

PROMOTION AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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ABSTRACT: This work focused on the effect of promotion on employee performance in the Nigerian Civil Service. The study specifically investigated the effects of receiving a promotion and experiencing promotion stagnation on employee performance in the Federal Civil Service of Imo State, Nigeria. The target population consisted of 1086 federal civil servants in 32 organisations. However, a sample of 1007 federal civil servants emerged from a total population survey of the target population. The 32 organisations, comprising ministries, departments, and agencies, were selected because they are strictly subject to the Civil Service Rules. The research data represent the responses of the sample population to the research questionnaire, which had a reliability coefficient estimate of 0.742. The survey data were subjected to logistic regression analysis to investigate whether promotion predicts employee performance in federal civil service organisations. The research hypothesis was tested using the Pearson correlation coefficient to determine whether a relationship existed between promotion and employee performance. The results of the logistic regression analysis revealed that receipt of a promotion ($p = .039$) was statistically significant. This meant that the receipt of promotion likely had a significant effect on employee performance. The hypothesis test result revealed that there existed a statistically significant positive relationship between promotion and employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State ($r = .167, p < .000$). The analyses results suggested that promotion affected employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State.

Keywords: Civil Service, Employee, Employee performance, Promotion

INTRODUCTION

Employees are a valuable resource of an organisation. They enter the organisation with their needs and expectations, which influence the energy and effort they invest in processing and converting other resources, towards the realisation of organisational goals. The attainment of organisational goals is dependent on various factors, including the satisfaction of employees' needs and expectations. The satisfaction of needs and expectations contributes to employee well-being, which is a crucial factor in employee commitment and performance.

One of the major needs of employees is career success. Conventionally, 'career success has been defined in terms of upward mobility' (Cascio, 2006, p. 385). Career success refers to the ability to climb up the career ladder or the organisational structure, and to reap the benefits that accrue from the ascension. The upward mobility of an employee is made possible through the mechanism of promotion. The term 'promotion' refers to 'a move of an employee to a job [or position] within

the company, which has greater importance, higher pay, higher status, and carries improved fringe benefits and more privileges' (Graham, 1974, p. 148). A promotion can be viewed as a reward for high performance from the employer to the employee, often accompanied by a new job title or additional responsibilities.

Organisations often deploy promotions to improve employee utilisation and motivation. They consider promotion to be a means of eliciting and sustaining employee loyalty and performance. Some organisations carry out promotional exercises regularly to prevent or curtail labour turnover due to its cost implications. Others do not, and this may give rise to negative consequences, such as employee demotivation, career stagnation, low performance, and a high attrition rate, which can hinder an organisation's success. There have been reported cases of employee promotion stagnation in some Nigerian organisations, such as the Civil Service. The Nation Newspaper (2025), wrote that Education Officers in the Federal Ministry of Education said they had not been promoted for over six years, despite meeting the criteria. The officers claimed that this has led to demotivation, decreased productivity, and a decline in academic performance. Yakubu (2024) exposed the complaints of some lawmakers about stagnation in promotions across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies of government, which has resulted in a loss of service delivery, a decline in highly specialised skills, and a low level of productivity and performance. According to Yakubu (2024), the lawmakers stated that promotion stagnation has led to employee unrest, corruption, and dampened morale.

Several studies have examined the impact of promotions on employees. Batse (2025) examined the impact of promotions on employee performance at Takoradi Technical University in Ghana. Olateju et al. (2024) investigated the effect of job promotion on employees' performance in selected money banks in Southwest Nigeria. Muhati and Makhamara (2023) aimed to investigate the impact of employee promotion on employee performance at the Technical University of Kenya. Duru et al. (2023) investigated the relationship between promotion and employees' performance in the University of Abuja. The present study was designed to investigate the effect of promotion practices, including the impact of promotion stagnation, on employee performance in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service, with a focus on understanding the dynamics of employee motivation and organisational efficiency.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the effect of the receipt of promotion on employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria.
2. To interrogate how promotion stagnation affects employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis

There is a significant positive relationship between employee promotion and employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Promotion

The term promotion depicts the act of elevating an employee to the next organisational level, or job grade. Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) defines promotion as the act or fact of being raised in position or rank. The Cambridge dictionary (n.d.) defines promotion as the process or fact of giving someone a higher or more important job. For Graham (1974, p. 148), “a promotion is a move of an employee to a job within the company, which has greater importance and, usually, higher pay”.

