

LEADERSHIP TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN MICROFINANCE FINANCE SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the impact of leadership training and the presence of essential leadership skills in training programs on employee performance. The study was designed to test the hypothesis that leadership training can be a significant contributor to performance outcomes and also to determine which components of training make the biggest contribution. A quantitative research design was used to collect data by administering questionnaires and performing regression and ANOVA analysis. The findings showed that the general regression model was statistically significant ($F = 206.703$, $p < 0.05$) which implied that leadership training does play a significant role in influencing employee performance. Yet, the analysis of the coefficients revealed that although certain leadership-related competencies had positive and strong influences on performance, others were not significant, and some had negative impacts. These results implied that training success relies on the quality, relevance and alignment of training material with organizational requirements. It was also suggested in the study that the refinement of training programs must be focused on competencies contributing to effective results, the removal of unproductive elements, and the incorporation of consistent assessment and feedback systems. In this way, organizations will be able to maximize the advantages of leadership development and realize sustainable performance gains.

Keywords: Leadership, Training, Competencies, Employee, Performance, Microfinance.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Leadership is commonly considered to be one of the most important success factors of an organization, especially in the dynamic industries where innovativeness and flexibility are required. The microfinance sector in South West Nigeria is a significant contribution to the financial inclusion process and empowerment of small-scale entrepreneurs, which are very important in poverty alleviation efforts. In spite of the flourishing economy in the region, microfinance institutions (MFIs) experience very high operational challenges. They are a lack of resources, high employee turnover, and competition through fintech startups and conventional banks. The main challenge in dealing with these issues and making MFIs realize both their financial inclusion and economic empowerment mission is good leadership. Nevertheless, the absence of specific microfinance leaders' leadership training programs prevents effective functioning of leaders in these areas, particularly the control over regulatory compliance, technological innovations, and socio-cultural diversity. The importance of

leadership in organizational performance and the long-term sustainability has been clearly developed. Leaders do not simply serve to set strategic goals but they must establish a culture of innovation and efficiency in their organizations. A lack of effective leadership development initiatives in the microfinance sector of South West Nigeria restricts the capacity of managers to address sector-specific issues, including the need to adjust to new regulatory demands and the need to deal with a diverse workforce. These institutions are unable to address the financial and social needs of their clients without the appropriate leadership skills, and therefore, they fail to contribute to the overall socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Lack of leadership capacity is a major performance barrier that microfinance institutions in South West Nigeria are dealing with. The leaders in the sector are faced with high employee turnover, poor operational efficiency, and failure to implement technological change and regulation changes. Existing leadership training initiatives are insufficient as they fail to focus on the particular issues encountered by MFIs in the area which include adhering to the regulations of the Central Bank of Nigeria, equipping them with financial literacy and socio-cultural elements that affect the success of leadership. The leadership development gap does not only impact internal operations, but it also makes MFIs unable to achieve their social and financial objectives completely. This failure to produce capable leaders capable of maneuvering the industry is stunted the potential of the sector to grow, which is needed to propel financial inclusion and financial empowerment of South West Nigeria. Moreover, deficiency in investment in leadership training leads to high turnover rates since workers particularly those who are skilled migrate to organizations that have better opportunities, which are stable or innovative.

The main aim of the study is to determine whether or not leadership training has an outcome on the performance of employees in South West Nigerian microfinance institutions. The research question will be to determine the relationship that exists between leadership training and employee productivity, retention and job satisfaction in the microfinance industry. This research will target the South West of Nigeria, which is Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Ogun states, microfinance institutions. The study will examine how leadership training affects the performance of the organization, especially the performance and productivity of its employees. The paper will also focus on the obstacles that MFIs are going through in the region and how leadership training can assist in solving these issues.

The proposed research will also add some value to the studies of building leadership in the Nigerian microfinance industry. The research will offer practical suggestions to enhance the leadership practices within MFIs in the region by establishing the gaps that currently exist in the current leadership training programs. The recommendations will assist MFI managers, policymakers, and development practitioners develop more efficient and customized leadership programs that will meet the issues of the sector. Finally, the research results will be useful in the wider objectives of financial inclusion, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic development in Nigeria as part of the Vision 2030 agenda of the country.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Leadership Training

Leadership training is crucial for organizational success, especially in the Nigerian microfinance sector, where it directly influences performance and service delivery. On-the-job training equips both managers and employees with the necessary skills and competencies to perform their roles effectively. Without such training, employees may lack clarity on responsibilities, impairing operational efficiency (Cole, 2002). In South West Nigerian microfinance institutions (MFIs), leadership training fosters skills development, adaptability, and alignment of individual capabilities with organizational goals (Cole, 2002; Shaheen, 2013). Training plays a central role in performance management by providing managers with the knowledge needed to lead teams and achieve strategic objectives (Shaheen, 2013). MFIs, where leaders face challenges like regulatory compliance and client diversity, require training to build capacity (Ameeq-ul-Ameeq & Hanif, 2013). Without it, employees struggle to develop new skills or adapt to evolving demands, impacting performance negatively (Elnaga & Amir, 2013).

