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Employee Motivation, Reward Systems, And Talent Retention In The Nigerian Public Service: Challenges And Policy Implications

Onyemaechi OJUGBELI
Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
Email: ojugbeli123@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Employee motivation, reward systems and talent retention constitute critical dimensions of human resource management and public-sector performance. However, the public service continues to experience challenges associated with inadequate remuneration, delayed promotion, limited career advancement, weak recognition systems, politicization of personnel administration, poor working conditions, and reliance on recent peer-reviewed journal articles and other conditions, inequitable reward distribution, inadequate professional development, and declining employee morale. These challenges have increased concerns about the ability of public institutions to attract, motivate and retain highly skilled personnel. This study examined the relationship between employee motivation, reward systems and talent retention in the Nigerian public service, with particular attention to the challenges confronting existing human resource practices and their implications for public-sector policy. The study adopted a qualitative narrative literature-review design and relied on recent peer-reviewed journal articles and relevant scholarly publications, particularly studies published between 2024 and 2026. Data were subjected to thematic content analysis. The findings indicate that employee motivation in the Nigerian public service is multidimensional and cannot be explained by salary alone. Monetary compensation remains important, particularly under conditions of inflation and declining purchasing power. The paper concludes that talent retention in the Nigerian public service requires an integrated reward architecture that combines competitive compensation with career development, merit-based advancement, recognition, employee participation, professional development and improved working conditions. It recommends the institutionalisation of transparent reward policies, periodic compensation review, merit-based promotion, strategic talent management, performance-linked recognition, leadership development, digital human-resource systems and stronger accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: Employee Motivation, Reward Systems, Talent Retention, Nigerian Public Service, Compensation, Career Development, Public Administration, Human Resource Management.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Human resources constitute one of the most important assets available to any organisation. Financial resources, infrastructure, technology and institutional structures cannot independently produce organisational outcomes without competent, committed and motivated employees. This observation is particularly important in the public service because government policies and programmes are ultimately implemented by public

employees. The quality of public administration therefore depends substantially on the extent to which employees are motivated, adequately rewarded and retained within public institutions. Employee motivation refers broadly to the forces that stimulate, direct and sustain an employee's effort toward the achievement of organisational and individual goals. Motivation determines the intensity with which employees work, the persistence of their effort and the direction of their behaviour. In public administration, motivation has an additional dimension because public employees often work in environments where financial incentives are constrained by government budgets, bureaucratic regulations and standardised salary structures (Okolie & Bisina, 2026). Consequently, public-sector motivation involves both extrinsic factors, such as salary, allowances, promotion and job security, and intrinsic factors, such as recognition, meaningful work, responsibility, achievement and opportunities for personal development.

Reward systems represent the mechanisms through which organisations provide employees with financial and non-financial returns for their contribution. A reward system may include basic salary, allowances, bonuses, promotions, pensions, recognition, training opportunities, flexible work arrangements, career development and other employment benefits. The effectiveness of a reward system depends not merely on the amount of reward provided but also on whether employees perceive the reward as fair, timely, transparent and related to their contribution (Okolie & Egbon, 2024). The relationship between motivation and reward is particularly important in the Nigerian public service. Public employees operate within an environment characterised by changing economic conditions, increasing cost of living, bureaucratic constraints and evolving expectations concerning professional development and career progression. Under such conditions, an employee may remain formally employed while becoming psychologically disengaged from the organisation. Therefore, retention should not simply be understood as the ability of an organisation to prevent employees from resigning. Effective retention involves maintaining a workforce that is committed, competent, productive and willing to develop within the organisation.

Recent Nigerian research confirms the importance of these relationships. Oladejo and Saka (2024), in a study of the Ogun State Civil Service, found that the existing compensation system was insufficient to meet employees' basic needs and argued for a broader motivational approach that includes non-monetary factors. Similarly, Okolie and Egbon (2024), in their study of the Delta State Civil Service Commission, reported that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly influenced employee commitment. The significance of employee motivation has also been demonstrated beyond conventional reward arrangements. Lodikero and Akeredolu (2024), through a systematic review of the Nigerian public sector, identified recognition, job security, promotion and growth opportunities as significant motivational factors associated with productivity and satisfaction. This finding suggests that public-sector employees respond not only to monetary incentives but also to organisational treatment, career prospects and the perceived value attached to their contributions.