There are two main ways organisations promote their employees. One way is by management decision. In this case, an employee is selected for promotion based on information already known to management. The second means is by internal advertisement. In this situation, employees are informed through notices and circulars that a vacancy exists. Thereafter, a selection is made from all those who applied (Graham, 1974).

Promotion, as an important organisational decision, has varied impacts on employees. Promoted employees generally shoulder greater responsibility and authority, and enjoy higher pay, benefits, and privileges (Cascio, 2006). Promoted employee derive satisfaction because of the fulfilment of their need for personal growth and security. The satisfaction derived from promotion, or the expectation of promotion, tends to spur employees to exhibit pro-organisational behaviours such as increased commitment and performance.

Employees who are bypassed for promotion feel unfairly treated. “Employees’ feeling of unfairness in promotions may lead to low morale and the emergence of frustration and conflicts within the work environment” (Aloufi et al., 2025, p. 1163). It may also result in the exhibition of anti-organisational behaviours such as a decrease in commitment and an increase in absenteeism. Therefore, it is essential that the method of promotion and the criteria for promotion, a fusion of ability, relevant experience, and length of service, must be fair and clear to all. “Unsuccessful candidates must be sympathetically treated” (Graham, 1974, p. 149).

Promotion Stagnation

A promotion indicates career development and professional growth. Organisations invest in employee growth to reduce costly turnover and to increase Job satisfaction among employees of all ranks (DeCarbo, 2023, updated in 2024). Notwithstanding the benefits of employee growth, some organisations still do not provide opportunities for the career advancement of their employees – they neither promote their employees nor develop their employees’ capabilities. This leads to employee promotion stagnation. The term ‘promotion stagnation’ refers to the lack of progress or movement in a career. It entails the inability to advance or develop professionally in the workplace. It implies being on the same job grade over a long period or being passed up for promotion repeatedly.

Several factors contribute to promotion stagnation. They include lack of development opportunities, poor management, and poor working conditions. Other likely causes of promotion stagnation are unclear promotion criteria, infrequent appraisals, and the lack of social and political connection, typical of some state-owned organisations in Nigeria. The range of consequences of promotion stagnation include faded initiative, decreased engagement, and decreased performance (Focus People, 2025). The end result may be employee attrition, and the decline in organisational efficiency.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a crucial factor in organisational success. The success of an organisation is usually measured in terms of its operational efficiency, customer satisfaction and retention, and profitability, all of which are mainly contingent on its employees' performance. The term 'employee performance' refers to how well an individual executes assigned job duties and responsibilities. It portrays whether an employee is competent. Generally, employee performance encompasses the quality and quantity of work produced, and involves assessing various factors such as productivity, efficiency, and overall job behaviour (Deel, 2025).

Employee performance is a multifactor concept. It encompasses employee work behaviour, and the outcome of work behaviour. There are two main dimensions of employee performance, namely: task performance and contextual performance. Task performance refers to the effectiveness with which an employee performs activities that contribute to the organisations technical core (Borman & Motowildo, 1993). According to Werner (2000), task performance consists of behaviours that are directly involved in producing goods or services. It spotlights specific outputs and outcomes. Task performance covers employees' contribution to organisational performance through actions that address the requirements as specified in job descriptions (Williams & Karau, 1991). In other words, it is job-specific. The indicators or measures of task performance include: the amount of work done [within allotted time], work quality (i.e., accuracy and technical mastery), knowledge of and compliance with job requirements, and the ability to take responsibility (Al-Husseini, 2023).

The other aspect of performance, which is contextual performance, depicts the voluntary behaviour of employees that are not directly part of their job responsibilities, but contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organisation (Decu, 2023). According to Borman and Motowildo (1993), contextual performance is performance that helps to shape the social and psychological context of the organisation. In the words of Decu (2023), contextual performance creates an environment where employees actively support each other, share knowledge, and contribute to the success of the organisation. The indicators of contextual performance include: assisting colleagues, cooperating with co-workers, volunteering for extra-work (Borman & Motowildo, 1997), and actively participating in organisational initiatives, suggesting improvements to work processes, adhering to organisational rules and norms, and respecting organisational policies (Decu, 2023). To a large extent, contextual performance is predicted by motivation and personality.

