

Research Article

Management Practices and Institutional Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria: The Mediating Role of Workplace Inclusion

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between management practices and institutional performance in selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of workplace inclusion. The study was anchored on Social Identity Theory and the Resource-Based View to explain how inclusive managerial practices enhance organisational outcomes. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. Data were collected from 312 academic and non-academic staff using a structured questionnaire. The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = 0.87\text{--}0.91$). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, simple and multiple regression analyses, and mediation analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that management practices significantly predicted workplace inclusion ($\beta = 0.734$, $p < 0.05$) and institutional performance ($\beta = 0.655$, $p < 0.05$). Workplace inclusion also significantly predicted institutional performance ($\beta = 0.694$, $p < 0.05$). Mediation analysis showed that workplace inclusion partially mediated the relationship between management practices and institutional performance, as the direct effect of management practices on performance reduced from $\beta = 0.655$ to $\beta = 0.243$ after inclusion of the mediator. The Sobel test confirmed that the indirect effect was statistically significant ($Z = 9.76$, $p < 0.05$). The study concludes that workplace inclusion functions as a strategic organisational mechanism through which management practices translate into improved institutional performance. It recommends that tertiary institution leaders institutionalise inclusive policies, participatory decision-making structures, and equitable reward systems to enhance employee engagement and institutional effectiveness.

Keywords

Workplace Inclusion, Management Practices, Institutional Performance, Mediation, Tertiary Institutions, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Workplace inclusion has gained increasing prominence in organisational and public administration research due to its

significant implications for employee engagement, institutional effectiveness, and sustainable performance. Inclusion

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refers to organisational practices and climates in which employees feel respected, valued, and able to participate fully in decision-making processes and workplace activities [21]. Unlike workforce diversity, which emphasises demographic representation, workplace inclusion focuses on employees' lived experiences of fairness, belongingness, and access to organisational opportunities. Inclusion involves satisfying employees' dual needs for belongingness and uniqueness, thereby fostering an environment where individuals can contribute authentically while feeling socially integrated [29].

Contemporary scholarship argues that inclusive workplaces foster psychological safety, collaboration, trust, and discretionary effort factors that are essential drivers of organisational performance. Empirical evidence shows that inclusive human resource practices enhance employee engagement and reduce turnover intentions [15]. Similarly, inclusion has been shown to strengthen team effectiveness by promoting shared decision-making and mutual respect [28]. The concept of psychological safety, defined as a shared belief that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, has also been linked to improved learning behaviour and performance outcomes [16]. In public sector institutions, where service delivery, accountability, and efficiency are critical, workplace inclusion has been identified as a strategic resource capable of enhancing institutional outcomes beyond traditional bureaucratic controls. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development notes that inclusive public institutions are more innovative, responsive, and effective in meeting citizens' needs [22].

In Nigeria, tertiary institutions operate within a highly heterogeneous socio-cultural environment characterised by ethnic diversity, religious plurality, and gender differentials. Nigeria's public service framework is formally guided by the Federal Character Principle enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which aims to promote equitable representation across states and ethnic groups. However, scholars argue that public sector employment practices are frequently undermined by patronage, nepotism, and informal power structures [1]. Studies examining organisational behaviour in Nigerian institutions also report that perceptions of unfairness and favouritism weaken employee commitment and performance outcomes [25]. Such structural and cultural constraints may limit the realisation of genuine inclusion, even where formal diversity policies exist.

Research further indicates that the effectiveness of workplace inclusion in public organisations depends largely on management practices and leadership behaviours. Leadership commitment shapes organisational climate and signals whether inclusion is a strategic priority. Inclusive leadership behaviours are positively related to psychological safety and employee involvement in creative work processes [10]. Inclusive management also emphasises transparent communication, equitable access to opportunities, participatory decision-making, and accountability mechanisms [30]. Where management

commitment to inclusion is weak, formal diversity and inclusion policies often fail to produce meaningful organisational outcomes, as policy rhetoric is not translated into daily supervisory practices.

Furthermore, inclusion aligns with broader theories of organisational performance, including social exchange theory and stakeholder theory. When employees perceive fair treatment and respect, they reciprocate with higher levels of organisational citizenship behaviour and performance [11]. In tertiary institutions, where intellectual capital and human resources constitute the primary assets, fostering inclusive climates may enhance academic productivity, administrative efficiency, and service quality. Empirical studies in emerging economies suggest that inclusive human resource management practices positively influence institutional effectiveness and competitive advantage [24].