Talent retention has consequently become a strategic concern. Highly skilled employees possess knowledge, institutional memory and specialised competencies that are difficult and expensive to replace (Clinton, 2025). When experienced personnel leave, public organisations lose not only individual

employees but also institutional knowledge and accumulated expertise. The consequences can include delays in policy implementation, increased recruitment and training costs, declining service quality and weakened organisational continuity. Salau (2025) examined talent retention in the Nigerian civil service and focused specifically on compensation and career development. Using data from selected public institutions and structural equation modelling, the study demonstrated the relevance of these factors to employee retention. This reinforces the argument that talent retention requires a strategic approach rather than an exclusive emphasis on salary.

The Nigerian public service therefore faces a central human-resource challenge: how can government institutions motivate employees sufficiently to perform effectively while creating reward and career systems that encourage talented personnel to remain in the service? The question is important because the public service performs functions that cannot be adequately sustained through short-term recruitment alone. Government requires experienced administrators, economists, accountants, engineers, medical professionals, legal practitioners, planners, information-technology specialists and other skilled personnel. If talented employees continuously perceive the private sector, international organisations or other labour markets as offering better rewards and career prospects, the public service risks losing precisely the human capital it needs to modernise.

Recent research on talent management in Nigerian public enterprises further demonstrates that recruitment, succession planning and performance management are connected to employee performance. Offiong, Jibril and Nuhu (2025) examined talent management practices in selected Nigerian public enterprises and focused on recruitment, succession planning and performance management. This indicates that retention should be considered as part of a broader talent-management system involving attraction, development, deployment, engagement and succession. The problem is therefore multidimensional (Clinton, 2025). Inadequate pay may undermine motivation, but increasing salary alone may not solve retention problems where promotion is delayed, training opportunities are limited, leadership is unsupportive or employees perceive the organisation as unfair. Similarly, career development may not be sufficient if employees experience poor working conditions or inadequate compensation.

The central argument of this seminar is that employee motivation, reward systems and talent retention are interconnected components of strategic human-resource management in the Nigerian public service. A sustainable retention policy must therefore move beyond a narrow salary-centred approach toward an integrated system that combines financial rewards, intrinsic motivation, career development, recognition, fairness, employee participation, leadership quality and improved working conditions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian public service has historically been regarded as an important employer of skilled labour and a major instrument for implementing government policies. However, its human-resource system continues to face significant motivational and retention challenges. One major problem concerns compensation. Public-sector salaries are generally determined within formal salary structures and government budgetary processes. While standardisation can promote consistency, it can also limit the ability of individual institutions to respond quickly to changes in labour-market conditions. Inflation

and declining purchasing power may further reduce the real value of salaries.

The second problem concerns the effectiveness of reward systems. Employees may receive formal salaries and statutory benefits while perceiving the broader reward system as unfair or inadequate. For example, an employee who performs exceptionally well may receive the same recognition as an employee whose performance is considerably lower. Such situations can undermine the connection between effort and reward. The third problem is career stagnation. Promotion delays, limited opportunities for professional development and unclear career pathways can weaken employees' commitment to public institutions. Talented employees often seek organisations where their skills can develop and where career progression is more predictable (Clinton, 2025).

The fourth problem involves recognition. Public-sector reward systems often emphasise financial remuneration while giving insufficient attention to recognition, appreciation and employee voice. Recent research on Nigerian public-sector motivation indicates that recognition remains an important motivational factor. The fifth problem involves organisational justice.

Employees who perceive promotion, training, appointments or rewards as influenced by favouritism, political considerations or personal connections may experience reduced trust in the organisation. The sixth problem is weak strategic talent management (Okolie & Ojomo, 2020). Recruitment, training, performance appraisal, succession planning and retention are sometimes treated as separate administrative activities rather than interconnected components of a talent-management strategy.

The seventh problem is the loss of experienced personnel. When skilled employees leave, organisations lose institutional memory and incur costs associated with recruitment and training. The problem becomes more serious where replacement personnel require significant time to develop the same expertise. The central problem, therefore, is not simply that Nigerian public servants are inadequately paid. Rather, the problem involves the misalignment between employee expectations, organisational rewards, career opportunities and institutional working conditions.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine employee motivation, reward systems and talent retention in the Nigerian public service and identify their implications for public-sector policy. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the concept and dimensions of employee motivation in the public service;
2. examine the nature and components of reward systems;
3. analyse the relationship between employee motivation and talent retention;
4. examine the influence of financial and non-financial rewards on public-service employees;
5. identify the major challenges affecting motivation and talent retention in the Nigerian public service;
6. examine recent empirical evidence on motivation, rewards and retention in Nigerian public institutions;
7. discuss the policy implications of existing reward and talent-management practices; and
8. propose strategies for strengthening employee motivation and talent retention in the Nigerian public service.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

