompasses major commercial areas including Asaba, the state capital, employees operate within a dynamic business environment characterized by both opportunities and challenges. The strategic location of this LGA as a commercial hub attracts diverse businesses, creating competitive labor markets where employee performance significantly influences organizational success. Despite this commercial vibrancy, many firms struggle with employee productivity due to limited training investments, inconsistent leadership practices, and motivational deficits. Given these factors, understanding how training programs and leadership support affect job performance through employee motivation is crucial for improving organizational outcomes.

Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of training and leadership across various sectors. For instance, research by Salas et al. (2022) highlights that well-designed training programs can improve performance by 20-30% when aligned with organizational needs and delivered through effective methods. Similarly, studies by Inceoglu et al. (2021) indicate that supportive leadership predicts employee engagement and performance through enhanced motivation and job satisfaction. However, despite widespread recognition of these relationships, there is limited empirical research specifically addressing the mediating role of motivation within local government settings in Delta State. This gap in the literature provides a compelling reason to investigate how training programs and leadership support influence job performance through employee motivation among firms in Oshimili South LGA.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the recognized importance of employee training and leadership support in enhancing workforce performance, many organizations in Oshimili South Local Government Area continue to experience suboptimal employee productivity and effectiveness. Business owners and managers frequently report challenges such as low employee engagement, inadequate skill levels, poor work quality, and high turnover intentions, which threaten organizational sustainability and growth. These conditions often result from limited investment in employee development, inconsistent leadership practices, and insufficient attention to employee motivation. In a competitive commercial hub like Oshimili South LGA, where businesses compete for market share and customer loyalty, the inability to optimize workforce performance can lead to competitive disadvantage and business failure.

Although several empirical studies have examined training, leadership, and performance relationships in large corporations and developed economy contexts, there remains limited research focusing specifically on the mediating role of motivation within local business environments in Delta State. The unique characteristics of the local context, including cultural factors, resource constraints, and organizational structures, may produce different relationship patterns compared to those observed in other settings. Specifically, it remains unclear whether employee motivation serves as a mechanism through which training programs and leadership support translate into improved job performance, or whether these factors operate independently. Consequently, there is insufficient localized evidence to guide human resource interventions and management practices in this context. This gap in literature underscores the need for the present study to provide empirical insights that can inform strategic human resource decisions for firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the effect of employee training programs on the job performance of employees in firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area.
2. To assess the influence of leadership support on the job performance of employees in firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area.
3. To investigate the mediating role of employee motivation in the relationship between training programs and job performance.
4. To determine the mediating role of employee motivation in the relationship between leadership support and job performance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of employee training programs on the job performance of employees in firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area?
2. To what extent does leadership support influence the job performance of employees in firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area?
3. Does employee motivation mediate the relationship between training programs and job performance?
4. Does employee motivation mediate the relationship between leadership support and job performance?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H₀₁: Employee training programs have no significant effect on the job performance of employees in firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area.

H₀₂: Leadership support has no significant influence on the job performance of employees in firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area.

H₀₃: Employee motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between training programs and job performance.

H₀₄: Employee motivation does not significantly mediate the relationship between leadership support and job performance.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Employee Training Programs

Employee training programs refer to systematic organizational interventions designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies of employees to perform their job functions effectively. Training encompasses a wide range of activities, from onboarding new employees to developing technical expertise, improving soft skills, and preparing workers for advanced responsibilities. In contemporary human resource management literature, training is recognized as a strategic investment in human capital that yields returns through improved productivity, quality, innovation, and employee retention (Noe, 2020). Effective training programs are those aligned with organizational goals, tailored to learner needs, and delivered through methods that facilitate knowledge acquisition and skill application.

One critical dimension of training programs is needs assessment, which involves systematically identifying performance gaps and determining whether training is the appropriate solution. Needs assessment encompasses organizational analysis, task analysis, and person analysis to ensure that training investments address genuine performance deficiencies (Salas et al., 2022). Organizations that conduct thorough needs assessments before designing training interventions achieve higher transfer of learning to job contexts and better return on investment. This foundational step ensures that training resources are directed toward areas with the greatest potential performance impact.

Training design and delivery methods constitute another essential aspect of effective programs. Contemporary approaches recognize that adult learners benefit from active participation, relevant content, and opportunities for practice and feedback. Methods range from traditional instructor-led classroom training to e-learning, simulation-based training, on-the-job coaching, and blended approaches combining multiple modalities -6. Research indicates that training effectiveness depends on matching delivery methods to learning objectives and learner characteristics. Furthermore, incorporating opportunities for behavioral rehearsal and constructive feedback significantly enhances skill acquisition and retention.

