

## TALENT RETENTION IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COMPENSATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** *This research assessed the role of compensation and career development on employee retention in Nigeria's civil service. The Nigerian civil service, being the mainstay of government administration, experienced severe retention issues, which had effects on the delivery of services and policy implementation. Social Exchange Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory were used as the theoretical frameworks to explain the operation of reciprocity and motivation in retaining civil servants. The study employed a descriptive study design on the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC), Lagos State Civil Service, Ministry of Labour and Employment, and Office of the Head of Service, which were selected purposely due to their size and ongoing workforce reform. A sample of 452 management and staff, including civil servants, was surveyed through hard and soft copies of questionnaires and data were analysed using SEM-Partial Least Square (PLS). The SEM-PLS analysis confirmed that both compensation ( $\beta = 0.472$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and career development ( $\beta = 0.536$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly and positively influence talent retention in the Nigerian civil service. Among the two, career development showed a stronger effect, indicating that opportunities for growth, training, and promotion are slightly more influential than pay-related factors. This highlights the critical need for non-monetary incentives in retaining skilled public sector employees. As a result, civil service in Nigeria should no longer rely solely on salaries for retaining staff and should focus instead on improving staff career paths and continuous professional development.*

**Keywords:** *civil service; compensation; career development; public sector; talent retention*

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## **1. Introduction**

Talent retention in the civil service is a pressing issue for many countries, particularly in Africa, where public sector performance is crucial for national development. The Nigerian civil service has found it difficult to keep its most skilled staff, as many have decided to seek work in private industries or abroad. Salary and career opportunities are two main reasons employees tend to remain with the company. Findings indicate that inadequate compensation and fewer opportunities for career advancement can cause many civil servants to leave their jobs (Anas, Alahakone, & Perdakis, 2020). Many other African nations face similar problems in their public sectors. Studies in several countries have found that the influence of pay and career goals on keeping talent is not always the same. For example, Kock and Burke (2008) explained that overseeing talent in the public service in South Africa can help make services more effective. Barkhuizen and Masale (2022) stress in Botswana how having a leadership talent mindset helps with talent retention strategies. Proof shows career development programs have delivered positive outcomes for Tanzania's civil service (Augossy, Msacky, & Magasi, 2024). They prove that while several nations work their way through these troubles, Nigeria has yet to successfully address them.

Looking at eight countries—South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia—uncovers big differences in how they try to keep their talent. Putting focus on performance appraisal in South Africa has resulted in happier employees and less employee turnover (Burhanudin & Wijanarko, 2022). In Kenya, many civil servants leave the service because the pay reflects a poor compensation framework (Ibidunni et al., 2016). Likewise, in Ghana, because career development is not organized, public servants are more likely to leave their jobs (Onah & Anikwe, 2016). This proves that for Nigeria to keep its best civil servants, it needs to combine incentives and job advancement plans.

Failure to keep talent in the civil service has serious results. Frequent changes in government personnel tend to result in gaps in information, make services less effective and add to the cost of hiring. As an example, Anas and Isichei (2024) found that civil servants in Nigeria losing job satisfaction became less committed to their work and public service. A poor government commitment in this area may lead to less productive employees and lower credibility for government institutions among the public. Because Nigeria's civil service keeps encountering these problems, it becomes important to find ways to reduce their impact. Although much research exists on talent management, there is not enough work that explores the connection

between pay and career development and how they relate to retaining people in the Nigerian civil service. Most of the research has been on single variables, so there is little practical advice for those making decisions about policy. Therefore, the research question guiding this study is: How do compensation and career development influence talent retention in the Nigerian civil service?

## **2. Literature and Theoretical Synthesis**

### **2.1 Talent Retention**

Organisations use talent retention methods and procedures to make sure their best employees don't quit. Retaining employees is vital for human resource management because frequent employee departures can cost an organisation a lot and disrupt its activities. Many previous studies have noted that the things affecting whether talent is kept include how employees feel about their jobs, workplace atmosphere and pay (Abubakar, Oluwade, & Ibrahim, 2022). In fact, studies show that, among other things, having a friendly workplace and giving opportunities for career advancement helps organisations keep their staff for a longer time (Anas & Isichei, 2024). The impact of talent retention on organisational performance is obvious, since skilled employees who stay increase both productivity and the company's body of knowledge. The Nigerian civil service has come to see talent retention as important because of brain drain and tough competition for jobs. The authors noted that difficulties in keeping skilled employees in the Nigerian public sector are mainly caused by poor levels of compensation and a lack of room for growth. For this reason, discovering why people stay or leave the civil service in Nigeria is important for making strategies that address these matters and improve results.