i. What are the major dimensions of employee motivation in the Nigerian public service?
ii. What constitutes an effective reward system in public-sector organisations?
iii. How do reward systems influence employee commitment and talent retention?
iv. What challenges undermine employee motivation and retention in the Nigerian public service?
v. What does recent empirical evidence reveal about motivation, reward and retention among Nigerian public employees?
vi. What policy measures can strengthen motivation and talent retention in the Nigerian public service?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Employee Motivation

Employee motivation refers to the psychological and organisational processes that initiate, direct and sustain work-related behaviour. It determines why employees exert effort, how much effort they exert and how long they continue exerting that effort.

Motivation may be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from the inherent satisfaction associated with performing a task. Employees may be motivated because they find their work meaningful, challenging or professionally rewarding. Extrinsic motivation comes from external rewards such as salary, bonuses, promotion, recognition and job security.

In public administration, motivation is particularly complex because employees may be motivated by both personal and public-oriented considerations. Public employees may value the opportunity to contribute to society, serve citizens and participate in national development.

Recent scholarship on public-sector motivation supports a multidimensional understanding. Kuril et al. (2026) argue that public-sector motivation cannot be reduced to conventional public-service motivation concepts because employees may simultaneously respond to intrinsic, extrinsic, economic, cultural and organisational factors (Okolie & Edo, 2023). This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where economic pressures may make financial compensation increasingly important even among employees who entered the public service because of public-service ideals.

2.1.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation arises when employees derive satisfaction from the work itself. Important intrinsic motivators include: achievement; recognition; responsibility; autonomy; meaningful work; professional growth; challenging assignments; learning opportunities; participation in decision-making.

Intrinsic motivation is particularly important for professional employees who may seek opportunities to use their skills creatively. In a bureaucratic environment, however, excessive hierarchy and rigid procedures can reduce autonomy and consequently weaken intrinsic motivation. Okolie and Egbon (2024) found that intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly influenced employee commitment in the Delta State Civil Service Commission. The implication is that public-sector organisations should not assume that salary is the only relevant motivational mechanism.

2.1.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation arises from external outcomes associated with employment. Examples include: salary; allowances; bonuses; promotion; pension; job security;

awards; recognition; housing benefits; health benefits.

Financial rewards remain particularly important where employees face high living costs. Oladejo and Saka (2024) found that the compensation system in the Ogun State Civil Service was insufficient to meet employees' basic needs, reinforcing the importance of compensation in public-sector motivation. However, extrinsic rewards can produce limited motivational effects if employees perceive the system as unfair. A large salary increase may not produce strong commitment if promotion is perceived to depend on personal relationships rather than merit.

2.1.3 Concept of Reward Systems

A reward system is the structured arrangement through which an organisation provides employees with compensation and recognition for their contributions. A comprehensive reward system includes:

Direct financial rewards: These include: basic salary; allowances; bonuses; performance incentives; overtime payments.
Indirect financial rewards: These include: pension; health insurance; housing benefits; leave benefits; transportation; welfare schemes.
Non-financial rewards: These include: recognition; promotion; training; career development; participation; autonomy; flexible working; professional recognition.

An effective reward system should satisfy four principles: **fairness**; **competitiveness**; **transparency**; **strategic alignment.** Adedipe and Adegoke (2025) argue that strategic reward systems should align reward practices with organisational objectives while combining monetary and non-monetary rewards.

2.1.4 Financial Rewards and Employee Motivation

Salary represents one of the most visible forms of employee reward. Employees use salary to meet basic needs and maintain their standard of living. Consequently, inadequate salary can generate dissatisfaction and may encourage employees to search for alternative employment. However, salary has a threshold effect. Once basic financial needs are adequately addressed, additional salary increases may have diminishing motivational effects unless combined with other factors. In Nigeria, the significance of salary is intensified by economic conditions. Inflation and increasing household expenses mean that nominal salary increases may not necessarily translate into increased purchasing power. Therefore, public-sector wage policy should consider real income rather than nominal salary alone.

2.1.5 Non-Financial Rewards

Non-financial rewards are increasingly important in modern human-resource management. These include: recognition; career progression; professional development;mentoring; participation; job enrichment; flexible work arrangements; employee wellbeing; supportive leadership.

