

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND EMPLOYEE JOB PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR: A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Wasilat Ahmed Kabir¹ & Mustapha Badamasi² & Fatima Dalhat³

¹Department of Public Administration, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina State, Nigeria · wasilat.ahmed@umyu.edu.ng

²Department of Management Science, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Azman University, Kano, Nigeria · mustaphabadamasi@gmail.com

³Department of Business Administration, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina State, Nigeria · fatima.dalhat@umyu.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

Employee motivation remains one of the most persistent management challenges confronting Nigeria's public sector, where recurring evidence of poor service delivery, absenteeism, and low productivity has been linked to weak motivational structures within ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). This paper examines the relationship between motivational factors, namely job security, work-life balance, and learning and development opportunities, and employee job performance, drawing on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory as its guiding framework. The paper builds on a comparative empirical precedent from Yang (2025), a quantitative study of 384 Malaysian public sector employees, and synthesises it with a substantial body of recent Nigerian and African literature to develop a conceptual framework suited to the Nigerian civil service context. The analysis suggests that job security, work-life balance, and learning and development opportunities are each strongly associated with employee job performance in comparable developing-country public sector settings, and that similar dynamics are visible across Nigerian federal, state, and parastatal institutions, albeit shaped by distinct structural constraints such as delayed promotions, weak pension administration, bureaucratic rigidity, and underfunded training budgets. The paper proposes a conceptual model and a cross-sectional survey methodology for empirically testing these relationships among Nigerian public sector employees, and concludes with theoretical, practical, and policy implications for the Federal Civil Service Commission, State Civil Service Commissions, and public sector human resource managers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Motivation, Motivational Factors, Job Security, Work-Life Balance, Learning and Development, Employee Job Performance, Nigerian Public Sector.

1. Introduction

Public sector performance is central to national development, and nowhere is this more evident than in Nigeria, where ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) are responsible for translating policy into services that reach over 220 million citizens. Yet the performance of the Nigerian civil service has long been a source of concern to policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike. Nigeria's public service delivery agency, SERVICOM, has repeatedly flagged weak internal performance-monitoring structures and inconsistent service delivery across MDAs. Reports of lateness, absenteeism, poor attitude to teamwork, and failure to meet deadlines continue to characterise segments of the

Nigerian civil service, prompting renewed scholarly attention to the motivational architecture that underlies public sector performance.

Motivation theory has long argued that a workforce that is inadequately motivated will underperform regardless of the technical competence of its members. Agbanero (2023) frames effective civil service performance in Nigeria as inseparable from the motivation experience of civil servants, arguing that structural weaknesses in recognition, career progression, and welfare provisions undermine service delivery. Similarly, Abuh, Okolie, and Uchenna (2025) demonstrate, using the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, that Nigerian public sector employees who are motivated and provided with the opportunity to apply their abilities record measurably higher commitment and performance levels. These findings echo a wider pattern documented across the African continent, including in Ghana and Morocco, where Elamalki et al. (2024) found that motivation exerts a significant positive effect on the job performance of public sector employees.

This paper takes as its starting point a quantitative Malaysian study by Yang (2025), which examined the relationship between three motivational factors — job security, work-life balance, and learning and development opportunities — and employee job performance among 384 Malaysian public sector employees, using Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory as its theoretical anchor. The Malaysian study found strong, statistically significant positive correlations between all three motivational factors and job performance, with the three factors jointly explaining 71.7% of the variance in employee job performance. Given the structural similarities between Malaysia's and Nigeria's public sectors — both large, hierarchical, civil-service bureaucracies inherited from colonial administrative traditions and both grappling with productivity and service delivery challenges — this paper re-examines the same three motivational constructs within the Nigerian public sector context, integrating recent Nigerian and African empirical literature to develop a context-specific conceptual framework and research agenda.