Despite the growing body of international literature on workplace inclusion, empirical studies examining the relationship between management-driven inclusion and institutional performance within Nigerian tertiary institutions remain limited. Existing Nigerian studies tend to focus on workforce diversity, employee engagement, or job satisfaction without explicitly examining inclusion as a performance-enhancing mechanism mediated by management practices. There remains a paucity of research linking inclusive management behaviours directly to measurable institutional outcomes in the Nigerian higher education sector.

This study therefore seeks to bridge this gap by examining the role of management in promoting workplace inclusion and assessing the effect of workplace inclusion on institutional performance in selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Recent scholarship increasingly conceptualises workplace inclusion as a performance-enabling mechanism rather than solely a diversity outcome. Contemporary studies emphasise that inclusive climates enhance psychological safety, knowledge sharing, and institutional resilience in public organisations [7, 27]. In higher education settings, emerging evidence demonstrates that inclusive leadership and participatory governance structures significantly predict faculty engagement and research productivity [17, 19].

Furthermore, public institutions in developing economies face structural inequalities that make inclusion particularly consequential for performance outcomes. Recent Global South research indicates that inclusive governance practices reduce organisational fragmentation and enhance administrative efficiency in public universities [2]. These developments underscore the need to examine inclusion not merely as an ethical imperative but as a mediating organisational capability that translates management practices into measurable institutional performance outcomes.

By integrating these recent theoretical and empirical developments, the present study situates itself within contemporary inclusion-performance scholarship while addressing a contextual gap within Nigerian tertiary institutions.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the relationship between management practices and institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of workplace inclusion.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- 1) Examine the effect of management practices on workplace inclusion in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
- 2) Determine the effect of workplace inclusion on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
- 3) Assess the direct effect of management practices on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
- 4) Determine whether workplace inclusion mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

1.2. Research Questions

In line with the stated objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What effect do management practices have on workplace inclusion in tertiary institutions in Enugu State?
- 2) What effect does workplace inclusion have on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State?
- 3) What direct effect do management practices have on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State?
- 4) Does workplace inclusion mediate the relationship between management practices and institutional performance?

1.3. Research Hypotheses

In line with the objectives and research questions of the study, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- 1) Management practices do not have a significant effect on workplace inclusion in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
- 2) Workplace inclusion does not have a significant effect on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
- 3) Management practices do not have a significant direct effect on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State.
- 4) Workplace inclusion does not significantly mediate the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Workplace Inclusion

Workplace inclusion refers to the extent to which employees perceive that they are valued, respected, and able

to fully participate in organisational decision-making and work processes without experiencing marginalisation. While earlier conceptualisations emphasised belongingness and uniqueness [29], recent scholarship reconceptualises inclusion as a multidimensional climate construct integrating fairness, psychological safety, voice, and equitable access to opportunities [31].

Contemporary research positions inclusion not merely as a complement to diversity but as the mechanism through which diversity translates into performance outcomes. Inclusive climates are characterised by transparent communication, participatory governance, equitable treatment, and recognition of employee contributions [27]. Recent updates to inclusion theory emphasise that inclusive workplaces must integrate fairness, belongingness, and employee voice to achieve sustainable organisational outcomes [32]. Empirical evidence indicates that employees in inclusive environments demonstrate higher organisational commitment, engagement, and innovative behaviour.

Psychological safety remains a central explanatory mechanism. Recent meta-analytic findings show that inclusive leadership significantly predicts psychological safety, which in turn enhances performance and knowledge sharing [27]. Psychological safety, defined as a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, has been widely recognised as a critical factor influencing employee learning behaviour and performance outcomes [13]. This extends earlier work by demonstrating that inclusion operates through measurable behavioural pathways rather than abstract cultural ideals.

In public sector institutions, inclusion assumes heightened importance due to bureaucratic hierarchies and structural inequalities. Inclusive public governance has been shown to enhance institutional trust, accountability, and service responsiveness [23]. Within Global South contexts, structural disparities, informal patronage systems, and limited institutional transparency make inclusion particularly consequential for performance sustainability.