Oko-Joseph and Eniola (2025) specifically argue that Nigerian public-sector reward systems should move beyond a predominantly monetary model and incorporate recognition, career progression, mentorship and professional communities. This is important because public organisations may face fiscal constraints that make large salary increases difficult. Non-financial rewards can therefore complement financial compensation.

2.1.6 Concept of Talent Retention

Talent retention refers to an organisation's ability to maintain skilled, competent and strategically important employees over time. Talent is not simply synonymous with employees. It refers particularly to individuals

whose skills, knowledge, experience or potential are important to organisational performance. Talent retention involves: reducing unnecessary turnover; maintaining critical skills; preserving institutional knowledge; creating career opportunities; strengthening employee commitment; improving employee experience. Retention should therefore be understood strategically. A public institution may have a low turnover rate but still suffer from talent loss if its most skilled employees leave while less-skilled employees remain.

2.1.7 Employee Motivation and Talent Retention

Motivation influences retention because employees evaluate their relationship with the organisation over time. When employees perceive that their contributions are recognised and rewarded, they are more likely to develop commitment. Conversely, when employees perceive that: salaries are inadequate; promotion is unfair; training is unavailable; leadership is unsupportive; performance is ignored; workloads are excessive; they may become disengaged and eventually seek alternative employment.

The relationship can therefore be represented as: **Motivation → Satisfaction/Commitment → Intention to Stay → Talent Retention.** This does not imply that motivation automatically guarantees retention. Employees may remain in an organisation despite low motivation because of job security or limited alternatives. Consequently, retention requires a combination of motivational, economic and organisational conditions.

2.1.8 Public Service Motivation

Public Service Motivation (PSM) refers to an individual's inclination to contribute to public service and public-interest objectives. Public-service motivation is important because public employees may derive satisfaction from helping citizens and contributing to societal development. However, public-service motivation should not be treated as a substitute for fair compensation. An employee may be highly committed to serving society but still experience financial pressure.

Recent research suggests that public-service motivation can influence how employees respond to demanding work conditions. A 2026 study in the *International Journal of Public Sector Management* examined PSM as a contextual resource affecting the relationship between job demands and job satisfaction among public-sector employees. This suggests that public organisations should cultivate both intrinsic public-service values and supportive employment conditions.

2.1.9 Career Development and Talent Retention

Career development refers to opportunities through which employees acquire new knowledge, skills, responsibilities and career advancement. It includes: training; mentoring; coaching; professional certification; job rotation; promotion; succession planning; leadership development. Career development is especially important for younger professionals who may evaluate employment based on future career opportunities rather than current salary alone. Salau (2025) specifically examined compensation and career development as determinants of talent retention in the Nigerian civil service. The implication is that public-sector organisations should provide visible career pathways.

2.1.10 Employee Recognition and Retention

Recognition involves acknowledging employee contributions and achievements. Recognition can take different forms: formal awards; letters of commendation; public acknowledgement; promotion; professional opportunities; leadership responsibilities. Recognition is relatively inexpensive

compared with salary increases but can have significant psychological value. Recent Nigerian public-sector evidence identifies recognition as one of the important motivational factors affecting productivity and satisfaction.

2.1.11 Promotion and Employee Motivation

Promotion provides employees with increased responsibility, status and remuneration. A fair promotion system can strengthen motivation because employees perceive a relationship between performance and career progression. However, delayed or politicized promotion can have the opposite effect. Employees may interpret promotion decisions as evidence that performance does not matter. Therefore, promotion should be: merit-based; transparent; timely; competency-driven; clearly communicated.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study draws primarily on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Expectancy Theory, Equity Theory, Social Exchange Theory and Public Service Motivation Theory.

2.2.1. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg distinguishes between hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors include: salary; working conditions; job security; organisational policy; supervision. Their absence may cause dissatisfaction. Motivators include: achievement; recognition; responsibility; advancement; meaningful work. These factors generate satisfaction. The theory is relevant to the Nigerian public service because increasing salaries may reduce dissatisfaction without necessarily producing high motivation if employees lack recognition and career advancement.

2.2.2. Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory suggests that motivation is influenced by three relationships: **Expectancy:** belief that effort will produce performance; **Instrumentality:** belief that performance will produce reward; **Valence:** value attached to the reward. The theory is particularly relevant to public-sector promotion and reward. If employees believe that hard work does not influence promotion or recognition, instrumentality is low and motivation declines.