Evaluation of training outcomes represents a third critical component of training programs. Kirkpatrick's four-level model remains influential, distinguishing between reaction, learning, behavior, and results criteria. Organizations that systematically evaluate training effectiveness can identify areas for improvement, demonstrate return on investment, and make evidence-based decisions about future training investments. Contemporary approaches emphasize the importance of transfer of training—the extent to which knowledge and skills learned in training are applied and maintained on the job. Factors influencing transfer include learner characteristics, training design, and work environment support (Blume et al., 2023).

Recent research has highlighted the role of digital transformation in reshaping training practices. Digital workforce training, encompassing e-learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and AI-powered personalized learning, has gained prominence as organizations seek flexible and scalable development solutions. Studies demonstrate that digital training can be as effective as traditional methods when designed with attention to learner engagement, interactivity, and practical application. However, the effectiveness of digital training depends on organizational infrastructure, learner digital literacy, and the nature of skills being developed.

The relationship between training and employee motivation has received increasing research attention. Training programs influence motivation through multiple mechanisms: they enhance self-efficacy by building competence, signal organizational investment in employees, and provide pathways for career advancement -2. When employees perceive training as relevant and valuable, their intrinsic motivation to apply learning and improve performance increases. Conversely, poorly designed or irrelevant training can diminish motivation by wasting time and creating frustration.

In summary, employee training programs encompass needs assessment, design and delivery, evaluation, and transfer support. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that well-designed training interventions significantly influence employee knowledge, skills, motivation, and ultimately job performance. Organizations that prioritize strategic training investments position themselves to achieve competitive advantage through enhanced workforce capabilities.

Leadership Support

Leadership support refers to the extent to which managers and supervisors provide guidance, resources, encouragement, recognition, and psychological safety to their subordinates. Supportive leadership is characterized by behaviors that demonstrate genuine concern for employee well-being, facilitate employee development, and create conditions for optimal performance. In contemporary organizational behavior research, leadership support is recognized as a fundamental determinant of employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance outcomes (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Leaders who exhibit supportive behaviors foster trust, commitment, and engagement among their team members.

One key dimension of leadership support is instrumental support, which involves providing employees with the resources, information, and assistance needed to perform their jobs effectively. This includes clarifying expectations, removing obstacles,

offering technical guidance, and ensuring access to necessary tools and materials. Research indicates that instrumental support directly enhances performance by enabling employees to execute tasks efficiently and overcome work-related challenges -4. Employees who perceive their leaders as helpful and resourceful report higher satisfaction and lower frustration.

Emotional support represents another critical aspect of leadership behavior. This involves demonstrating care, concern, and respect for employees as individuals, listening to their concerns, and showing appreciation for their contributions. Emotionally supportive leaders create psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and admitting mistakes without fear of negative consequences -3. Psychological safety has been linked to learning behavior, innovation, and team effectiveness. In contemporary volatile business environments, emotional support from leaders helps employees cope with uncertainty and maintain well-being.

Developmental support encompasses leadership behaviors aimed at enhancing employee capabilities and career growth. This includes providing coaching and mentoring, offering challenging assignments, supporting participation in training, and giving constructive feedback. Recent research emphasizes that middle managers play a crucial role as the "secret ingredient" in motivating employees to embrace training opportunities. Managers who model learning behaviors and show genuine interest in employee development significantly increase training participation and subsequent performance improvements.

Recognition and appreciation constitute a further dimension of leadership support. When leaders acknowledge employee contributions, celebrate achievements, and express gratitude, they reinforce desired behaviors and enhance motivation. Research demonstrates that recognition from supervisors is a powerful motivator that influences employee engagement and retention. Effective recognition is specific, timely, and sincere, connecting employee efforts to organizational goals and values.

Contemporary research has identified human-centered leadership as an emerging priority in organizational contexts. A 2026 report by the Centre for Organisational Effectiveness found that 72% of employees report their organizations experienced disruption, and that leaders play a crucial role in modeling behaviors that create safe environments where employees are empowered to collaborate and contribute their best work. The report emphasizes that engaged employees are 14% more productive and up to 50% less likely to leave, highlighting the tangible performance impact of supportive leadership.