### **2.2 Compensation**

The term compensation includes the earnings and other benefits provided to workers based on their work. It helps determine whether people are satisfied and choose to stay with the company. Several studies have pointed out that fair compensation benefits can support and hopefully increase employees' motivation and commitment (Burhanudin & Wijanarko, 2022). For example, research in the banking area has shown that giving attractive compensation to employees can improve how many remain with the company (Chiekezie, Emejulu, & Nwanneka, 2017). And if compensation is insufficient, many workers might seek to move to better-paying jobs. A lot of people working in the Nigerian civil service disagree with their compensation, given how much higher the cost of living has risen and

how much is expected of them. It has been shown by Pillah (2023) that compensation for workers in the Nigerian civil service has not been adjusted for inflation, lowering morale and boosting employee turnover. This proves that compensation policies need to be revisited so they are in line with what is expected by civil servants.

### **2.3 Career Development**

Salau et al. (2020) argued that helping employees advance in their careers and reach their goals is the main focus of career development. When organisations help employees improve their knowledge, they are more likely to remain working there (Ituma et al., 2024). It has been shown by research that organisations with good career development schemes see reduced staff exits and improved employee involvement (Mabaso et al., 2021). Career development programs in the Ministry of Works in Tanzania have helped keep employees longer and make them feel satisfied with their work (Augossy, Msacky, & Magasi, 2024). A lack of structured career development efforts is considered a primary reason why good talent is leaving the Nigerian civil service. According to Anas and Isichei, service workers sometimes feel blocked in their position because there is not enough opportunity to move up. For these reasons, setting up good career development approaches is important for boosting staff motivation and lifting the performance of the civil service in Nigeria.

### **2.4 Nigerian Civil Service**

The Nigerian civil service plays a vital role in the country's governance and administration. It serves as the backbone for implementing government policies and providing essential services to the people. Despite its importance, the civil service has struggled with several persistent issues such as bureaucratic delays, widespread corruption, and low employee morale (Gberevbie, 2010). These challenges have damaged its public image, making it harder to attract and retain skilled professionals. Studies show that the efficiency of the civil service is strongly tied to the quality of its personnel, underlining the importance of solid talent management practices (Ikeji, Agba, & Ogaboh, 2011). Additionally, critics have pointed out the system's inflexible structures and its failure to adequately address employee needs. According to Ajiteru, Sulaiman, and Abalaka (2022), the recruitment and retention methods used by Nigeria's Ministry of Education fall short in solving the problems faced by civil servants. This has led to high staff turnover and diminished commitment within the workforce. To enhance the effectiveness of the civil service, it is crucial to adopt innovative talent retention strategies that reflect the unique realities of Nigeria's public sector.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

Guiding this study are Social Exchange Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Blau's Social Exchange Theory from 1964 contends that relationships form because individuals strive to get more reward than cost in what they do for each other (Anas, Alahakone, & Perdikis, 2020). To retain talent, this theory predicts that workers will stick around if they think their efforts are recognized by receiving adequate pay and chances for advancement in their jobs. This structure can be useful to look at employee retention in the Nigerian civil service, since employees often leave due to feeling that there is unequal pay and opportunities for advancement. In 1959, Frederick Herzberg introduced the Two-Factor Theory which separates hygiene factors from motivators influencing satisfaction at work (Ameen & Baharom, 2019). Salaries and the conditions at work must be dealt with and rewards such as recognition and chances for growth matter a lot for keeping workers content and helping them stay with the company. In Nigeria's civil service, solving hygiene problems by offering better pay and chances to advance can strongly improve the rate at which employees stay. Through using these theories, this research examines how compensation, career opportunities and the retention of top talent are related in the Nigerian civil service.

## **3. Methods and Materials**

### **3.1 Research Design and Philosophy**

This research adopted a descriptive design to explore how talent is retained within Nigeria's civil service. It focused specifically on four key institutions: the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC), the Lagos State Civil Service, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the Office of the Head of Service. These organisations were selected intentionally due to their size and ongoing efforts toward workforce reform. The descriptive design allowed for a detailed investigation into the current strategies in place for retaining talent, as well as how effective these methods have been across the selected institutions. By using a quantitative method, the study aimed to collect concrete, measurable data that would shed light on the underlying factors impacting employee retention in this sector.