2.2.3. Equity Theory

Equity Theory focuses on employees' perceptions of fairness. Employees compare their inputs and outcomes with those of others. If an employee believes that a colleague contributes less but receives greater rewards, perceived inequity may develop. This can result in: reduced effort; dissatisfaction; absenteeism; withdrawal; turnover intention. Equity is therefore central to public-service reward policy.

2.2.4. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory proposes that employment involves reciprocal relationships. When employees perceive that an organisation supports them, they are more likely to reciprocate through commitment and positive behaviour. This makes organisational support, recognition and career development important retention mechanisms. Salau (2025) used Social Exchange Theory alongside Herzberg's theory in examining talent retention in the Nigerian civil service.

2.2.5. Public Service Motivation Theory

Public Service Motivation Theory explains why individuals may be attracted to public employment because they value serving society. The theory is particularly relevant in public administration because employees may be motivated by: commitment to public interest; compassion; civic duty; service to citizens. However, PSM should complement rather than replace appropriate reward systems.

2.1.12 Conceptual Model

The relationship examined in this study can be represented as follows:

Employee Motivation

→ Intrinsic motivation
→ Extrinsic motivation
→ Recognition
→ Job security
→ Meaningful work

Reward Systems

→ Salary
→ Allowances
→ Promotion
→ Benefits
→ Performance rewards
→ Non-financial recognition

Talent Management

→ Training
→ Career development
→ Mentoring
→ Succession planning
→ Performance management

⬇

Employee Satisfaction and Commitment

⬇

Talent Retention

⬇

Improved Public-Service Performance and Service Delivery

The model also recognises contextual factors such as leadership, organisational justice, economic conditions, political interference, bureaucracy and working conditions.

2.3 Empirical Review

Okolie and Egbon (2024) examined reward systems and employee commitment in the Delta State Civil Service Commission, Asaba. The study focused on intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and examined their implications for employee commitment. The study found that

both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly influenced employee commitment. The finding is important because it challenges a salary-centred approach to employee motivation. It suggests that public servants respond to both material and psychological rewards (Orhero, Okereka & Okolie, 2023). The study is particularly relevant to the present seminar because it provides Nigerian public-service evidence rather than relying exclusively on private-sector studies.

Oladejo and Saka (2024) investigated compensation and employee motivation in the Ogun State Civil Service. The study found that compensation was insufficient to meet employees' basic needs and recommended a comprehensive motivational system that incorporates non-monetary factors. This finding demonstrates the importance of economic conditions in public-sector motivation. It also suggests that compensation reform must be complemented by non-financial incentives.

Akpolo and Osazevbaru (2024) examined motives and personal characteristics as determinants of employee retention in selected civil service commissions in Delta, Edo and Rivers States. The study used a cross-sectional survey and obtained 524 usable responses from 600 questionnaires. The study is important because it demonstrates that retention is affected by both motivational factors and individual characteristics. This supports the argument that public-sector retention policies should avoid one-size-fits-all approaches.

Lodikero and Akeredolu (2024) conducted a systematic review of motivation, productivity and satisfaction in the Nigerian public sector. Their findings identified recognition, job security, promotion and growth opportunities among the major motivational factors. This finding reinforces the multidimensional nature of motivation. It suggests that public-sector employees value both security and opportunities for professional advancement.

Salau (2025) examined talent retention in the Nigerian civil service by assessing compensation and career development. The study used 452 respondents drawn from selected public institutions and employed structural equation modelling using Partial Least Squares. The study's focus on compensation and career development is particularly important because it moves beyond the assumption that salary alone determines retention. The study supports an integrated approach in which employees are offered both competitive rewards and opportunities for professional growth.

Offiong, Jibril and Nuhu (2025) examined talent-management practices in selected Nigerian public enterprises. The study focused on recruitment, succession planning and performance management and used a quantitative survey involving 163 employees. The study demonstrates that talent retention should be embedded within broader talent-management practices. Recruitment without development can produce turnover, while development without succession planning can create organisational vulnerability.

Jibrin et al. (2025) examined the relationship between motivation and organisational commitment among 210 employees of a Nigerian federal agency. The study used a cross-sectional survey and multiple regression analysis. The study reinforces the connection between motivation and commitment, which is an important precursor to retention.