Empirical Literature on Employee Promotion and Performance

Scholars have over time, investigated the link and impact of promotions on employee performance. Batse (2025) examined the impact of promotions on employee performance at Takoradi Technical University in Ghana. The study involved 273 employees. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using regression analysis. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between promotions and performance, thus confirming that promotions significantly improve employee performance.

Olateju et al. (2024) investigated the effect of job promotion on employees' performance in selected money banks in Southwest Nigeria. The study sample size was 984. A questionnaire was used as the research instrument. The results of data analysis done with the statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) revealed that job promotion has weak positive and statistically significant relationship with employee performance in the selected deposit money banks (DMBs) in South-west Nigeria ($R\ 0.315$, $p < 0.05$). The study recommended that banks and financial institutions should implement a performance-based promotion system that links promotions directly to employees' achievements, skills development, and contributions to the organisation.

Muhati and Makhamara (2023) sought to determine the effect of employee promotion on employee performance at the Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study was anchored on equity theory. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select 361 employees consisting of 153 academic staff and 208 administrative workers. Primary data were collected with a semi-structured questionnaire. The results indicated among others, that moderate promotion increased employee performance.

Duru et. al. (2023) investigated the relationship between promotion and employees' performance at the University of Abuja. The study utilised a descriptive design. Data were collected from 337 workers at the University of Abuja through a structured questionnaire. The findings indicated that the provision of promotional opportunities had a positive influence on employees' performance at the university.

Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on Expectancy Theory, developed in the 1960s by Victor Vroom. Expectancy theory assumes that behaviour results from conscious choices among alternatives, whose purpose is to maximise pleasure and to minimise pain. Put differently, the theory states that individuals will be motivated to engage in behaviours if they think that those behaviours will lead to desirable outcomes. The main focus of Vroom's expectancy theory was "on factors involved in stimulating an individual to put effort into something, since this is the basis of motivation" (Cole, 1996, p. 40).

The core of the expectancy theory relates to how an individual perceives the relationship between effort, performance, and rewards. The perception of the relationship between effort and performance is referred to by Vroom as expectancy. The link between performance and a specific outcome is known as instrumentality, while the perception of the desirability of a reward is tagged

valence (Vroom, 1964). “According to Vroom, the three factors- expectancy, instrumentality, and valence - combine to create a driving force, which motivates an individual to put in effort, to achieve a level of performance, and to obtain rewards at the end” (Cole, 1996, p. 41).

The application of expectancy theory in explaining employee work behaviour in the Nigerian Civil Service implies that employees will only be motivated to exert a higher level of effort, when they believe that effort will lead to organisational rewards such as a promotion. In other words, promotion as an organisational reward will most likely stimulate positive performance. However, if employees perceive the relationship between performance and reward as weak or not clear, they will not bother to put in sufficient effort. It is therefore pertinent that the management of organisations such as the Nigerian civil service, establishes clear linkages, as failure to do so may impact employee performance because employees are led to believe that their increased effort provides little or no benefit. The critics of expectancy theory claim that it is idealistic because, according to them, few individuals perceive a high correlation between performance and rewards in their job. Ironically, these critics agree that it explains why a segment of the workforce exerts low levels of effort in carrying out their job responsibilities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as a cross-sectional survey. It relied on data collected from 1007 federal civil servants in 32 organisations. These 32 organisations constituted the Federal Civil Service, Imo State. The respondents were selected through a total population survey. The primary data were obtained using a structured questionnaire. The respondents were asked questions such as: have you ever received promotion, are there employees on the same grade for more than six years, and how would you describe the effect of promotion stagnation on employee performance. In order to estimate the reliability of the research questionnaire, a pilot study adopting test-retest method was conducted on 50 employees selected from 2 federal establishments, which were not part of the Federal Civil Service, and as such, not involved in the main study. The data retrieved from the first and second administration of the research questionnaire, executed at an interval of two weeks, were subjected to a reliability test using Cronbach Alpha. The reliability test revealed a coefficient estimate of 0.742 which indicates a high level of internal consistency of the questionnaire, hence, justifying its' reliability as a research instrument. The primary data obtained through the research questionnaire were subjected to logistic regression analysis in a bid to predict the effect of promotion practices on employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria. Furthermore, the data were analysed with Pearson correlation coefficient to test the research hypothesis.