The relationship between leadership support and employee motivation is well established in literature. Supportive leaders enhance motivation by satisfying basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as articulated in self-determination theory. When leaders provide choice, encouragement, and connection, employees internalize work motivation and demonstrate greater effort and persistence. Furthermore, supportive leadership builds trust, which increases employee willingness to exert discretionary effort beyond formal job requirements.

In conclusion, leadership support encompasses instrumental, emotional, developmental, and recognition behaviors that collectively shape employee experiences and outcomes. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that supportive leadership significantly influences employee motivation, engagement, and performance. Organizations that develop supportive leadership capabilities position themselves to optimize workforce potential and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Employee Motivation

Employee motivation refers to the psychological forces that determine the direction, intensity, and persistence of effort expended by individuals toward work-related goals. Motivation answers the question of why employees choose to engage in certain behaviors, how hard they work, and how long they sustain effort in the face of obstacles. In organizational behavior research, motivation is recognized as a fundamental driver of performance, complementing ability and opportunity in determining work outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Understanding motivation is essential for designing work environments and management practices that elicit optimal employee contribution.

Intrinsic motivation represents one primary form of motivation, arising from the inherent satisfaction and enjoyment derived from the work itself. Employees who are intrinsically motivated engage in tasks because they find them interesting, challenging, or meaningful. Factors that enhance intrinsic motivation include autonomy in how work is performed, opportunities for skill development, and tasks that provide a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Research demonstrates that intrinsic motivation is associated with higher creativity, deeper learning, and greater persistence.

Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, stems from consequences separate from the work activity, such as pay, promotions, recognition, or avoiding punishment. While extrinsic motivators can effectively direct behavior, their effects may be contingent on continued availability and may sometimes undermine intrinsic interest. Contemporary motivation theory emphasizes that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can coexist and interact, with optimal conditions occurring when external rewards support rather than diminish internal drive (Gagné, 2022).

Self-determination theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding employee motivation, proposing that humans have basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the experience of volition and choice in one's actions. Competence involves feeling effective and capable of achieving desired outcomes. Relatedness encompasses feeling connected to and valued by others. Work environments that satisfy these needs foster autonomous motivation, characterized by greater engagement, well-being, and performance.

Goal-setting theory offers another influential perspective, emphasizing that specific, challenging goals enhance motivation and performance when accompanied by feedback and commitment. Goals direct attention, mobilize effort, increase persistence, and motivate strategy development. Research spanning decades confirms that goal setting is one of the most robust and practical motivation theories, applicable across diverse tasks and contexts (Locke & Latham, 2019). In organizational settings, involving employees in goal setting and providing regular progress feedback optimizes motivational outcomes.

Expectancy theory conceptualizes motivation as a function of three beliefs: expectancy (effort will lead to performance), instrumentality (performance will lead to outcomes), and valence (outcomes are personally valued). Employees are motivated when they believe their efforts will result in achievable performance, that performance will be rewarded, and that rewards are meaningful to them. This framework highlights the importance of clear performance-reward linkages and understanding individual differences in reward preferences (Vroom, 1964, cited in Pinder, 2022).

Recent research has explored motivation in the context of digital transformation and changing work arrangements. Studies indicate that motivation remains critical for performance in remote and hybrid work environments, with autonomy and relatedness needs requiring particular attention. Furthermore, research demonstrates that motivation serves as a mediating mechanism linking organizational practices to performance outcomes, explaining how training and leadership translate into improved employee effectiveness.

In summary, employee motivation encompasses intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions, is shaped by satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and is influenced by goal-setting processes and expectancy beliefs. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that motivation mediates relationships between organizational interventions and performance outcomes. Organizations that understand and cultivate employee motivation are better positioned to achieve sustained workforce excellence.

Job Performance

Job performance refers to the behaviors and actions employees engage in that contribute to organizational goals and effectiveness. It encompasses both the tasks employees perform and the contextual behaviors that support the organizational, social, and psychological environment in which tasks are accomplished. In human resource management research, job performance is recognized as a multidimensional construct influenced by employee capabilities, motivation, and opportunities to perform (Campbell & Wiernik, 2022). Understanding performance is essential for evaluating organizational effectiveness and designing interventions to enhance productivity.

Task performance represents the core dimension of job performance, comprising the activities formally recognized as part of an employee's job description. These include executing technical duties, achieving specific objectives, and producing required outputs. Task performance varies across jobs but generally involves transforming raw materials into finished products, serving customers, operating equipment, or processing information. Research indicates that task performance is influenced by knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivation, with training playing a crucial role in developing necessary competencies -6.