Leadership training not only improves employee attitudes and capabilities but also enhances organizational competitiveness, particularly in a sector driven by human capital (Brum, 2007). Employees in South West MFIs need training to improve their professional competencies, simplify tasks, and boost productivity (Karim, 2019). Effective leadership training is a structured process that addresses specific needs and improves managers' ability to enhance team performance (Abiodun, 1999). Identifying these needs before implementing training ensures relevance and impact (Herbert, 1990). A well-defined strategy at the strategic, tactical, and operational levels is essential (Motlokoa et al., 2018). At the strategic level, top management in MFIs must prioritize training initiatives based on organizational goals, such as improving client satisfaction and operational efficiency, while addressing the unique challenges of South West Nigeria's microfinance landscape.

2.2 Training Effectiveness

Microfinance Institution effectiveness is the extent of training effectiveness in terms of imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes and performance within the institution (Alvarez et al., 2004). An effective program enhances the skills of the managers and workers, increasing the productivity and enthusiasm (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 1994). It is used to tackle such negative behaviors as dissatisfaction and absenteeism and develop a skilled workforce (Santos et al., 2003). The indicators of effectiveness include learning outcomes and evaluations of employer performance on the job. Good training leads to greater adaptability, innovation and productivity, eliminates the inefficiencies in operations and improves employee involvement (Bentley, 1982; Cole, 2001). Training can help MFIs to enhance performance results such as client satisfaction and operational efficiency within a competitive industry by aligning it with organizational objectives.

2.3 Leadership styles

The leadership style, especially the transactional and transformational style, has a significant influence on performance among microfinance institutions (MFIs) in South West Nigeria. Transactional leadership, which is founded on the path-goal model, emphasizes incentives on achievement of expectations or penalties on misconduct (Burns, 1978). It boosts performance by defining roles and managing it either actively or passively (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership on the other hand encourages employees to rise beyond self-interest in the

furtherance of the organization and contribute to its growth, innovation and flexibility (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1994). This form of style is essential in combating the dynamic issues that MFIs in South West Nigeria have had to deal with since it will inspire employees to take on the change and be aligned with the client-oriented services (Shamir et al., 1993). The two styles are both important in the training of leaders, where stability is balanced with flexibility in a competitive environment.

2.4 Leadership and performance

Transformational and transactional leadership styles have varied effects on performance at South West Nigerian microfinance institutions (MFIs). Transformational leadership is associated with better performance results as a connection between personal and corporate objectives by inspiring and motivating the employees (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 1994). It promotes innovation, increased productivity and client service (Avolio, 1999). Transactional leadership, however, which relies on rewards and management-by-exception, balances routine tasks, but has less effect on performance (Howell and Avolio, 1993). Transformational leadership, when coupled with transactional approaches, improves performance, which contributes to the adaptability and commitment of a leader, and thus it becomes more effective in the case of MFIs in the areas of operational efficiency and client satisfaction (Podsakoff et al., 1990).

2.5 Employee performance

The performance of the employees employed at the South West Nigerian microfinance institutions (MFIs) is assessed in terms of accuracy, completeness, cost, and efficiency (Sultana, 2012). Performance is improved with well-trained leaders as the employees become skilled, confident and feel valued by the organization thus working to achieve the organizational objectives such as client service and operational success (Muzaffar et al., 2012; Batool, 2012). The managers are also important as they create clear standards and fill performance gaps through training (Daft, 1988). Specified training promotes satisfaction and motivation which enhance productivity and achievement of targets (Swart, 2005). This is the case in MFIs where performance influences the quality of services and financial inclusion, and employee contributions are considered in order to guarantee organizational effectiveness and excellence (Motlokoa et al., 2018).

2.6 Leadership Competency

The performance of employees in South West Nigerian microfinance institutions (MFIs) is based on the accuracy, completeness, cost and efficiency standards (Sultana, 2012). Leadership training is an effective approach to improving performance through skills, confidence, and value of employees, in line with organizational objectives such as client service and operational success (Muzaffar et al., 2012; Batool, 2012). The managers are important in that they provide clear standards and close the gaps in performance, which can be achieved through training (Daft, 1988). Specialized training leads to satisfaction and motivation which enhances productivity and target achievement (Swart, 2005). In the context of MFIs, where the quality of services and the financial inclusion of people depend on the performance, the employee contributions are addressed to provide the organizational effectiveness and excellence (Motlokoa et al., 2018).