It is important to state at the outset that the empirical results reported by Yang (2025) were drawn from a Malaysian public sector sample and are used here strictly as comparative evidence and as a template for conceptual and methodological adaptation. They are not presented as Nigerian data. The contribution of this paper is therefore conceptual and theoretical: it re-contextualises an established motivation-performance framework for the Nigerian civil service, synthesises the relevant Nigerian and African literature, and proposes a testable model and methodology for future primary research among Nigerian public sector employees.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite decades of civil service reform in Nigeria — ranging from the 1988 and 1999 civil service reforms to the more recent Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPS) and Treasury Single Account (TSA) initiatives — concerns about low productivity persist. Onyekwulunne (2020) links weak personnel management practices to depressed productivity in Nigeria's public service. Career progression in the Nigerian civil service is frequently criticised for being slow, opaque, and vulnerable to favouritism rather than merit (Bello, 2023), while job security, historically a defining feature of Nigerian public employment, has been eroded in some MDAs by contract casualisation, irregular confirmation of appointments, and delayed promotions.

Work-life balance pressures have also intensified. Civil servants in Nigeria report that longer working hours, rigid schedules, growing workloads, and poor time-management support blur the boundary between work and personal life (Nigerian Civil Service News, 2024). Okpabi et al. (2024) found a significant relationship between work-life balance and organisational performance among Nigerian financial-sector employees, while training and development budgets in Nigerian public institutions are frequently underfunded or poorly aligned with institutional needs.

This paper pursues four objectives: (i) to review the conceptual and theoretical literature on motivation and employee job performance, with emphasis on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory; (ii) to synthesise recent Nigerian and African empirical evidence on job security, work-life balance, and learning and development as motivational factors; (iii) to

develop a conceptual framework linking these three motivational factors to employee job performance within the Nigerian public sector; and (iv) to propose a research methodology for empirically testing the framework among Nigerian public sector employees.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Motivation is generally understood as the inner force that propels individuals to initiate, sustain, and direct effort towards achieving personal and organisational objectives. In the context of work, motivation is what distinguishes an employee who merely occupies a position from one who actively strives to perform. Motivational factors are the specific organisational conditions, policies, and practices — such as job security, recognition, compensation, work-life balance, and learning and development opportunities — that either stimulate or fail to stimulate this inner drive. Employee job performance, in turn, refers to the extent to which an employee accomplishes assigned tasks and responsibilities relative to established standards, encompassing dimensions such as task completion, timeliness, quality of output, and, in the public sector, responsiveness to citizens.

In the Nigerian setting, job performance in public institutions has acquired particular salience because it is closely tied to citizens' experience of governance. Poor performance appraisal systems, in particular, have been identified as compounding motivational weaknesses: performance appraisal in Nigerian public organisations is frequently undermined by ethnicity, nepotism, favouritism, and outright bribery, which erodes the credibility of merit-based systems and, in turn, employee motivation (Ihensekhien, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Review

This paper is anchored on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959), which distinguishes between motivator factors — such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the work itself — that generate job satisfaction, and hygiene factors — such as pay, supervision, working conditions, organisational policy, and job security — whose absence generates dissatisfaction but whose presence does not, by itself, generate satisfaction (Dugguh & Dennis, 2014; Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl, & Maude, 2017). Applied to the Nigerian civil service, the theory implies that improving hygiene factors such as job security and reasonable working conditions is necessary to prevent dissatisfaction and disengagement, but that sustained performance gains require attention to genuine motivators such as recognition, meaningful learning and development opportunities, and merit-based advancement.