### **3.2 Participants and Procedure**

A total of 452 individuals, including both management and civil service staff, took part in the study. Questionnaires were shared in both digital and printed formats to reach a wide range of participants from the selected institutions. These individuals

were carefully chosen using a purposive sampling technique, specifically targeting those directly involved in managing or overseeing talent retention strategies. The questionnaire covered several critical areas such as compensation, opportunities for career growth, and overall job satisfaction. The number of participants was determined based on estimates of the workforce size within the institutions under review, ensuring that the results could reliably represent the broader trends within Nigeria's civil service

### **3.3 Materials**

A structured questionnaire served as the main tool for data collection. It was designed to capture essential information on the key elements that influence talent retention. Questions were derived from well-established and validated scales used in prior research to ensure consistency and reliability. The questionnaire focused on various aspects of the employee experience, including how civil servants perceive their compensation packages, the availability of career advancement opportunities, their level of job satisfaction, and their intentions to stay or leave their positions. This approach ensured the data captured both the general trends and the subtle dynamics influencing employee decisions

### **3.4 Measures and Analysis**

The data gathered from the survey were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. This method was selected for its ability to deal with complex relationships between multiple variables and to identify causal links. The analysis helped to highlight how different factors – such as pay, professional development, and workplace satisfaction – interact and influence whether employees choose to remain in the civil service. To ensure that the measures used were both reliable and valid, statistical tests like Cronbach's alpha were conducted. Ultimately, the results of this analysis aim to provide policymakers and administrative leaders with actionable insights into how talent retention can be strengthened across Nigeria's public service parastatals and agencies.

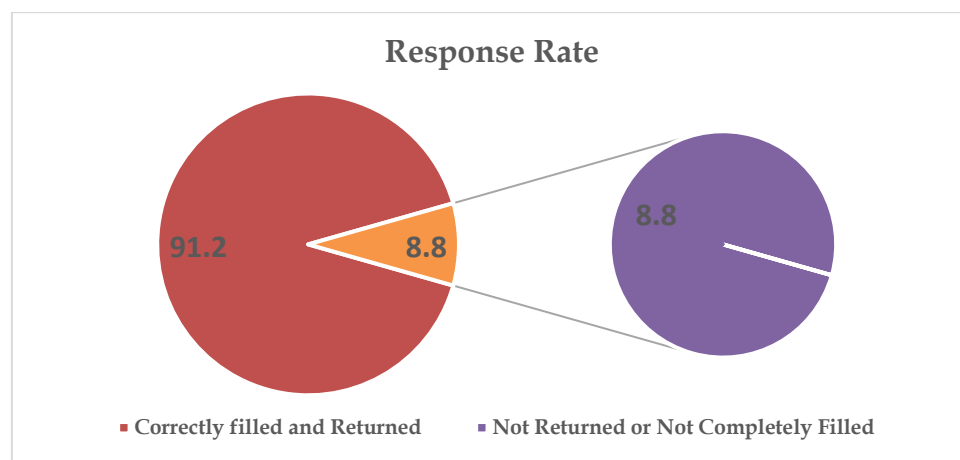
## **4. Data Analysis and Discussion**

The unit of analysis for this study comprises management and staff of the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC), Lagos State Civil Service, Ministry of Labour and Employment, and the Office of the Head of Service. These institutions were selected purposely due to their size and ongoing workforce reform efforts. A total of 452 copies of the questionnaire were administered via both hardcopy and digital means.

Of this number, 412 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, while 40 were either not returned or invalid, resulting in a 91.2% response rate, as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

**Table 1. Response Rate**

Sample Size	Number	Percentage (%)
Correctly filled and Returned	412	91.2
Not Returned or Not Completely Filled	40	8.8
Total	452	100



**Figure 1. Distribution and Retrieval Rate of Questionnaire**

#### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 412 valid questionnaires were analyzed. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2. These individuals cut across four major government institutions and were selected based on their current roles in HRM, policy execution, and workforce development.

**Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 412)**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	239	58.0
	Female	173	42.0
Age	21–30 years	74	18.0
	31–40 years	169	41.0
	41–50 years	112	27.2
	Above 50 years	57	13.8
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	146	35.4
	Master's Degree	197	47.8
	Doctorate (PhD)	36	8.7
	Professional Certifications	33	8.0
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	68	16.5
	5–10 years	143	34.7
	11–15 years	119	28.9
	Above 15 years	82	19.9
Institutional Affiliation	FCSC	107	26.0
	Lagos State Civil Service	129	31.3
	Ministry of Labour & Employment	93	22.6
	Office of Head of Service	83	20.1