2.7 Performance and competency impact of training.

In South West Nigerian microfinance institutions (MFIs), leadership training has been found to enhance performance and competency, which leads to institutional success. It improves the staff skills, knowledge, and attitudes as well as fills the performance gaps and matches the individual abilities with organizational objectives such as client satisfaction and efficiency in the operations (Wright and Geroy, 2001; Swart, 2005). Companies that invest in training outdo those that do not and research indicates that it has a positive influence on personal and organizational performance (Guest, 1997; Karim, 2019). Continued training also enables MFIs to keep up with the demands avoiding competency discontinuities and making employees effective in a competitive sector (Swart, 2005).

3.0 THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theory of transformational leadership taught by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 and again reiterated by Bass (1985) indicates that leaders and followers uplift one another due to mutual interaction, motivation and morality. It is defined by four major behaviors that include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Transformational leaders can inspire employees, boost morale and make employees work towards organizational objectives i.e. serving clients and operating efficiently in microfinance institutions (MFIs) in South West Nigeria (Ismail et al., 2009). The study is anchored on this theory which connects the training of leaders to better performance and competency in MFIs. It however does not explicitly show which leadership style would be most effective in business performance and this is what this study tries to determine. The transactional leadership theory, developed and perfected by Bernard Bass (1981) centers on a process of exchange between the leaders and the followers, in which rewards and punishments encourage task performance. Transactional leadership in MFIs guarantees stability of operation at the cost of innovation and flexibility. This paper is an investigation of the effect of the two leadership styles on performance in MFIs.

3.1 Empirical Review

Saira et al. (2021) conducted a study in Pakistan to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and employee outcomes, with psychological empowerment as the mediator. The study established a positive and significant influence of transformational leadership on psychological empowerment. In Nigeria, Liman et al. (2020) focused on the moderating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between multi-level marketing and distributor retention, finding job satisfaction as a key moderator. In Uganda, Mugizi et al. (2019) explored the impact of transformational leadership on teacher retention in Bushenyi-Ishaka, revealing a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. Similarly, Almas et al. (2020) conducted a study in Spain on volunteer employees in non-profit organizations, finding a positive significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention, with satisfaction partially mediating this relationship through organizational commitment and role loyalty.

Judeh and Abou-moghli (2019) investigated the effect of transformational leadership on employees' intent to stay in the textile industry, showing a positive and significant effect

mediated by self-efficacy. Nkatha (2017) used transformational leadership theory to study employee engagement in microfinance institutions, identifying that employees perform a cost-benefit analysis to decide whether to stay or leave. In the microfinance sector, Muriuki and Ombaba (2018) found a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and staff performance, extending the investigation to staff retention. Miller et al. (2018) studied 68 executives in a major US firm and found that leadership development programs significantly improved leadership effectiveness, with an increase in transformational leadership behaviors mediating this impact. Giber et al. (2018) examined the response of 154 managers at a medium-sized firm to a leadership development program, finding significant improvements in their leadership capacity. Lastly, Knippenberg et al. (2019) studied 125 executives at a multinational business, demonstrating that leadership development programs had a favorable impact on leadership effectiveness, mediated by heightened self-awareness.

3.2 Methodology

The research design used in this study was a survey research design to investigate the effects of leadership training on the employee performance in the South West Nigerian microfinance institutions (MFIs). The data were collected using primary data through structured questionnaire on 100 members of staff (managers and employees) in 10 MFIs in Ondo and Ekiti. The selection of MFIs was done using a purposive sampling method of MFIs in terms of the scale of operation, the geographical area covered, and participation in leadership training programs. In every MFI, stratified random sampling shall be used in the selection of managers and employees with respect to leadership and performance. The linear regression model employed in the study is to determine the relationship between perceived leadership training effectiveness (X1) and availability of key competencies in training programs (X2) and employee performance (Y). The questionnaire was based on 5-points Likert scale to collect data regarding the perceptions of the training impact and competency availability.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Analysis

The source of data used in this study is the questionnaire administered to key personnel of 10 selected microfinance institutions in South West Nigeria. Out of the 95 questionnaires distributed, 87 were successfully retrieved which represents 91.6% of the total questionnaires distributed, while 8 questionnaires which represent 8.4% were not retrieved due to time and unwillingness of respondents. The details are presented in the tables below.