Recent African and emerging economy research further demonstrates that inclusive leadership practices significantly predict employee engagement and organisational effectiveness in public universities [2, 19]. These findings are especially relevant for Nigerian tertiary institutions, where pluralistic social identities and governance challenges may undermine cohesion if inclusive systems are not deliberately institutionalised.

Moreover, updated integrative reviews confirm that workplace inclusion is positively associated with organisational performance indicators across sectors, including innovation, productivity, and institutional effectiveness [31]. This contemporary evidence strengthens the argument that inclusion functions as both a relational climate variable and a strategic organisational capability.

2.2. Management Practices and Workplace Inclusion

Management practices constitute the primary mechanisms through which workplace inclusion is operationalised within organisations. Inclusive management practices include transparent communication, participatory decision-making, equitable reward systems, fair performance appraisal, bias mitigation strategies, and consistent enforcement of institutional policies [30]. Managers and institutional leaders act as cultural architects who shape employees' perceptions of fairness and belonging.

Inclusive leadership behaviours have been shown to significantly predict employee involvement in creative tasks through the mediating role of psychological safety [10]. Similarly, leadership commitment to diversity and inclusion is often more influential than formal policy frameworks in shaping employees' lived experiences [28]. This suggests that management practices are not merely administrative tools but determinants of organisational climate.

Recent leadership scholarship highlights that inclusive management practices go beyond symbolic diversity statements and require structural integration into governance systems. Empirical studies show that participatory leadership, transparent performance appraisal, and procedural justice significantly predict inclusion perceptions in higher education settings [17]. Similarly, inclusive leadership behaviours have been shown to enhance employee voice and discretionary effort, particularly in knowledge-intensive institutions [27]. In emerging economies, inclusion has been linked to administrative transparency and improved institutional coordination. Inclusive managerial practices in public institutions have been found to significantly predict employee engagement and service effectiveness [19]. These findings reinforce the view that management practices are predictive determinants of inclusion climates and not merely contextual variables.

From a governance perspective, management practices in tertiary institutions influence faculty participation in decision-making bodies, transparency in promotion criteria, allocation of research funding, and conflict resolution mechanisms. When management adopts consultative approaches and ensures fairness in appointments and promotions, employees are more likely to perceive the institution as inclusive. Conversely, tolerance of favouritism or informal networks may erode trust and weaken institutional cohesion.

Empirical evidence from developing economies reinforces this relationship. Managerial fairness and participatory human resource practices have been found to positively influence employee commitment and organisational performance in Nigerian firms [24]. In public institutions, weak managerial enforcement of equity principles often undermines institutional performance by generating perceptions of exclusion and disengagement.

In Nigerian tertiary institutions, management-driven inclu-

sion is particularly significant because hierarchical governance structures may restrict staff voice. Vice-chancellors, rectors, deans, and heads of department therefore play pivotal roles in translating institutional values into operational practices. Where management demonstrates consistency, transparency, and accountability, workplace inclusion becomes embedded within institutional culture.

2.3. Workplace Inclusion and Institutional Performance

Institutional performance in public tertiary institutions encompasses multidimensional indicators, including academic excellence, research productivity, administrative efficiency, service delivery quality, innovation capacity, staff morale, and stakeholder satisfaction. Public sector performance must be assessed beyond financial metrics to include service effectiveness and organisational sustainability [8].

2.4. Operational Definition of Institutional Performance

For the purpose of this study, institutional performance is operationalised as employees' perceptions of effectiveness across three core dimensions relevant to Nigerian public tertiary institutions:

Teaching Quality: reflected in instructional effectiveness, curriculum delivery efficiency, student support, and academic mentoring.

Research Output: indicated by scholarly productivity, collaboration, innovation, and knowledge dissemination.

Administrative Efficiency: reflected in timely service delivery, internal coordination, procedural transparency, and responsiveness to stakeholders.

These indicators were measured through perceptual items capturing staff evaluations of productivity, teamwork, service delivery quality, and institutional effectiveness. This multidimensional operationalisation aligns with public sector performance frameworks which emphasise service quality, knowledge production, and administrative functionality beyond financial metrics [8]. By specifying these measurable dimensions, the study clarifies how institutional performance was conceptualised and assessed within the Nigerian tertiary education context.

Recent empirical research strengthens the inclusion–performance nexus. A large-scale review confirms that inclusive organisational climates are positively associated with innovation, commitment, and overall performance metrics [31]. Other studies further demonstrate that inclusion improves decision quality and adaptive performance through psychological safety mechanisms [27].