Contextual performance encompasses behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness by shaping the environment in which task performance occurs. This includes cooperating with colleagues, persisting through challenges, volunteering for additional responsibilities, and representing the organization positively. Contextual performance, sometimes labeled organizational citizenship behavior, facilitates coordination, maintains morale, and supports the social fabric of organizations. Research demonstrates that contextual performance is strongly influenced by leadership, motivation, and organizational climate (Podsakoff et al., 2023).

Adaptive performance has gained prominence as organizations face increasing volatility and change. This dimension involves responding effectively to changing circumstances, learning new tasks, and coping with uncertainty. Adaptive employees demonstrate flexibility, creativity, and resilience when faced with novel situations. In contemporary business environments characterized by technological disruption and market shifts, adaptive performance has become essential for organizational survival and success -6.

Counterproductive behaviors represent the negative pole of performance, encompassing actions that harm organizational interests. These include absenteeism, tardiness, theft, harassment, and deliberate underperformance. Understanding factors that prevent or minimize counterproductive behaviors is as important as enhancing positive performance. Research indicates that supportive leadership and fair treatment reduce counterproductive behaviors by building trust and commitment (Berry et al., 2021).

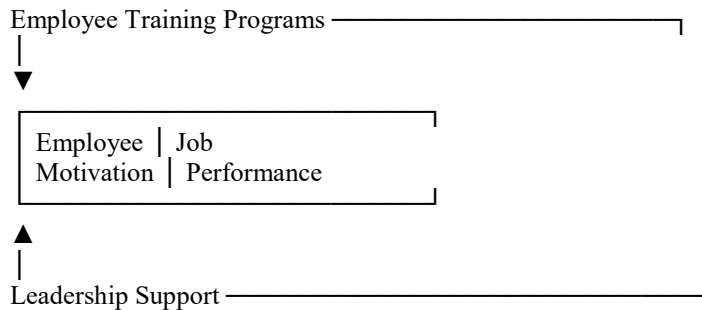
The determinants of job performance are typically categorized into declarative knowledge (knowing what to do), procedural knowledge and skill (knowing how to do it), and motivation (choosing to do it). This framework, articulated in Campbell's theory of performance, highlights that performance requires both capability and willingness. Training programs primarily influence declarative and procedural knowledge, while leadership and motivation shape the willingness to apply capabilities. Consequently, optimizing performance requires attention to both skill development and motivational conditions -2.

Performance measurement and management represent critical organizational processes for enhancing job performance. Effective performance management involves setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, conducting fair evaluations, and linking performance to consequences such as recognition, rewards, and development opportunities. Research indicates that employees perform better when they understand what is expected, receive timely feedback, and perceive performance management systems as fair and accurate (Aguinis, 2023).

In conclusion, job performance encompasses task, contextual, and adaptive dimensions, determined by knowledge, skills, and motivation. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that training programs enhance capabilities while leadership support and motivation influence willingness to apply those capabilities. Organizations that adopt comprehensive approaches to performance management, addressing both ability and motivation factors, are better positioned to achieve sustainable workforce excellence.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent Variables Mediating Variable Dependent Variable



Developed by the Researcher, 2026

This conceptual framework proposes that employee training programs and leadership support influence job performance both directly and indirectly through employee motivation. The independent variables—training programs and leadership support—represent organizational interventions that shape employee capabilities and work experiences. Training programs encompass systematic efforts to enhance employee knowledge, skills, and abilities relevant to job performance. Leadership support involves managerial behaviors that provide guidance, resources, encouragement, and recognition to employees. Employee motivation, the mediating variable, represents the psychological forces directing and sustaining effort toward work goals. The framework hypothesizes that training and leadership enhance motivation by building competence and satisfying psychological needs, and that motivated employees demonstrate superior job performance. Thus, motivation serves as a mechanism explaining how organizational practices translate into performance outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. SDT proposes that humans have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that satisfaction of these needs is essential for optimal motivation, well-being, and performance. The theory distinguishes between autonomous motivation, where individuals engage in activities out of genuine interest or personal valuing, and controlled motivation, where behavior is driven by external pressures or contingencies. Autonomous motivation is associated with greater persistence, creativity, and psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The need for autonomy refers to the experience of volition and psychological freedom in one's actions. When employees feel that they have choice and can act in accordance with their authentic interests, autonomous motivation flourishes. In organizational contexts, autonomy-supportive environments provide meaningful choices, minimize controlling language, and acknowledge employee perspectives. Leadership behaviors that offer autonomy support enhance intrinsic motivation and engagement -3. The need for competence involves feeling effective and capable of achieving desired outcomes. Employees experience competence when they master challenges, develop skills, and receive positive feedback. Training programs directly address competence needs by building knowledge and abilities, thereby enhancing self-efficacy and motivation -2. Furthermore, supportive leaders provide opportunities for skill development and recognize employee accomplishments, further satisfying competence needs. The need for relatedness encompasses feeling connected to and valued by others in the social environment. Employees satisfy relatedness needs when they experience caring relationships, a sense of belonging, and mutual respect with colleagues and supervisors. Supportive leadership characterized by genuine concern, active listening, and appreciation directly contributes to relatedness satisfaction. Research indicates that relatedness fosters internalization of organizational values and commitment to collective goals -4.