Table 1: Analysis of Questionnaires Administered

S/No	Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Questionnaire retrieved & used	87	91.6
2	Questionnaire not retrieved	8	8.4
	Total	95	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The above table shows that out of 95 questionnaires distributed, 87 were retrieved, representing 91.6%, while 8 questionnaires, representing 8.4%, were not retrieved.

Table 2: Analysis of Respondent Demographics

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
(Male)	54	62.1
(Female)	33	37.9
	87	100
Academic Qualification (SSCE)		
(University Level)	46	52.9
(Postgraduate Level)	23	26.4
	87	100
Years of Service (Less than 5 years)		
(6 – 10 years)	26	29.9
(11 – 15 years)	11	12.6
(16 – 20 years)	6	6.9
(Above 20 years)	2	2.3
	87	100

The table provides demographic data on the respondents in the study, including gender, academic qualifications, and years of service. Among the 87 respondents, a majority (62.1%) are male, while 37.9% are female, indicating a higher representation of males in the sample. Regarding academic qualifications, over half (52.9%) of the respondents have attained a university level of education, followed by 26.4% with postgraduate qualifications, and 20.7% at the secondary level, suggesting a well-educated sample overall. In terms of years of service, 48.3% of respondents have worked in their current role for less than 5 years, while 29.9% have between 6 to 10 years of experience. Fewer respondents have longer tenures, with only 6.9% having 16 to 20 years, and a small portion (2.3%) with more than 20 years of service. This distribution highlights a relatively younger workforce in terms of experience in the microfinance sector.

4.2 Reliability Test

When the linear regression model's assumptions are correct, ordinary least squares (OLS) gives efficient and unbiased parameter estimates (Lakshmi, Mahaboob, Rajaiah, & Narayana, 2021). To ensure that these assumptions were satisfied, the variables were subjected to a reliability test. The reliability test was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the study's measurement items. Reliability highlights how effectively the items in the scale are related to one another. According to Hee (2014), the closer a Cronbach's Alpha value is to 1, the higher the internal consistency, and a minimum acceptable threshold of 0.7 is generally preferred. The study is comprised of two independent variables Perceived Effectiveness of Leadership

Training and Availability of Key Leadership Competencies in Training Programs and one dependent variable, Employee Performance.

Table 3

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.965	10

Source: Author's Computation (2025)

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal that the overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the 10 items used in the study was 0.965, which is far above the minimum acceptable level of 0.7. This indicates an excellent level of internal consistency among the items, suggesting that the instrument is highly reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.978 ^a	0.956	0.952	0.23044

a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Training and Availability of Key Leadership Competencies in Training Programs, **Employee Performance**

Source: Author's Computation (2025)

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between leadership training, availability of key leadership competencies in training programs, and employee performance in microfinance institutions in South West Nigeria. The model summary is presented in Table 4. The results reveal that the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.978, indicating a very strong positive relationship between the independent variables (leadership training and availability of leadership competencies) and the dependent variable (employee performance). This implies that improvements in leadership training and competency development are strongly associated with enhanced employee performance. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.956, suggesting that approximately 95.6% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by leadership training and the availability of leadership competencies in training programs. The remaining 4.4% may be attributed to other factors not included in the model. The Adjusted R Square of 0.952 further confirms the robustness of the model, taking into account the number of predictors. This value being close to the R Square indicates minimal loss of explanatory power when adjusting for the number of variables in the model. Finally, the Standard Error of the Estimate (0.23044) is relatively low, implying that the model has a good fit and the predicted values of employee performance are close to the actual observed values.

Table 5: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	98.791	9	10.977	206.703	0.000 ^b
	Residual	4.514	85	0.053		
	Total	103.305	94			
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Training and Availability of Key Leadership Competencies in Training Programs						

The results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) confirm that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-statistic of 206.703 at a probability level of $p < 0.05$. This indicates that the independent variables leadership training and the availability of key leadership competencies jointly exert a significant influence on employee performance in microfinance institutions in South West Nigeria. The high F-value demonstrates that the model provides a good fit and that the explanatory variables significantly predict variations in employee performance.