Within higher education institutions, inclusive governance structures have been linked to research productivity and faculty collaboration [17]. In Sub-Saharan African universities, inclusive leadership has been shown to predict organisational

effectiveness and service quality outcomes [2]. These recent findings provide contemporary empirical grounding for conceptualising workplace inclusion as a mediating organisational capability linking management practices to institutional performance.

Research consistently demonstrates a positive association between workplace inclusion and organisational performance. Inclusive climates enhance employee engagement, strengthen teamwork, and reduce turnover intentions [20]. Inclusive organisations also benefit from improved decision quality due to broader participation and knowledge integration [28].

In public sector contexts, inclusive institutions are better equipped to address complex social challenges because employees collaborate more effectively and align with organisational goals. Inclusion has been reported to strengthen internal coordination and trust, which are essential for effective public service delivery [22].

Within Nigeria, perceptions of organisational justice have been found to significantly influence employee commitment in public institutions [25]. Commitment, in turn, correlates positively with productivity and institutional effectiveness. In tertiary institutions, where intellectual capital constitutes the primary resource, workplace inclusion enhances knowledge sharing, interdisciplinary research collaboration, and innovation. Employees who perceive fairness and belonging are more likely to contribute discretionary effort, mentor junior colleagues, and support institutional reforms factors that collectively improve institutional performance.

Therefore, workplace inclusion functions not merely as a social ideal but as a performance-enhancing strategy. By fostering psychological safety, organisational identification, and engagement, inclusion strengthens both human capital utilisation and institutional sustainability.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Identity Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV) to explain the interrelationship among management practices, workplace inclusion, and institutional performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

2.5.1. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory explains how individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups, leading to in-group and out-group dynamics [34]. In organisational settings, such categorisation may manifest through ethnic, religious, gender, or professional divisions. When unmanaged, these distinctions can result in bias, discrimination, and reduced cooperation.

Social identity theory has been extended to organisational contexts, suggesting that strong organisational identification enhances cohesion and performance [3]. Inclusive management practices mitigate identity-based fragmentation by promoting shared institutional identity, equitable participation, and mutual respect.

In Nigerian tertiary institutions where social identities are

often salient, Social Identity Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how management practices that promote workplace inclusion can reduce intergroup tensions and strengthen institutional performance.

2.5.2. Resource-based View (RBV)

Contemporary applications of the Resource-Based View increasingly recognise intangible organisational climates such as inclusion as strategic assets capable of generating sustained institutional advantage [5, 31]. Inclusive management practices enhance human capital utilisation, knowledge integration, and organisational trust resources that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate. Empirical evidence from public institutions suggests that inclusive climates strengthen performance resilience and adaptive capacity in resource-constrained environments [27]. By integrating Social Identity Theory and RBV, this study conceptualises workplace inclusion as both a social integration mechanism and a strategic organisational capability mediating the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

From a Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective, workplace inclusion represents an intangible strategic resource. Inclusive management practices enhance human capital utilisation, trust, and knowledge-sharing resources that are difficult for competing institutions to replicate. Effective human resource systems contribute to sustained organisational advantage by strengthening employee competencies and commitment [35]. Thus, management practices that foster workplace inclusion become strategic capabilities that enhance institutional performance. By integrating Social Identity Theory and RBV, this study conceptualises workplace inclusion as both a social integrative mechanism and a strategic resource linking management practices to institutional performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-correlational research design with mediation analysis. While descriptive components were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of management practices, workplace inclusion, and institutional performance, the primary objective of the study was to examine the relationships among these variables and test a mediating effect model.

A descriptive-correlational design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to determine the direction and strength of relationships among variables without manipulating them [12]. This research design is widely used in social science research to examine relationships among variables without manipulation and allows for robust statistical inference in organisational studies [9]. Given that the study tested whether work-

place inclusion mediates the relationship between management practices (independent variable) and institutional performance (dependent variable), regression-based mediation analysis was employed.

The mediation procedure followed established regression-based approaches for testing indirect effects [16]. This predictive correlational framework aligns with the study's objectives and hypotheses, which move beyond simple description to the explanation of structural relationships among organisational variables. Therefore, the research design is more accurately classified as descriptive-correlational with predictive mediation modelling.