The secondary data of the study emerged from literature review, conducted to conceptualise and contextualise the independent and dependent variables of the topic. The literature review highlighted the assumptions of the expectancy theory and provided the basis for its adoption as the theoretical framework. It also furnished empirical evidence for the discussion of findings. Lastly, the literature review exposed the gap in knowledge concerning promotion stagnation, which this study sought to fill.

RESULTS

For this study, two specific objectives were stated. They are: (1) to investigate the effect of the receipt of promotion on employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria, and (2) to interrogate how promotion stagnation affects employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria. To fulfil these specific objectives, a logistic regression analysis was conducted, and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Logistic Regression predicting the effect of promotion practices on employee performance

Variables in the Equation	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Receipt of promotion (3)	.281	.136	4.282	1	.039	1.325
Position stagnation (5)	.059	.068	.751	1	.386	1.061
Constant	-.379	.422	.806	1	.369	.685

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: 3, 5

Dependent Variable = Employee Performance; significant at 0.05 level

As shown in Table 1, the logistic regression analysis result revealed that receipt of promotion ($p=.039$) was found to be statistically significant. This means that the receipt of promotion predicts (i.e., is likely to have) a significant effect on employee performance (the dependent variable). The other independent variable, position stagnation, is not statistically significant ($p<0.05$). This could be interpreted to mean that position stagnation ($p=.386$) is unlikely to have a significant effect on employee performance.

To further guide the study, a research hypothesis, which states that there is a significant positive relationship between employee promotion and employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria, was formulated. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson Correlation coefficient, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation coefficient test of the Research hypothesis

		Promotion	Employee performance
Promotion	Pearson Correlation	1	.167**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	1007	1007
Employee performance	Pearson Correlation	.167**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1007	1007

****.** *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Table 2 contains the hypothesis test. The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between promotion and employee performance in the Federal Civil Service of Imo State ($r = .167, p < .000$).

DISCUSSIONS

The Logistic regression analysis revealed that the receipt of promotion predicts employee performance, and the Pearson Correlation coefficient analysis result showed that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between promotion and employee performance in the study organisation. The results lend support to Batse's (2025) findings, which revealed a strong positive relationship between promotions and performance. They also lend credence to the findings of Duru et al. (2023), which suggest that providing promotional opportunities has a positive influence on employees' performance. These results suggest that promotions have a significant impact on employee performance. Hence, if an employee is promoted as and when due, they will be more likely to be motivated to enhance their work performance. This pattern aligns with the proposition of the Expectancy theory, which posits that individuals will be motivated to engage in positive work behaviours if they believe that those behaviours will lead to desirable outcomes. It implies that employees will only be motivated to exert a high level of effort when they believe that effort will lead to organizational rewards such as a promotion.

This discussion would be incomplete without mentioning that the logistic regression analysis showed that promotion stagnation was not statistically significant in predicting employee performance. This means that promotion stagnation is unlikely to have a significant effect on employee performance. The somewhat mixed results of the logistic regression analysis evoke the need for further studies on the effect of promotion practices on employee performance in the Federal Civil Service and other organisations in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Promotion is a workplace process or practice that indicates and enables the upward mobility of an employee. Promotion is often utilised as compensation for service to an organisation over a period of time or as a reward for good performance. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the receipt of promotion stimulates employee performance in the Federal Civil Service, Imo State, Nigeria. From the study, it could be inferred that when promotion is deployed fairly, transparently, and in a timely manner, it has the potency to elicit good performance. However, when it is delayed or applied in a hazy manner, it can hinder or diminish an employee's enthusiasm to optimise performance. Therefore, it is recommended that organisations implement promotions that show clearly the nexus between performance and promotion. There must be clear and consistent requirements for promotion, enabling employees to work towards benefiting from the process. Furthermore, promotion exercises must be regular, ideally yearly, to avoid stagnation in promotions, which demoralises employees and inhibits their contributions to organisational success.

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