Table 6: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-0.182	0.112		-1.624	0.1080
	Leadership training programs in my institution are well-structured and effectively delivered.	0.009	0.058	0.011	0.162	0.8720
	The leadership training I have received has improved my ability to perform my job duties efficiently.	0.439	0.155	0.507	2.839	0.0060
	Training programs in my institution enhance problem-solving and decision-making skills among employees.	0.376	0.053	0.395	7.08	0.0000
	Leadership training has a positive impact on employee motivation and work commitment.	-0.414	0.151	-0.479	-2.748	0.0070
	Regular leadership training in my institution contributes significantly to overall employee productivity.	-0.187	0.078	-0.183	-2.406	0.0180
	Leadership training in my institution covers essential communication and interpersonal skills.	0.009	0.074	0.011	0.122	0.9030
	Training programs adequately address conflict resolution and team management skills.	0.204	0.042	0.201	4.871	0.0000
	My institution's leadership training equips employees with strategic thinking and planning competencies	-0.002	0.077	-0.002	-0.027	0.9780
	Training programs in my institution are tailored to meet the practical leadership needs of microfinance operations.	0.609	0.095	0.572	6.405	0.0000
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance						

Source: Author's Computation (2025)

The coefficients analysis further provides insights into the individual contributions of the predictors. Some training dimensions, such as the perception that leadership training improves job performance ($p = 0.006$), that training enhances problem-solving and decision-making skills ($p = 0.000$), that conflict resolution and team management skills are addressed ($p = 0.000$), and that training is tailored to practical leadership needs of microfinance operations ($p = 0.000$), were found to have strong positive and statistically significant effects on employee performance. These results highlight the critical importance of problem-solving, teamwork, and practical-oriented training in driving employee effectiveness. However, the analysis also revealed that certain predictors were not statistically significant, such as the belief that training programs are well-structured and effectively delivered ($p = 0.872$), that communication and interpersonal skills are adequately covered ($p = 0.903$), and that strategic thinking and planning competencies are equipped ($p = 0.978$). This suggests that while these areas may be included in leadership training, they do not translate into measurable improvements in performance within the sampled institutions.

Interestingly, two variables exhibited significant negative effects. The perception that leadership training positively impacts motivation and work commitment ($B = -0.414$, $p = 0.007$) and that regular leadership training contributes to overall productivity ($B = -0.187$, $p = 0.018$) were both negatively associated with performance. This implies that frequent or generic leadership training, if not well aligned with organizational needs, may create redundancy or training fatigue, thereby reducing its intended motivational effect on employees. The results suggest that while leadership training is an essential driver of employee performance, its effectiveness depends on the quality, relevance, and practical orientation of the training content. Specifically, programs that are tailored to the unique operational realities of microfinance institutions, and those that build problem-solving and teamwork skills, appear to deliver the most significant improvements in performance.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the impact of leadership training and leadership competencies on employee performance in South West Nigerian microfinance institutions. Findings indicate that leadership training significantly improves performance, especially when it enhances problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, and conflict resolution. However, generic training programs showed negligible or negative effects. These results align with previous research, such as Knippenberg et al. (2019) and Giber et al. (2018), which demonstrated that targeted leadership development improves leadership efficacy and performance. The study also supports findings from Saira et al. (2021) and Liman et al. (2020), highlighting the positive impact of leadership on employee empowerment and retention. However, the study identified a divergence, where repetitive training negatively affected motivation, suggesting that poorly structured programs lead to disengagement. Overall, the research confirms that effective, context-specific leadership training is crucial for enhancing employee performance in Nigerian MFIs, emphasizing the importance of quality and relevance in training design.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of leadership training and the availability of key leadership competencies in training programs on employee performance in microfinance institutions. The

regression and ANOVA results confirmed that leadership training significantly influences employee outcomes, with the overall model being statistically significant. However, the coefficient analysis revealed mixed results: some training components positively impacted performance, while others were either insignificant or negatively affected performance. These findings suggest that leadership training, when well-structured and aligned with relevant competencies, enhances employee performance. Conversely, poorly designed or irrelevant training programs can have little to no effect or even diminish effectiveness. Therefore, organizations must recognize that not all aspects of leadership training contribute equally to performance outcomes. In conclusion, while leadership training is essential for organizational growth and employee success, its impact is heavily dependent on the quality, relevance, and implementation of training programs.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, organizations should refine their leadership training programs by reviewing and emphasizing competencies that have a proven positive impact on employee performance. Ineffective components, identified as statistically insignificant or negatively associated with performance, should be revised, redesigned, or removed. Additionally, training programs should adopt a needs-based approach, ensuring they are tailored to the specific needs of employees and aligned with organizational goals, rather than relying on generic modules. Continuous evaluation of training programs is also essential, with regular assessments to determine their effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. Furthermore, leadership training should integrate practical applications, such as real-life case studies, mentorship, and hands-on exercises, to strengthen its impact on employee performance. Lastly, organizations should encourage employee feedback on training content and delivery to ensure programs remain relevant and impactful.

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