Abuh, Okolie and Uchenna (2025) applied the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity framework to employee commitment and performance in the Nigerian public sector. The framework is

important because it proposes that performance requires three conditions: employees must possess the ability to perform; employees must be motivated to perform; employees must have opportunities to apply their abilities. This framework provides a useful extension to traditional reward-based approaches.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The seminar adopted a qualitative narrative literature-review design. The design was considered appropriate because the purpose was to synthesise existing evidence concerning employee motivation, reward systems and talent retention in the Nigerian public service rather than collect new primary data. The review focused particularly on recent studies published between 2024 and 2026.

3.2 Sources of Data

Data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly journal databases, academic publishers, institutional publications, recent Nigerian public-sector studies, and relevant theoretical literature. Particular attention was given to empirical studies that directly examined Nigerian public servants, civil servants, employees of public enterprises, and local-public-sector workers, as well as scholarly works that provided relevant theoretical perspectives on employee motivation, reward systems, talent management, organisational commitment, and employee retention.

3.3 Search Strategy

Relevant literature was identified through combinations of keywords such as employee motivation, employee retention, reward systems, public service, Nigerian public service, civil service, talent retention, compensation, career development, employee commitment, public-service motivation, and talent management. The identified studies were carefully reviewed and selected based on their direct relevance to one or more of the major concepts underpinning the seminar, particularly employee motivation, reward systems, organisational commitment, career development, talent management, and employee retention in the Nigerian public service.

3.4 Data Analysis

The literature was analysed using thematic content analysis, through which the reviewed studies were systematically examined and grouped into five major themes: financial compensation and employee motivation; intrinsic and non-financial rewards; career development and promotion; organisational justice and leadership; and talent retention and strategic human-resource management. The findings from the reviewed studies were subsequently compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence, establish patterns across the literature, and highlight existing gaps requiring further scholarly attention.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Employee Motivation Is Multidimensional

The first major finding is that employee motivation cannot be explained by salary alone. The reviewed studies consistently identify multiple motivational factors, including: salary; job security; recognition; promotion; career development; meaningful work; leadership; working conditions; organisational fairness. Lodikero and Akeredolu (2024) identified recognition, job security, promotion and growth opportunities as significant motivational factors in the Nigerian public sector. This suggests that public-service motivation requires a combination of economic and psychological rewards.

4.2 Financial Compensation Remains Fundamental

The second finding is that financial compensation remains a major determinant of motivation. The evidence from Ogun State demonstrates that compensation was perceived as inadequate to meet basic needs. This finding is especially important in an economy experiencing rising living costs. The implication is that non-financial rewards cannot compensate indefinitely for inadequate salaries. Therefore, government must maintain a minimum level of competitive compensation.

4.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Rewards Influence Commitment

The Delta State study found that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly affected employee commitment. This provides direct empirical evidence that reward systems should be multidimensional. An effective public-service reward system should therefore combine: Extrinsic rewards (which include salary; allowances; promotion; bonuses; benefits). with Intrinsic rewards **(**include: recognition; responsibility; achievement; professional growth; meaningful work).

4.4 Career Development Is a Retention Mechanism

The review found that career development is increasingly important to talent retention. Salau's (2025) study explicitly examined compensation and career development as determinants of retention in the Nigerian civil service. This means that public-service organisations must create visible pathways through which employees can progress. Career development should include: training; mentoring; coaching; professional certification; promotion; leadership development; job rotation.

4.5 Recognition Is an Important Motivator

Recognition emerged as a recurring motivational factor. Employees need to feel that their contributions matter. Recognition can take the form of: employee-of-the-year awards; commendation letters; public recognition; professional opportunities; leadership assignments; merit-based promotion. Recognition is particularly useful where financial resources are limited.

4.6 Perceived Inequity Weakens Motivation

The review indicates that the effectiveness of reward systems depends heavily on perceived fairness. Where employees perceive that rewards are allocated according to: political; influence; personal relationships; favouritism; ethnicity; patronage; the motivational value of the reward system decreases. Employees may conclude that performance has little influence on outcomes. This undermines the expectancy relationship between effort and reward.

4.7 Weak Promotion Systems Encourage Talent Loss

Promotion is both a reward and a career-development mechanism. When promotion is delayed or unpredictable, employees may become frustrated. For talented employees, the opportunity cost of remaining in an organisation increases when alternative employers provide clearer advancement opportunities. Therefore, public-service promotion systems should become more competency-based and predictable.