A key contribution of SDT is its explanation of how social contexts influence motivation and performance. The theory proposes that environments supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness promote autonomous motivation, which in turn drives positive outcomes including performance, persistence, and well-being. Conversely, controlling or unsupportive environments undermine intrinsic motivation and lead to disengagement. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding how training programs and leadership support influence employee motivation and subsequent job performance -6.

SDT also addresses the process of internalization, through which individuals transform external regulations into personally endorsed values. When employees understand the meaning and importance of their work, and when they feel supported by leaders, they internalize motivation and demonstrate greater effort and commitment. Training programs that explain the rationale behind practices and connect learning to meaningful outcomes facilitate internalization. This theoretical insight explains why motivation serves as a mediating mechanism linking organizational interventions to performance.

Recent extensions of SDT have addressed applications in work organizations, including research on leadership, training, and performance management. Studies demonstrate that autonomy-supportive leadership predicts employee engagement and well-being across diverse cultural contexts. Furthermore, research confirms that satisfaction of basic psychological needs mediates relationships between organizational practices and employee outcomes (Gagné, 2022). These findings provide empirical support for the mediating role proposed in this study.

Contemporary applications of SDT in emerging economy contexts, including Nigeria, continue to validate its explanatory power. Research indicates that satisfaction of psychological needs predicts motivation and performance among Nigerian employees, and that cultural factors moderate but do not eliminate these relationships (Adeyemi & Ogunyemi, 2024). Thus, anchoring this study on Self-Determination Theory offers a robust conceptual basis for examining the relationships among training programs, leadership support, employee motivation, and job performance.

In summary, Self-Determination Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how organizational practices influence employee motivation and performance. By explaining the role of basic psychological needs in fostering autonomous motivation, the theory clarifies how training programs and leadership support can enhance performance through their effects on motivation. Anchoring this study on SDT therefore offers a strong theoretical foundation for investigating the proposed relationships and mediation effects.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Training Programs and Job Performance

A growing body of empirical research demonstrates a significant positive relationship between employee training programs and job performance. A recent quantitative study among manufacturing firms in Tanzania found that training opportunities significantly predicted employee performance, with training accounting for substantial variance in productivity outcomes -2. The researchers reported that employees who participated in structured training programs demonstrated higher task proficiency and adaptability compared to untrained colleagues. This finding aligns with broader human resource development research emphasizing the role of skill enhancement in driving performance improvements.

Supporting this, a 2025 study conducted in Vietnam examining digital workforce training found significant positive effects on employee motivation, engagement, and adaptability in digital workplaces -6. Using structural equation modeling with data from 497 employees, the research demonstrated that digital training directly influenced performance and indirectly affected performance through motivation and job satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of training design and delivery in achieving performance outcomes, particularly in contexts of technological transformation.

Further empirical evidence from the Indonesian public sector examined training effects on employee performance among financial officers. The study found that training had a positive and significant effect on performance, even when competence and motivation showed nonsignificant direct effects -10. This suggests that training may operate through mechanisms beyond those captured by traditional motivation measures, reinforcing the need to examine multiple pathways linking training to performance.