Two complementary theories enrich this analysis. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) suggests that employees can only be motivated by higher-order needs — belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation — once basic physiological and safety needs, including job and income security, are met. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where economic pressures such as inflation and delayed salary payments in some sub-national governments mean that safety and security needs remain unmet for a segment of public employees, constraining the effectiveness of non-financial motivational strategies. The Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) further argues that skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback shape employees' experienced meaningfulness of work and, consequently, their motivation and performance. Task significance is especially salient for Nigerian civil servants, who are more motivated when they perceive their roles as meaningful and capable of influencing citizens' lives, but that bureaucratic rigidity, inadequate resources, and weak feedback systems in Nigerian public institutions frequently diminish this sense of significance.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Job Security and Employee Job Performance

Job security remains a foundational motivational concern in the Nigerian public sector, where employment has traditionally been perceived as more stable than in the private sector, though this perception has weakened in recent years. Earlier Nigerian research found that civil servants who received confirmation of their appointments felt secure in their jobs and consequently performed better, concluding that job security is meaningfully guaranteed within the Nigerian civil service structure, at least for confirmed staff. More recent evidence from the Nigerian banking sector similarly ranks job security as the leading non-monetary motivational factor associated with employee job performance. Comparable evidence from Malaysia's public sector shows a strong positive correlation ($r = .810$) between job security and employee job performance, with flexible contractual arrangements and organisational assurance regarding tenure identified as the specific mechanisms through which job security motivates staff (Yang, 2025). Taken together, this suggests that job security operates as a hygiene factor in Herzberg's sense across both contexts: its presence does not necessarily generate exceptional enthusiasm, but its absence measurably depresses performance.

2.3.2 Work-Life Balance and Employee Job Performance

Work-life balance has emerged as an increasingly prominent concern in Nigerian human resource scholarship. Okpabi et al. (2024), studying deposit money banks in Makurdi, found a significant positive relationship between work-life balance and organisational performance using regression and correlation analysis on a sample of 252 employees. Solihu, Iyobhebhe, and Kilimvi (2023) similarly found that work-life balance significantly improves employee work quality in the Nigerian context. Within the public sector specifically, Oguh and Adamu (2025) reported that work-family-life balance significantly predicts employee job satisfaction among staff of a major Nigerian government-linked petroleum enterprise. These findings mirror the Malaysian evidence, where work-life balance showed the strongest of the three correlations with job performance ($r = .827$), operationalised through flexible working hours, optimal workload design, and the ability of employees to give fair priority to both professional and personal life domains (Yang, 2025). For Nigerian civil servants, who frequently report that long hours, rigid schedules, and heavy workloads erode personal time (Nigerian Civil Service News, 2024), this convergence suggests that work-life balance interventions represent a high-leverage motivational lever for Nigerian public sector reform.

2.3.3 Learning and Development and Employee Job Performance

Learning and development opportunities are widely recognised as a motivational lever with direct performance consequences. Ituma Odanwu, Agu, and Ozo (2024), studying Ebonyi State Civil Service in south-east Nigeria, found that career development significantly affects employee performance among a sample of 382 civil servants. Awotunde and Aregbeshola (2024) similarly emphasise intrapreneurship training and development as central to enhanced performance and organisational productivity within Nigerian organisations. However, training and development activities in Nigerian public institutions are frequently underfunded or poorly aligned with institutional requirements. This tension mirrors the Malaysian finding that learning and development exhibited both the strongest correlation with job performance ($r = .840$) and the largest regression coefficient among the three motivational factors (Yang, 2025). This suggests that Nigerian public institutions seeking performance gains from training investment should prioritise structured, assessed development programmes over informal mentoring arrangements alone.

2.3.4 Comparative and Cross-African Evidence

Evidence from elsewhere on the continent reinforces these Nigerian findings. Elamalki, Kaddar, and Beniich (2024) found that motivation significantly predicts job performance among Moroccan public sector employees, reflecting shared public-administration legacies across African civil services. A recent Nigerian study applying the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity framework found that motivation, alongside ability and opportunity, significantly enhances

employee commitment and performance levels within the Nigerian public sector (Abuh, Okolie, & Uchenna, 2025). Agbanero (2023) similarly frames motivation as central to effective civil service functioning in Nigeria, arguing that the country's service delivery challenges are, in part, a motivation problem rather than purely a competence problem. Collectively, this body of African evidence supports the applicability of a Herzberg-based motivational framework, adapted with Nigeria-specific hygiene and motivator factors, to the Nigerian public sector context.

