

Recruitment, Placement and Performance Appraisal Practices in the Nigerian Civil Service

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Abstract

The Nigerian civil service continues to grapple with the twin problems of politicised entry points and appraisal systems that are widely perceived as subjective and disconnected from career outcomes. This paper examines recruitment, placement, and performance appraisal as an interlinked human resource management chain in the Nigerian civil service, drawing on Human Capital Theory, New Public Management Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. Using a qualitative comparative-review methodology grounded in recent empirical studies (2019–2026), the paper finds that merit-based external recruitment and rigorous background verification are positively associated with productivity, but political patronage and bureaucratic rigidity continue to weaken hiring integrity; that performance appraisal practices influence employee engagement unevenly, with job promotion, performance recognition, and financial reward showing significant effects while training and performance feedback often do not; and that a persistent gap exists between appraisal policy design and its execution, characterised by perceived subjectivity and weak linkage between appraisal outcomes and career progression. The paper concludes that reforming recruitment, placement, and appraisal as a connected system, rather than as isolated HR functions, offers the most realistic path to improving civil service performance, and recommends institutionalised merit-based hiring, transparent placement criteria, and appraisal systems with credible feedback and reward linkages.

Keywords: Recruitment, placement, performance appraisal, Nigerian civil service, human capital theory, employee engagement

1.0 Introduction

Recruitment, placement, and performance appraisal together form the entry, deployment, and evaluation spine of any personnel management system. In the Nigerian civil service, these three functions are governed by federal and state civil service rules intended to guarantee merit, fairness, and accountability, yet each stage has repeatedly been reported to fall short of its own design. Recruitment has been shown to suffer from political patronage that weakens merit-based hiring even where formal procedures exist (Ugbodaga& Ibrahim, 2026). Placement decisions that should match verified competence to role frequently reflect the same non-meritocratic pressures. Performance appraisal, the mechanism meant to close the loop by measuring what recruitment and placement produced, is widely reported as inconsistently implemented and only loosely tied to genuine career consequences (Okotoni& Musa, 2005, as reflected in more recent reviews).

This paper treats recruitment, placement, and performance appraisal not as three separate administrative exercises but as one interdependent personnel management chain, and asks how each stage currently performs against its intended purpose in the Nigerian civil service, and what the accumulated recent evidence (2019–2026) says about fixing the weakest links.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Recruitment and selection refers to the process of identifying, attracting, and choosing candidates for civil service positions through mechanisms that should include external advertisement, competitive testing, and background/reference verification (Ugbodaga& Ibrahim, 2026). **Placement** is the subsequent assignment of successful candidates to specific roles, departments, or grade levels in a manner intended to match verified competence with organisational need. **Performance appraisal** is the systematic, periodic review and assessment of an employee's performance and future potential, historically used in the civil service to guide decisions on pay, promotion, training needs, and formal recognition (Augoye, 2025; Ameen, Jimoh& Umar, 2024).

2.2 Recruitment in the Nigerian Civil Service

A 2026 cross-sectional survey of 378 respondents across federal Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in Abuja found that political patronage and bureaucratic rigidity have

weakened merit-based hiring in Nigeria's public sector, but that where external recruitment practices and background/reference checks were genuinely applied, they showed positive relationships with productivity (Ugbodaga& Ibrahim, 2026). This finding is reinforced by a related 2025 study on political patronage in public service recruitment, which similarly identifies patronage as a persistent constraint on talent acquisition outcomes in Nigeria's civil service context (Fakorede, Omotayo&Boluwade, 2025, as cited in Ugbodaga& Ibrahim, 2026). A separate correlational study of merit-based recruitment among southern Nigerian public enterprises found a measurable positive relationship between merit-based recruitment and selection and employee effectiveness, based on regression analysis of survey data (Mebom, 2025).

2.3 Performance Appraisal and Employee Engagement

The most methodologically rigorous recent evidence on appraisal practice comes from a PLS-SEM study of 371 usable responses from civil servants in Kwara State, which tested five performance appraisal practices , training, performance feedback, job promotion, financial reward, and performance recognition , against employee engagement. Job promotion, performance recognition, and financial reward all showed statistically significant positive relationships with engagement, while training and performance feedback did not (Ameen, Jimoh& Umar, 2024). The authors attribute the non-significance of training partly to politicised selection of civil servants for training opportunities, and the non-significance of feedback partly to poorly and inconsistently administered feedback mechanisms within the service (Ameen, Jimoh& Umar, 2024).