Leadership Support and Job Performance

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that leadership support significantly influences employee job performance. A randomized controlled trial of leadership training conducted in Sweden found that managers who received operant-based leadership training showed significant improvements in performance feedback behaviors, and these improvements persisted over 18 months -8. Employees of trained managers reported better leadership behaviors, which in turn influenced their motivation and performance. This rigorous experimental design provides strong causal evidence for the leadership-performance relationship. Research from Harvard Business School examining training programs across multiple organizations revealed that middle managers serve as the "secret ingredient" in motivating employees to embrace development opportunities -4. The study found that when high-training managers (those who champion learning) took over teams previously led by low-training managers, training participation surged by up to 60% within weeks. Furthermore, during periods of increased demand pressure, employees reporting to high-training managers showed significantly lower absenteeism compared to those with low-training managers, demonstrating the tangible performance impact of supportive leadership. Contemporary research on human-centered leadership emphasizes that supportive leader behaviors create psychological safety and trust, enabling employees to contribute their best work -3. A 2026 report found that engaged employees are 14% more productive and up to 50% less likely to leave, with leadership quality emerging as a primary driver of engagement. These findings underscore the critical role of leadership support in shaping workforce outcomes.

Mediating Role of Employee Motivation

Recent empirical studies increasingly examine motivation as a mediator linking organizational practices to performance outcomes. Research by Kimario (2025) specifically investigated the mediation effect of work motivation on the relationship between training opportunities and job performance among manufacturing employees in Tanzania -2. Using quantitative methods and structural equation modeling, the study found that motivation partially mediated the training-performance relationship, accounting for a significant proportion of the total effect. This provides direct empirical support for the mediation hypothesis proposed in the current study.

Similarly, the Vietnamese study on digital workforce training found that motivation and job satisfaction served as mediating factors that enhanced employee productivity -6. The research demonstrated that training influenced performance both directly and indirectly through motivational mechanisms, highlighting the dual pathways through which organizational interventions affect outcomes. These findings suggest that interventions combining skill development with motivation enhancement may achieve superior results.

Research examining the mechanisms linking leadership to performance provides additional evidence for mediation. Studies demonstrate that supportive leadership influences performance through satisfaction of psychological needs, increased trust, and enhanced engagement -3-8. When employees feel valued and supported by leaders, their intrinsic motivation increases, leading to greater effort and persistence. This motivational pathway explains why leadership interventions produce performance improvements beyond those attributable to direct guidance or resource provision.

Summary of Empirical Evidence

The empirical literature consistently demonstrates significant relationships among training programs, leadership support, employee motivation, and job performance. Training enhances performance by building capabilities and signaling organizational investment in employees. Leadership support influences performance through resource provision, emotional encouragement, and developmental guidance. Motivation serves as a mediating mechanism explaining how these organizational practices translate into performance outcomes. However, most studies have been conducted in developed economy contexts or large organizations, with limited research focusing on SMEs in Nigerian local government settings. This gap underscores the need for the present study to provide localized evidence examining these relationships among firms in Oshimili South Local Government Area.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, which collects data at a single point in time to examine existing relationships among variables without manipulation. This design is suitable for assessing the relationships among training programs, leadership support, employee motivation, and job performance.

The population consisted of employees of registered small and medium-scale enterprises operating in Oshimili South Local Government Area, from which 256 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling. This method ensures proportional representation across business categories and employee levels, reducing sampling bias and improving the study's accuracy.

Instrumentation

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The instrument was divided into four sections:

Section A: Demographics – Collected information on gender, age, educational level, years of experience, and job role.

Section B: Employee Training Programs Scale – Measured training needs assessment, training design and delivery, training evaluation, and perceived training effectiveness (12 items).

Section C: Leadership Support Scale – Measured instrumental support, emotional support, developmental support, and recognition (12 items).

Section D: Employee Motivation Scale – Measured intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and basic psychological need satisfaction (9 items).

Section E: Job Performance Scale – Measured task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance (9 items).

All items in Sections B through E were measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 256)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	53.9
	Female	118	46.1
Age	18–30 years	86	33.6
	31–40 years	94	36.7
	41–50 years	52	20.3
	Above 50 years	24	9.4
Education	Secondary	42	16.4
	Diploma/NCE	68	26.6
	Bachelor's Degree	112	43.8

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Experience	Postgraduate	34	13.3
	1–3 years	58	22.7
	4–6 years	84	32.8
	7–10 years	72	28.1
	Above 10 years	42	16.4

Interpretation: The results in Table 1 show a relatively balanced gender distribution with a slight male majority (53.9%). The largest age group was 31–40 years (36.7%), indicating a predominantly early-to-mid career workforce. The majority of respondents held bachelor's degrees (43.8%), reflecting a reasonably educated employee population. Experience distribution was spread across categories, with the largest group having 4–6 years of experience (32.8%).