4.8 Talent Retention Requires Strategic Talent Management

The review shows that retention should not be treated as an isolated HR activity. Recruitment, training, performance management, succession planning, compensation and retention should be integrated. Evidence from Nigerian public enterprises shows the importance of recruitment, succession planning and performance management within talent management. This means that retention begins

before an employee is recruited and continues throughout the employee's career.

4.9 Leadership Affects Motivation and Retention

Leadership affects how employees experience the reward system. A formally adequate reward system can still fail where supervisors are: unsupportive; authoritarian; unfair; inaccessible; dismissive. Conversely, supportive leaders can strengthen motivation by providing recognition, feedback and opportunities. Thus, public-service reform should incorporate leadership development.

4.10 Public-Service Motivation Is Valuable but Insufficient

The review demonstrates that public-service motivation can encourage employees to remain committed to public-interest goals. However, it should not be used as a justification for poor compensation. Employees can be strongly committed to serving society while simultaneously requiring fair wages, career opportunities, and supportive working conditions. Public-service motivation should therefore complement rather than replace sound human-resource management.

The findings demonstrate that employee motivation and talent retention are closely interconnected within the Nigerian public service. When employees are adequately motivated, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction, organisational commitment, engagement, willingness to exert effort and a stronger intention to remain in their organisations. Conversely, declining motivation may result in employee withdrawal, absenteeism, reduced productivity, dissatisfaction and increased intention to leave. This suggests that employee retention should be understood, to a considerable extent, as an outcome of the motivational environment created by an organisation. Where employees perceive that their efforts are recognised, adequately rewarded and supported through opportunities for growth, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards their organisations and remain committed to them.

The evidence further demonstrates that neither purely financial nor purely non-financial reward systems are sufficient to sustain employee motivation and retention. Financial rewards address employees' economic needs by providing salaries, allowances and other monetary benefits, whereas non-financial rewards address psychological, social and professional needs through recognition, career advancement, responsibility, participation and opportunities for personal development. An effective reward system should therefore combine both dimensions in a balanced manner. This position is consistent with the findings of Okolie and Egbon (2024), who established that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards significantly influenced employee commitment in the Delta State Civil Service Commission. The implication is that public-sector organisations should avoid relying exclusively on salary increases as a motivational strategy and instead develop comprehensive reward systems that respond to the diverse needs of employees.

The findings also indicate that the Nigerian public service requires a total-rewards approach to employee motivation and retention. A total-rewards approach views employee compensation broadly by incorporating financial compensation, employment benefits, career development, recognition and the overall work environment. Financial compensation includes salaries and allowances, while benefits encompass pension, healthcare and employee welfare provisions. Career-related rewards include training, promotion, professional development and opportunities for advancement. Recognition involves awards, commendation and

acknowledgement of employee contributions, while the work environment encompasses leadership, employee participation, organisational support and wellbeing. Such an integrated approach is more appropriate for contemporary public administration than a narrow salary-centred reward model because it recognises that employees evaluate their employment relationship based on several economic, psychological and professional considerations. Oko-Joseph and Eniola (2025) similarly advocate a strategic reward framework that incorporates recognition, career progression, mentorship and learning opportunities within the Nigerian public sector.

The evidence from the Ogun State Civil Service also demonstrates the need for compensation reform, particularly where existing remuneration does not adequately correspond with employees' economic needs. Public-service compensation should therefore be reviewed periodically to reflect inflation, changes in the cost of living, labour-market competitiveness, scarcity of specialised professional skills and the responsibilities associated with different positions. Where appropriate, compensation policies should also consider relevant regional and occupational differences. The central objective should be to ensure that public-sector remuneration remains sufficiently competitive to attract, motivate and retain competent professionals. Nevertheless, compensation reform should not be interpreted solely as the continuous increase of salaries. Rather, it should involve the development of a sustainable remuneration structure that protects employees' purchasing power while remaining consistent with government fiscal capacity and broader public-sector objectives.

Career development should also be institutionalised as an important component of employee motivation and talent retention. Career development should not depend entirely on the discretion of individual supervisors or the availability of informal opportunities. Public institutions should establish formal career frameworks that clearly specify the competencies required for advancement, available training opportunities, promotion requirements, leadership pathways and succession arrangements. Such frameworks can improve predictability, encourage employees to invest in their professional development and reduce perceptions of favouritism in career advancement. When employees can identify a realistic career path within the public service, they are more likely to perceive their current employment as a long-term professional opportunity rather than a temporary position.