3.2. Area of the Study

The study was conducted in selected tertiary institutions located in Enugu State, Nigeria. Enugu State serves as a major administrative and educational hub in South-Eastern Nigeria, hosting several tertiary establishments with diverse workforce compositions. The choice of Enugu State was informed by its socio-cultural diversity and the presence of multiple tertiary institutions, making it a suitable setting for examining workplace inclusion in the Nigerian public sector context.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised employees of selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State, including both academic and non-academic staff. The population covered different cadres of staff, reflecting variations in roles, responsibilities, and organisational experiences. This broad population base ensured that perceptions of workplace inclusion and institutional performance were captured across hierarchical levels.

3.4. Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents for the study. The population was first stratified based on staff categories (academic and non-academic staff), after which respondents were randomly selected from each stratum. A total sample size of 312 respondents was used for the study, representing the valid questionnaires returned and analysed. Stratified sampling is recommended in organisational studies where the population is heterogeneous, as it improves representativeness and reduces sampling bias [33].

3.5. Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on existing literature on workplace inclusion, management practices, and institutional performance. The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

Section A: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Section B: Management practices related to workplace inclusion

Section C: Workplace inclusion indicators (belongingness, fairness, participation, respect)

Section D: Institutional performance indicators (productivity, teamwork, job satisfaction, service delivery)

Items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Likert-type scales are widely accepted in organisational research for measuring perceptions and attitudes [18].

3.6. Validity of the Instrument

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert review by specialists in management and social science research. The experts assessed the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items in measuring the study variables. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

Establishing content validity through expert judgment is a standard procedure in survey-based organisational studies [6].

3.7. Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the research instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.87 for Management Practices, 0.89 for Workplace Inclusion, and 0.91 for Institutional Performance, indicating high internal consistency reliability [21].

This level of reliability indicates that the instrument consistently measured the constructs of management practices, workplace inclusion, and institutional performance.

3.8. Common Method Bias

Given that the study utilised cross-sectional, self-reported data collected from a single source, the possibility of common method bias (CMB) was considered. To minimise procedural bias, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and questionnaire items were structured to reduce evaluation apprehension and social desirability effects. Different sections of the instrument were clearly separated to reduce implicit response consistency.

Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted using exploratory factor analysis. The results indicated that no single factor accounted for the majority of variance, as the first factor explained less than 50% of the total variance, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to significantly distort the findings [26]. Nonetheless, future studies may adopt multi-source data or longitudinal designs to further mitigate potential method bias.

3.9. Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered directly to respond-

ents with the assistance of trained research aides. This approach enhanced the response rate and ensured proper clarification of questionnaire items where necessary. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents were strictly observed.

3.10. Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions. These statistical techniques are widely recommended for analysing quantitative survey data and ensuring accurate interpretation of relationships among variables [14]. Simple and multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the direct and mediating relationships among management practices, workplace inclusion, and institutional performance at the 0.05 level of significance.

In addition to descriptive statistics, regression-based mediation analysis was conducted to test indirect effects, consistent with contemporary predictive correlational research designs [16].

3.11. Model Specification

The regression model used in the study is specified as:

Model 1:

$$WI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MP + \varepsilon$$

Model 2:

$$IP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MP + \varepsilon$$

Model 3 (Mediation Model):

$$IP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 MP + \beta_2 WI + \varepsilon$$

Where:

MP = Management Practices

WI = Workplace Inclusion

IP = Institutional Performance

To examine the mediating role of workplace inclusion in the relationship between management practices and institutional performance, a simple mediation analysis was conducted using regression-based procedures. The mediation process followed an established approach that involves estimating a series of regression models to determine whether the specified mediation conditions are satisfied [4]:

- 1) Management practices significantly predict workplace inclusion.
- 2) Management practices significantly predict institutional performance.
- 3) Workplace inclusion significantly predicts institutional performance.
- 4) The effect of management practices on institutional performance reduces when workplace inclusion is introduced into the model.