Level of Training Programs, Leadership Support, Motivation, and Job Performance

Mean Decision Rule: 1.00–2.49 = Low; 2.50–3.49 = Moderate; 3.50–5.00 = High

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Employee Training Programs	3.62	0.71	High
Leadership Support	3.58	0.73	High
Employee Motivation	3.48	0.69	Moderate
Job Performance	3.52	0.72	High

As shown in Table 2, the overall levels of employee training programs (Mean = 3.62) and leadership support (Mean = 3.58) were high, indicating that respondents generally perceived positive training opportunities and supportive leadership in their organizations. Employee motivation was moderate (Mean = 3.48), suggesting room for enhancement in motivational conditions. Job performance was high (Mean = 3.52), reflecting positive self-reported performance levels among respondents.

Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Training Programs	1.00			
2. Leadership Support	0.523**	1.00		

Variables	1	2	3	4
3. Employee Motivation	0.587**	0.614**	1.00	
4. Job Performance	0.674**	0.712**	0.698**	1.00

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation: The results in Table 3 reveal significant positive correlations among all study variables. Training programs showed a strong positive correlation with job performance ($r = 0.674$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher training quality is associated with higher performance. Leadership support demonstrated a strong positive correlation with job performance ($r = 0.712$, $p < 0.01$), the strongest among the direct relationships. Both training ($r = 0.587$) and leadership ($r = 0.614$) correlated significantly with employee motivation, satisfying conditions for mediation analysis. Employee motivation correlated strongly with job performance ($r = 0.698$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4: Direct Effects Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H ₀₁	Training → Performance	0.674	14.62	0.000	Rejected
H ₀₂	Leadership → Performance	0.712	16.18	0.000	Rejected

Interpretation: The regression results in Table 4 show that both hypotheses H₀₁ and H₀₂ are rejected. Employee training programs have a significant positive effect on job performance ($\beta = 0.674$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that improvements in training quality are associated with increases in employee performance. Leadership support demonstrates an even stronger effect ($\beta = 0.712$, $p < 0.05$), confirming its critical role in shaping performance outcomes.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis (Baron & Kenny Approach)

Step	Path	β	p-value	Condition Met
Step 1	Training → Performance	0.674	0.000	Yes
Step 1	Leadership → Performance	0.712	0.000	Yes
Step 2	Training → Motivation	0.587	0.000	Yes
Step 2	Leadership → Motivation	0.614	0.000	Yes
Step 3	Motivation → Performance	0.698	0.000	Yes
Step 4a	Training + Motivation → Performance			
	Training (direct)	0.445	0.000	Reduced

Step	Path	β	p-value	Condition Met
	Motivation	0.391	0.000	Significant
Step 4b	Leadership + Motivation \rightarrow Performance			
	Leadership (direct)	0.418	0.000	Reduced
	Motivation	0.424	0.000	Significant

Mediation Proportions:

- Training \rightarrow Performance mediated by Motivation: 34.0%
- Leadership \rightarrow Performance mediated by Motivation: 41.3%

Interpretation: The mediation analysis reveals that employee motivation partially mediates both relationships. For training programs, the direct effect reduced from $\beta = 0.674$ to $\beta = 0.445$ when motivation was included, with motivation accounting for 34% of the total effect. For leadership support, the direct effect reduced from $\beta = 0.712$ to $\beta = 0.418$, with motivation accounting for 41.3% of the total effect. Both mediation effects are statistically significant, leading to rejection of hypotheses H₀₃ and H₀₄. These findings confirm that employee motivation serves as a significant mechanism through which training programs and leadership support influence job performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study demonstrate significant positive relationships among employee training programs, leadership support, employee motivation, and job performance among employees in Oshimili South Local Government Area. The strong direct effects of training ($\beta = 0.674$) and leadership support ($\beta = 0.712$) on job performance align with established human resource management literature emphasizing the critical role of these organizational practices in shaping workforce outcomes -2-6. Employees who receive adequate training and perceive their leaders as supportive report higher performance levels, suggesting that investments in these areas yield tangible returns for organizations.

The finding that employee motivation partially mediates both relationships provides important insights into the mechanisms through which organizational practices influence performance. Training programs enhance motivation by building competence and self-efficacy, while supportive leadership satisfies psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness -8. When employees feel capable and valued, their intrinsic motivation increases, leading to greater effort, persistence, and ultimately superior performance. This mediation finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory's proposition that need satisfaction drives autonomous motivation and positive outcomes.