Another important finding is that reward and performance should be meaningfully connected. One of the challenges associated with bureaucratic organisations is the weak relationship between employee performance and organisational rewards. Where high-performing employees receive little additional recognition while poor performance attracts few consequences, employees may conclude that additional effort has limited value. Expectancy Theory suggests that employees are more likely to exert effort when they believe that their effort will lead to improved performance and that improved performance will produce valued outcomes. Public-service performance-management systems should therefore be strengthened so that employees can clearly understand how performance is assessed and how good performance contributes to recognition, development and career advancement. However, performance-based reward systems should be carefully designed and transparently administered to prevent manipulation of performance targets, unhealthy competition and other unintended consequences.

Organisational justice is equally central to effective motivation and talent retention. Employees are more likely to accept organisational decisions when they perceive the processes through which those decisions are made as fair, transparent and consistent. Public-service reform should therefore strengthen transparent promotion procedures, objective recruitment processes, clearly defined performance criteria, effective grievance mechanisms, accessible appeal procedures and equal opportunities for training and professional development. Merit-based recruitment is particularly important because it establishes the foundation for a competent and motivated workforce. Akpoyibo (2025), in examining merit-based recruitment and employee effectiveness in selected southern Nigerian public enterprises, highlights the importance of merit-based human-resource practices for organisational effectiveness. Where employees believe that recruitment and career progression are based primarily on competence and performance, confidence in the organisation's reward system is likely to increase.

Digital human-resource management also provides an important opportunity for improving transparency, efficiency and motivation in the Nigerian public service. Digital HR systems can facilitate the systematic management of employee records, promotion eligibility, training, performance appraisal, leave, payroll and career progression. By automating routine processes and providing employees with timely access to relevant information, digital systems can reduce administrative delays and minimise opportunities for manipulation. Digitalisation can also support evidence-based workforce planning by enabling public institutions to identify skills gaps, monitor employee development and anticipate future staffing requirements. Okorie et al. (2024) similarly identify digital transformation as relevant to employee motivation and service delivery in Nigerian local government. Consequently, the adoption of digital HR systems should form part of broader public-service reform aimed at improving employee experience, organisational transparency and institutional performance.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that employee motivation, reward systems and talent retention are closely interconnected in the Nigerian public service. Although financial compensation remains important, particularly under inflation and rising living costs, salary alone is insufficient to sustain employee commitment. Motivation and retention are also influenced by career development, recognition, organisational justice, leadership, working conditions and employee wellbeing.

Major challenges include inadequate compensation, inflation, delayed promotion, limited training opportunities, politicisation of human-resource decisions, poor working conditions, weak recognition systems, ineffective leadership, bureaucratic rigidity and competition from the private and international labour markets. These challenges can reduce employee satisfaction, weaken commitment and encourage skilled public servants to seek better opportunities elsewhere. The study therefore recommends regular review of public-service salaries and benefits to reflect inflation, cost-of-living changes and labour-market conditions. However, compensation reform should be complemented by a **total-reward approach** that combines salary, allowances, recognition, career development, training and employee wellbeing. Evidence from Okolie and Egbon (2024) supports the importance of balancing intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in strengthening employee commitment, while Oko-Joseph and

Eniola (2025) emphasise recognition, career progression, mentorship and learning opportunities.

Merit-based recruitment and promotion should also be strengthened through transparent criteria based on competence, performance, qualifications and experience. Public institutions should institutionalise career-development plans, strategic talent management and succession planning to ensure that competent employees are developed and retained. Salau (2025) similarly highlights the importance of compensation and career development to talent retention in the Nigerian civil service.

Furthermore, government institutions should strengthen employee recognition, leadership development and employee participation. Managers should be equipped with skills in communication, coaching, motivation, conflict management and ethical leadership, while employees should have accessible channels for making suggestions and reporting workplace concerns.

Digitalisation of human-resource management should also be expanded to improve transparency and efficiency in recruitment, promotion, payroll, training and performance appraisal. Performance management should be linked to meaningful recognition and development opportunities, while employee wellbeing, reasonable workloads and work-life balance should receive greater attention. Okorie et al. (2024) similarly identify digital transformation as relevant to employee motivation and service delivery in Nigerian local government.

Overall, sustainable talent retention in the Nigerian public service requires a shift from a narrow salary-centred approach to an integrated human-resource management system that combines competitive compensation, career development, merit-based promotion, recognition, effective leadership, digital HR systems, performance management and employee wellbeing. Such an approach would strengthen employee commitment, preserve institutional knowledge and improve public-service performance and service delivery.

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