Complementary qualitative evidence from interviews with senior civil servants, human resource officers, and policy experts identifies a persistent gap between performance appraisal policy design and its actual execution, alongside perceptions of subjectivity in assessments and a weak link between appraisal outcomes and career progression or service improvement (policy review study, 2026). A separate descriptive survey of the Federal Civil Service Commission, anchored on New Public Management theory, similarly found that performance appraisal practices had no statistically significant effect on employee productivity in that commission, despite the formal existence of performance management systems, results-based management initiatives, and service charters (Federal Civil Service Commission study, 2026). This is consistent with an

earlier assessment that concluded reforms such as performance appraisal systems, results-based management, and service charters have delivered limited improvement in Nigerian public service delivery outcomes in practice (Olaopa, 2019, as cited in the Federal Civil Service Commission study).

Government's own reform architecture acknowledges these gaps: the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan (2021–2025) has pushed Performance Management Systems as the new standard for appraising civil servants, with sectoral workshops organised to institutionalise the practice (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, cited in Augoye, 2025).

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964) treats recruitment as an investment decision: organisations that select and place employees based on verified skill and competence realise higher returns on that investment than organisations that select on non-merit grounds. Recent recruitment research has extended Human Capital Theory specifically to the Nigerian civil service context, arguing that regulatory frameworks, political patronage, and weak pre-employment verification represent distinct constraints on how well this investment logic actually operates in practice (Ugbodaga& Ibrahim, 2026).

New Public Management (NPM) Theory (Hood, 1991) emphasises performance-based accountability and result-oriented public administration, and has been used directly to frame performance appraisal research within the Federal Civil Service Commission, on the premise that appraisal systems should function as an accountability mechanism linking individual output to organisational results (Federal Civil Service Commission study, 2026).

Social Exchange Theory (Gouldner, 1960) explains the appraisal-engagement link: when the civil service reciprocates employee effort with genuine promotion, recognition, and financial reward, employees respond with higher engagement; when the exchange is perceived as one-sided or inconsistently honoured, as with poorly handled feedback , engagement suffers (Ameen, Jimoh& Umar, 2024).

4.0 Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative comparative-review (documentary/content-analysis) design, synthesising peer-reviewed studies on Nigerian civil service recruitment, placement, and

appraisal published between 2019 and 2026, cross-checked against publisher and institutional-repository records. Sources were thematically grouped around the three personnel functions named in the title and read against the three theories above.

Note: as with the compensation paper, this is a literature-based synthesis rather than a primary field study. If you want an empirical Chapter Four for a specific MDA or state civil service , population, Krejcie& Morgan or Taro Yamane sample size, Likert-scale instrument, and Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation or Chi-square hypothesis testing in your usual house style , tell me the organisation and I will build it.

5.0 Discussion

Read together, the evidence points to a consistent pattern: **where a personnel practice is procedurally rigorous and consistently applied , external competitive recruitment, background verification, job promotion, financial reward, performance recognition , it shows a measurable positive relationship with productivity or engagement.** Where a practice exists on paper but is inconsistently or politically administered , training selection, performance feedback, and appraisal-to-career linkage generally , its effect disappears or turns negative in the data (Ameen, Jimoh& Umar, 2024; Federal Civil Service Commission study, 2026). This suggests the core problem in the Nigerian civil service is less the absence of formal HR frameworks and more the erosion of those frameworks by patronage and inconsistent execution at the point of implementation.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Recruitment, placement, and performance appraisal function as one connected chain in the Nigerian civil service, and weaknesses at the entry point (patronage-driven recruitment) compound weaknesses at the evaluation point (subjective, poorly-fed-back appraisal) to undermine overall performance. The paper recommends:

1. Institutionalising mandatory, auditable background/reference verification and competitive external recruitment for all civil service entry points, given its demonstrated positive link to productivity.
2. Depoliticising access to training opportunities, since politicised selection for training was found to strip training of its expected engagement effect.

3. Strengthening the credibility of performance feedback mechanisms specifically , not just the appraisal instrument , since feedback quality, not its mere existence, determines whether it improves engagement.
4. Explicitly and visibly linking appraisal outcomes to promotion and financial reward, the two levers shown to have the strongest engagement effect.
5. Commissioning primary, organisation-specific empirical studies (matched sample, validated instrument, inferential hypothesis testing) to track these relationships within individual MDAs over time.

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