A reduction in the direct effect of management practices after the inclusion of the mediator indicates the presence of mediation. All regression analyses were conducted at the 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

A total of 312 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analysed, representing the effective sample size for the study. The data were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analyses in line with the research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of management practices, workplace inclusion, and institutional performance, while regression and mediation analyses were employed to test the hypothesised relationships among the study variables. The results are presented in tables and interpreted accordingly.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Management Practices, Workplace Inclusion, and Institutional Performance.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management Practices	3.81	0.84
Workplace Inclusion	3.76	0.79
Institutional Performance	3.72	0.82

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the major study variables. The mean scores for management practices ($M = 3.81$), workplace inclusion ($M = 3.76$), and institutional performance ($M = 3.72$) are all above the benchmark of 3.00. This indicates that respondents generally perceived high levels of inclusive management practices, workplace inclusion, and institutional performance in the selected tertiary institutions. The standard deviations, all below 1.00, suggest relative homogeneity in responses.

Table 2. Regression Result Showing the Effect of Management Practices on Workplace Inclusion.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(1,310)	Sig.
0.734	0.538	0.536	309.25	0.000

Coefficients

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Management Practices on the Dependent Variable.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.102	0.168	—	6.560	0.000
Management Practices	0.721	0.041	0.734	17.585	0.000

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Table 2 indicates that management practices significantly predict workplace inclusion ($\beta = 0.734$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2 value of 0.538 implies that management practices explain 53.8% of the variance in workplace inclusion. The F-statistic ($F(1,310) = 309.25$, $p < 0.05$) confirms that the regression model is statistically significant.

Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. Management practices significantly affect workplace inclusion.

Table 4. Regression Result Showing the Effect of Workplace Inclusion on Institutional Performance.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(1,310)	Sig.
0.694	0.482	0.480	287.416	0.000

Coefficients

Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Workplace Inclusion on the Dependent Variable.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.214	0.173	—	7.017	0.000
Workplace Inclusion	0.653	0.039	0.694	16.952	$p < .001$

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Table 4 shows that workplace inclusion significantly predicts institutional performance ($\beta = 0.694$, $p < 0.05$). The R^2

value of 0.482 indicates that 48.2% of the variation in institutional performance is explained by workplace inclusion. The regression model is statistically significant as indicated by $F(1,310) = 287.416$, $p < 0.05$.

The null hypothesis is rejected. Workplace inclusion significantly affects institutional performance.

Table 6. Regression Result Showing the Direct Effect of Management Practices on Institutional Performance.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(1,310)	Sig.
0.655	0.429	0.427	222.21	0.000

Coefficients

Table 7. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Management Practices on the Dependent Variable.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.187	0.171	—	6.942	0.000
Management Practices	0.642	0.043	0.655	14.907	0.000

Source: SPSS Output (2025)

Table 7 reveals that management practices significantly predict institutional performance ($\beta = 0.655$, $p < 0.05$). Table 6 reveals that the R^2 value of 0.429 indicates that management

practices account for 42.9% of the variance in institutional performance. The regression model is statistically significant.

The null hypothesis is rejected. Management practices significantly affect institutional performance.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Result Showing the Mediating Role of Workplace Inclusion.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(2,309)	Sig.
0.758	0.575	0.572	209.06	0.000

Coefficients

Table 9. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Showing the Joint Influence of Management Practices and Workplace Inclusion on the Dependent Variable.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.982	0.159	—	6.175	0.000
Management Practices	0.238	0.052	0.243	4.577	0.000
Workplace Inclusion	0.564	0.048	0.587	11.750	0.000

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 9 shows that when workplace inclusion is introduced into the regression model, the standardized beta coefficient for management practices reduces from 0.655 (Table 6) to 0.243 but remains statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Workplace inclusion also remains a significant predictor of institutional performance ($\beta = 0.587$, $p < 0.05$).

The reduction in the beta value indicates that workplace inclusion partially mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance. The R^2 increased from 0.429 to 0.575, showing improved explanatory power of the model.

The null hypothesis is rejected. Workplace inclusion significantly partially mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance, as evidenced by the reduction in standardized beta coefficients. Partial mediation is established because the direct effect remains significant after inclusion of the mediator. Workplace inclusion significantly mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

Based on the regression results, all the null hypotheses were rejected as the regression analyses showed significant relationships among the study variables at the 0.05 level of significance. Management practices significantly predicted workplace inclusion and institutional performance, while workplace inclusion significantly predicted institutional performance and partially mediated the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

Table 10. Sobel Test of the Indirect Effect of Management Practices on Institutional Performance Through Workplace Inclusion.