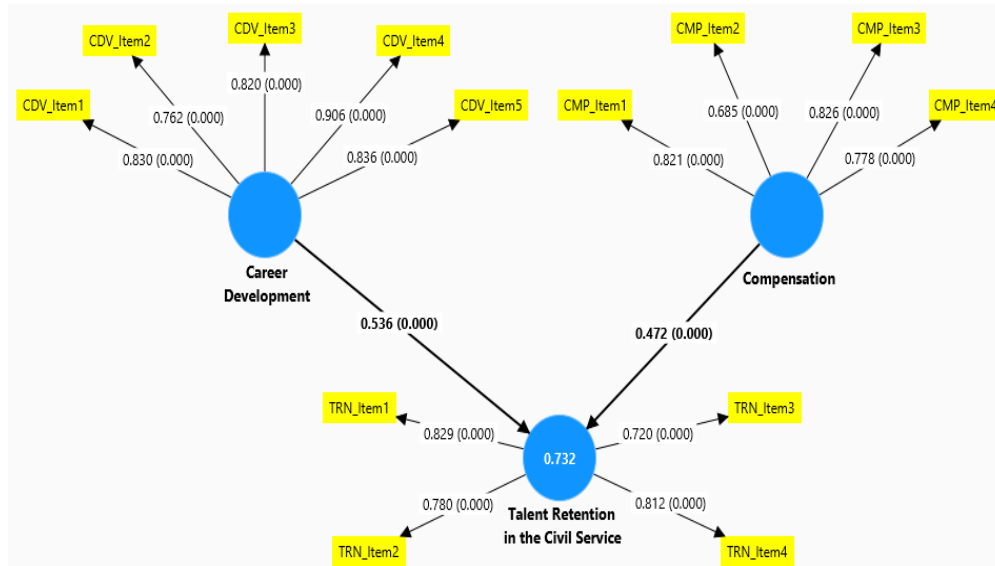
The demographic spread reflects a balanced representation across key civil service bodies. With 58% male and 42% female participation, the study captures gender inclusivity in administrative roles. The dominant age group (31–40 years) represents mid-career professionals who are most likely affected by compensation and career advancement strategies. More than 55% of respondents possess at least a Master's degree, highlighting a relatively educated workforce. The majority (83.5%) have over 5 years of experience, strengthening the credibility of the feedback gathered regarding long-term policy effects.

#### 4.2 SEM-PLS Results on Talent Retention

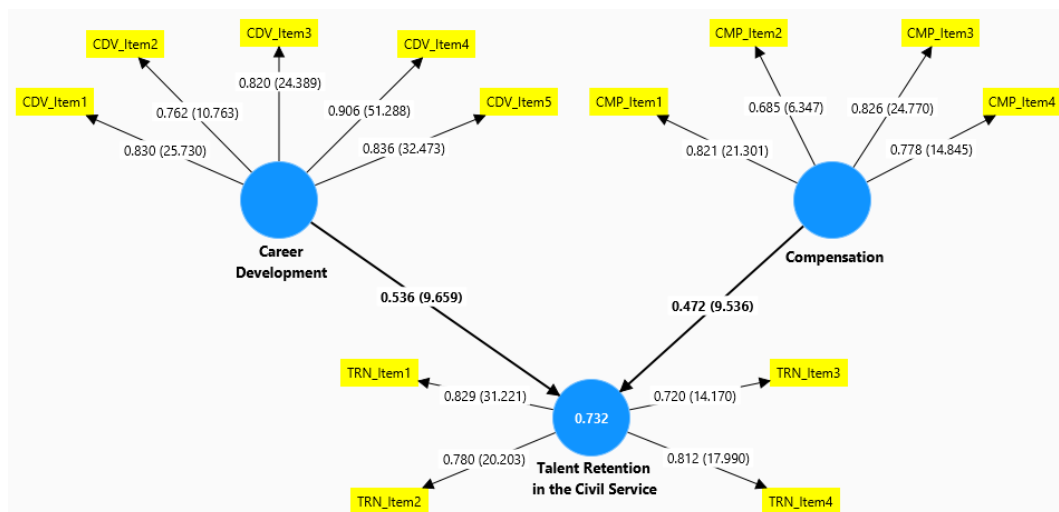
The Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was employed to test the impact of compensation and career development on talent retention in the civil service. Figures 2 to 3 demonstrate the path coefficients, bootstrapping results, and histogram distributions of the structural model. These visual outputs illustrate the strength and significance of the relationships between



compensation, career development, and talent retention. The statistical summary of these findings is presented in Table 3.