The stronger mediation effect for leadership support (41.3%) compared to training (34.0%) suggests that leadership may play a particularly crucial role in shaping motivational states. This finding resonates with research emphasizing that managers serve as the "secret ingredient" in translating organizational investments into employee outcomes -4. Leaders who demonstrate genuine interest in employee development, provide recognition, and create psychological safety foster motivational conditions that amplify the effects of other organizational practices.

The moderate level of employee motivation (Mean = 3.48) despite high training and leadership ratings suggests that additional factors may influence motivation in this context. Economic pressures, job insecurity, or limited career advancement opportunities could constrain motivation even when training and leadership are positive. This finding highlights the importance of addressing multiple determinants of motivation, including compensation, job design, and career development, alongside training and leadership interventions.

These findings have important implications for organizations in Oshimili South Local Government Area and similar contexts. First, investing in comprehensive training programs that address both technical and soft skills can directly enhance performance while also building the competence that fuels motivation. Second, developing supportive leadership capabilities through targeted training and selection should be a priority, given the strong direct and indirect effects of leadership on performance. Third,

organizations should explicitly address employee motivation through practices that satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, recognizing motivation as a critical pathway to performance.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that employee training programs and leadership support are significant predictors of job performance among employees in Oshimili South Local Government Area, both directly and indirectly through employee motivation. The positive relationships identified imply that improvements in training quality and leadership support lead to measurable gains in employee task, contextual, and adaptive performance. Furthermore, employee motivation serves as a critical mediating mechanism, explaining how these organizational practices translate into performance outcomes. Therefore, strategic investments in employee development and supportive leadership, coupled with attention to motivational conditions, are likely to yield substantial benefits for organizational effectiveness.

In summary, prioritizing employee training programs and leadership support, while understanding and enhancing employee motivation, represents a comprehensive approach to optimizing workforce performance and achieving sustainable organizational success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings that training programs and leadership support significantly influence job performance through employee motivation, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance organizational outcomes:

- 1. Invest in comprehensive and needs-based training programs:** Organizations should conduct thorough training needs assessments to identify genuine performance gaps and design interventions that address specific competency requirements. Training content should be relevant to job demands, delivered through methods that facilitate learning and transfer, and evaluated regularly to ensure effectiveness. Given the significant direct and indirect effects of training on performance, this investment is likely to yield substantial returns.
- 2. Develop supportive leadership capabilities throughout the organization:** Organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that equip managers with skills in providing instrumental, emotional, and developmental support to employees. Training should emphasize coaching, recognition, psychological safety, and creating conditions for employee autonomy and growth -4-8. Given the strong effects of leadership support on both motivation and performance, leadership capability building should be a strategic priority.
- 3. Implement motivation-enhancing human resource practices:** Organizations should explicitly address employee motivation through practices that satisfy basic psychological needs. This includes providing meaningful choices in work methods (autonomy), offering opportunities for skill development and mastery (competence), and fostering positive relationships and team cohesion (relatedness). Recognition programs, career development pathways, and participative decision-making can further enhance motivation -2-3.
- 4. Integrate training and leadership development with motivation strategies:** Rather than treating training, leadership, and motivation as separate domains, organizations should adopt integrated approaches that recognize their interconnections. Training programs should incorporate elements that build not only skills but also confidence and intrinsic interest. Leadership development should emphasize how supportive behaviors influence employee motivation. Performance management systems should consider motivational mechanisms when designing interventions.
- 5. Conduct regular assessment of employee motivation and its determinants:** Organizations should monitor employee motivation levels through surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews, identifying factors that enhance or undermine motivation. Understanding the specific motivational conditions within each organizational context enables targeted interventions. Given the mediating role of motivation, monitoring motivational trends provides early warning of potential performance challenges.

6. Create organizational cultures that value learning and support: Beyond specific programs, organizations should cultivate cultures where continuous learning is encouraged and supportive leadership is modeled at all levels. This includes celebrating training achievements, recognizing supportive managers, and embedding learning and support values into organizational mission and practices -3.

7. Ensure adequate resources for training and leadership initiatives: Under-resourced training programs and overburdened managers cannot deliver the effects demonstrated in this study. Organizations should allocate sufficient budget, time, and personnel to ensure that training is high-quality and that managers have capacity to provide meaningful support to their teams.

Overall, implementing these recommendations will not only enhance employee training programs and leadership support but also strengthen employee motivation and, consequently, improve job performance and organizational competitiveness.

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