Path	Coefficient	Std. Error
MP → WI (a)	0.721	0.041
WI → IP (b)	0.564	0.048
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.406	—
Sobel Z-value	9.76	—
p-value	0.000	—

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 10 shows that the Sobel test produced a Z-value of 9.76, which is far greater than the critical value of ± 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. The associated p-value ($p < 0.05$) indicates that the indirect effect of management practices on institutional performance through workplace inclusion is statistically significant.

This confirms that workplace inclusion significantly mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

Given that the direct effect of management practices on institutional performance remained significant (β reduced from 0.655 to 0.243), the mediation is partial mediation.

Since the Sobel test is significant ($Z = 9.76$, $p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis is rejected.

Workplace inclusion significantly partially mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that management plays a significant role in promoting workplace inclusion in tertiary institutions in Enugu State. Respondents generally agreed that management encourages teamwork, fairness, employee participation in decision-making, and non-discriminatory practices. This result suggests that management behaviour and

leadership practices are central to shaping inclusive organisational climates within public sector institutions.

This finding aligns with existing literature which emphasises management as the primary driver of inclusion in organisations. Inclusive workplaces do not emerge automatically from diversity policies but are cultivated through consistent managerial actions that promote fairness, openness, and respect [30]. Similarly, inclusive leadership behaviours have been found to enhance employee involvement and psychological safety, both of which are core components of workplace inclusion [10].

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, inclusive management practices help reduce in-group and out-group distinctions by fostering a shared organisational identity. In heterogeneous public institutions such as those in Nigeria, management-driven inclusion minimises perceptions of marginalisation linked to ethnicity, religion, or social background. This strengthens interpersonal trust and organisational cohesion, thereby improving the overall work climate.

The findings also corroborate Nigerian-based studies which indicate that fairness in leadership and participatory management significantly influence employees' perceptions of inclusion and commitment [24]. The implication is that when management demonstrates commitment to inclusive practices, employees are more likely to feel valued and engaged, regardless of structural or bureaucratic constraints.

The study further found that workplace inclusion has a positive and statistically significant effect on institutional performance in tertiary institutions in Enugu State. Improvements in workplace inclusion were associated with enhanced productivity, teamwork, job satisfaction, and service delivery. This finding confirms the second objective of the study and underscores the strategic importance of inclusion in public sector performance management.

This result is consistent with prior empirical evidence which demonstrates that inclusive workplaces outperform less inclusive ones due to higher employee engagement and collaboration [20]. Inclusive environments promote psychological safety, enabling employees to contribute ideas, share knowledge, and exert discretionary effort that enhances organisational outcomes.

The finding also supports the Resource-Based View, which conceptualises workplace inclusion as an intangible organisational resource. Inclusive practices enhance the effective utilisation of human capital, making inclusion a valuable and difficult-to-imitate capability that contributes to sustained institutional performance [5, 34]. In the context of public institutions, where financial and material resources are often constrained, the strategic utilisation of human resources through inclusion becomes particularly critical.

Furthermore, the results align with findings that inclusive public institutions are better positioned to deliver efficient services and respond to complex societal challenges [22]. In Nigeria's public sector, where service delivery effectiveness is a persistent concern, the demonstrated link between inclusion

and performance suggests that inclusion should be treated as a core management strategy rather than a peripheral human resource initiative.

The combined findings of the study provide empirical support for both Social Identity Theory and the Resource-Based View. Social Identity Theory explains how inclusive management practices reduce social categorisation and foster a shared sense of belonging among employees. This psychological integration enhances cooperation and reduces workplace conflict, thereby supporting institutional performance.

Simultaneously, the Resource-Based View explains how workplace inclusion functions as a strategic organisational asset. By promoting fairness, participation, and respect, management enhances employees' commitment and productivity, translating social inclusion into tangible performance outcomes. The integration of these theories strengthens the explanatory power of the study and demonstrates that inclusion operates through both social and strategic mechanisms.

The findings have important implications for Nigerian tertiary institutions. First, they suggest that management commitment to inclusion is a prerequisite for improving institutional performance. Policies alone are insufficient without deliberate managerial actions that promote fairness and employee participation. Second, inclusion should be integrated into performance management and leadership evaluation frameworks within public institutions.