**Figure 2. Bootstrapping of p-Values for the Impact of Compensation and Career Development on Talent Retention in the Nigerian Civil Service**



**Figure 3. Bootstrapping of T-values for the Impact of Compensation and Career Development on Talent Retention in the Nigerian Civil Service**

**Table 3. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing**

Path Relationship	$\beta$ (Beta Value)	t-Value	p-Value	Significance
Compensation $\rightarrow$ Talent Retention	0.472	9.539	0.000	Significant
Career Development $\rightarrow$ Talent Retention	0.536	9.659	0.000	Significant

The results from the Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) revealed that both compensation and career development play a crucial role in influencing talent retention within Nigeria's civil service. Specifically, the analysis showed a path coefficient of  $\beta = 0.472$  for compensation, which indicates a moderately strong and statistically significant relationship ( $t = 9.539$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports earlier research by Chiekezie, Emejulu, and Nwanneka (2017), as well as Pillah (2023), both of whom stressed the importance of fair and well-structured compensation systems in enhancing employee motivation and reducing turnover. The findings are also in line with the work of Franca and Arzenšek (2025), who observed that equitable pay practices in European civil service institutions have helped improve employee commitment and performance.

Career development had a slightly stronger effect on talent retention with a  $\beta = 0.536$ , also statistically significant ( $t = 9.659$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that structured progression opportunities, training, and skill enhancement initiatives are more critical in influencing civil servants' decisions to remain in their roles. The findings resonate with Ituma et al. (2024), who examined the Nigerian civil service and found that the absence of career planning structures leads to disengagement and attrition. Additionally, Augossy, Msacky, and Magasi (2024) confirmed similar patterns in the Tanzanian Ministry of Works, demonstrating how career growth pathways reduce employee turnover. Moreover, the findings support the views of Burhanudin and Wijanarko (2022), Ibidunni et al. (2016) and Pandita and Ray (2018) and Salau et al. (2020), who asserted that poor compensation and lack of career advancement are twin drivers of high turnover intention across government agencies. Within the Nigerian context, Gberville (2010) had earlier warned that stagnated promotion and lack of skill enrichment were major deterrents to civil service retention.

### 4.3 Model Fit and R-Square Values

The model summary, as shown in Table 6, reveals an R-square ( $R^2$ ) value of 0.732 for the endogenous construct, *Talent Retention*. This indicates that 73.2% of the variance in talent retention among civil servants can be explained jointly by the two predictor variables—compensation and career development. This high  $R^2$  value demonstrates

a strong explanatory power of the model, suggesting that these two HR factors are critically important determinants of employee retention in the Nigerian civil service. In practical terms, the model's fit validates the structural relationships established through SEM-PLS, reinforcing that improvements in compensation schemes and structured career development initiatives are not just beneficial but essential to sustaining civil service talent.

**Table 6. Model Summary**

Endogenous Construct	R-Square (R <sup>2</sup> )
Talent Retention	0.732

The implications for the Nigerian public sector are both strategic and urgent. Given the strong model fit, public sector HRM frameworks must prioritize equitable remuneration systems and clearly defined career progression paths as foundational pillars for reform. This is particularly important in light of high attrition rates, low morale, and increasing migration of talent to the private sector or abroad. Policy reforms that institutionalize periodic salary reviews, introduce performance-based rewards, and offer professional development programs can significantly enhance employee retention. Furthermore, aligning civil service HR practices with global best practices—as supported by this study—can foster institutional stability, reduce recruitment costs, and build a committed, high-performing public workforce capable of delivering on national development goals.

## 5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study affirm that both compensation and career development have statistically significant and positive effects on talent retention in the Nigerian civil service. The results from the SEM-PLS analysis indicate that career development has a slightly stronger influence compared to compensation. This demonstrates that fostering an enabling environment for career growth and providing fair, competitive compensation packages are not optional, but imperative for civil service reform and sustainability. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Nigerian government, through institutions such as the Federal Civil Service Commission, Office of the Head of Service, and relevant ministries, institutionalize structured and transparent career development frameworks. These should include mentorship schemes, periodic training, clearly defined promotion criteria, and support for professional certification.

Career stagnation often leads to demotivation and exits; hence, addressing it would not only improve retention but also enhance employee performance and institutional memory. Insights from related studies (e.g., Augossy et al., 2024; Ituma et al., 2024) confirm that when public servants see a clear pathway for progression, their commitment to the service increases significantly. Lastly, compensation policies must be reformed to align with economic realities and employee expectations. This includes not only competitive salary structures but also allowances, pension security, health insurance, and performance-based incentives. The work of Franca and Arzenšek (2025) and Gberevbie (2010) has shown that remuneration reform in public administration is directly linked to reduced turnover and higher morale. Nigerian civil service compensation currently lags behind both private sector standards and regional public service benchmarks. Thus, budgetary allocations must reflect a strategic investment in human capital, rather than viewing salaries as mere overhead costs.

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