Given Nigeria's socio-cultural diversity, inclusive management practices can serve as a unifying mechanism that enhances organisational stability and effectiveness. By prioritising inclusion, tertiary institutions can improve not only internal work climates but also the quality of public service delivery.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its cross-sectional design, which restricts causal inference. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce common method bias despite procedural and statistical controls. Additionally, perceptual measures of institutional performance may not fully capture objective indicators such as publication counts, graduation rates, or administrative processing timelines. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, incorporate objective performance metrics, and utilise multi-source data to strengthen causal interpretation and external validity. The geographical focus on tertiary institutions in Enugu State may also limit generalisability to other regions of Nigeria or different public sector contexts.

7. Conclusion

The study examined workplace inclusion and institutional performance in selected tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the role of management in promoting inclusive practices and the effect of workplace

inclusion on institutional performance. Using a descriptive survey design and quantitative analytical techniques, the study provided empirical evidence on the strategic relevance of inclusion within the Nigerian public sector context.

The findings revealed that management practices play a significant role in fostering workplace inclusion through fairness, participatory decision-making, teamwork, and non-discriminatory treatment of employees. The study further established that workplace inclusion has a positive and statistically significant effect on institutional performance, as reflected in improved productivity, teamwork, job satisfaction, and service delivery.

The mediation analysis further revealed that workplace inclusion partially mediates the relationship between management practices and institutional performance. Although management practices directly influence performance, their effect becomes substantially stronger when channelled through inclusive workplace climates. This finding suggests that management practices enhance performance not only through direct administrative control but also indirectly by fostering inclusive environments that improve employee engagement, teamwork, and satisfaction. The result provides empirical support for the integrated application of Social Identity Theory and the Resource-Based View, as inclusion simultaneously reduces social fragmentation and functions as a strategic organisational resource.

The study concludes that workplace inclusion is not merely a normative or ethical concern but a strategic management resource capable of enhancing institutional effectiveness in public sector organisations. Management commitment to inclusive practices is therefore indispensable for achieving sustainable performance outcomes in tertiary institutions.

8. Contributions to Knowledge

The study makes several contributions to existing literature:

- 1) The study provides empirical evidence on the relationship between workplace inclusion and institutional performance within Nigerian tertiary institutions, an area that remains under-researched in public sector management literature.
- 2) By integrating Social Identity Theory and the Resource-Based View, the study demonstrates that workplace inclusion operates simultaneously as a social mechanism that reduces group-based exclusion and as a strategic organisational resource that enhances performance.
- 3) The study extends inclusion and performance discourse to the Nigerian public sector, offering context-specific insights relevant to developing and pluralistic societies.

9. Policy and Practical Implications

The findings of the study have important implications for

policy formulation and management practice in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Firstly, workplace inclusion should be institutionalised as a core component of public sector management strategies rather than treated as a peripheral human resource initiative. Management appraisal systems should incorporate inclusion-related indicators such as fairness, participatory leadership, and equitable treatment of employees.

Furthermore, leadership development programmes in tertiary institutions should prioritise inclusive leadership competencies. Training managers to recognise and mitigate unconscious bias, encourage employee voice, and promote psychological safety will enhance inclusive organisational climates.

Lastly, inclusive practices should be embedded within performance management frameworks to ensure that institutional effectiveness is pursued through employee engagement and collaboration rather than solely through bureaucratic controls.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Tertiary institutions should implement regular inclusive leadership training Programmemes for managers and supervisors.
- 2) Participatory decision-making structures should be strengthened to enhance employee involvement and ownership of institutional goals.
- 3) Transparent and equitable reward and promotion systems should be enforced to reduce perceptions of bias and favouritism.
- 4) Workplace inclusion indicators should be integrated into institutional performance evaluation and monitoring systems.
- 5) Anti-discrimination policies should be actively monitored and enforced to sustain inclusive organisational climates.

Abbreviations

α	Cronbach's Alpha
β	Standardised Beta Coefficient
B	Unstandardised Regression Coefficient
CMB	Common Method Bias
DV	Dependent Variable
F	F-Statistic (Analysis of Variance Test Statistic)
IP	Institutional Performance
IV	Independent Variable
MP	Management Practices
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
p	Probability Value (Level of Statistical Significance)
RBV	Resource-Based View

R	Correlation Coefficient
R ²	Coefficient of Determination
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Std.	Standard Deviation
WI	Workplace Inclusion
Z	Z-Statistic (Sobel Test Value)

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this study.

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