3. Conceptual Framework

Building on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the Nigerian and African evidence reviewed above, this paper proposes a conceptual framework in which job security and work-life balance function primarily as hygiene factors, whose deterioration triggers dissatisfaction and reduced performance, while learning and development functions primarily as a motivator, whose enhancement actively drives superior performance. Employee job performance is conceptualised as the dependent construct, comprising task performance, timeliness, and citizen-responsiveness dimensions relevant to Nigerian public administration. The framework further recognises that Nigeria's federal structure introduces institutional heterogeneity: motivational deficits associated with delayed salaries and irregular promotions are more pronounced in some sub-national civil services than at the federal level, suggesting that empirical tests of the framework should, where feasible, disaggregate findings by tier of government.

Table 1: Proposed Motivational Factors and Their Herzberg Classification in the Nigerian Public Sector Context

Motivational Factor (Independent Variable)	Herzberg Classification	Nigerian Public Sector Indicators
Job Security	Hygiene factor	Confirmation of appointment, tenure assurance, clarity on pension and retirement benefits, contract regularisation
Work-Life Balance	Hygiene factor	Flexible resumption/closing times, manageable workload, support for family responsibilities, leave entitlement enforcement
Learning and Development	Motivator	Structured training seminars, career progression pathways, competency-based development programmes, study-leave provisions

Source: Adapted from Herzberg (1959) and Yang (2025), contextualised for the Nigerian public sector.

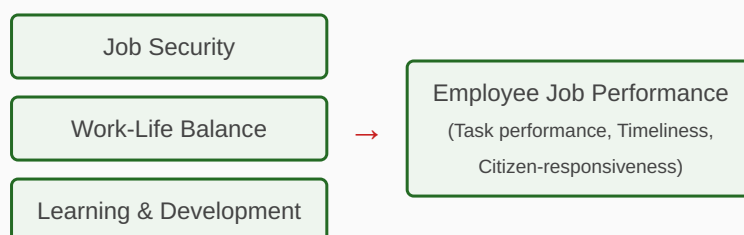
On this basis, the paper advances three propositions for empirical testing among Nigerian public sector employees:

P1: Job security is positively associated with employee job performance in the Nigerian public sector.

P2: Work-life balance is positively associated with employee job performance in the Nigerian public sector.

P3: Learning and development opportunities are positively associated with employee job performance in the Nigerian public sector, and this relationship is stronger than that observed for job security and work-life balance.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model — Motivational Factors and Employee Job Performance



Theoretical anchor: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959), complemented by Maslow (1943) and Hackman & Oldham (1976)

4. Proposed Methodology for Empirical Validation

To move from the conceptual framework above to verifiable Nigerian evidence, this paper proposes a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, consistent with the dominant methodological approach in comparable Nigerian public-sector motivation studies (e.g., Ituma Odanwu et al., 2024; Okpabi et al., 2024). The target population would comprise confirmed staff of selected federal MDAs or a specific state civil service (for example, Kano State or Katsina State civil service, given their relevance to the Nigerian north), stratified by grade level and ministry to ensure representativeness. Using a Taro Yamane or Krejcie-and-Morgan sample-size approach, a sample of approximately 380–400 respondents would be adequate for the planned correlation and multiple regression analysis, mirroring the scale of both the Malaysian precedent ($n = 384$) and comparable Nigerian civil service studies ($n = 382$ – 399).

A structured questionnaire, adapted from validated instruments used in Yang (2025) and in Nigerian studies such as Okpabi et al. (2024) and Ituma Odanwu et al. (2024), would measure job security, work-life balance, learning and development, and employee job performance on five-point Likert scales, following a pilot test and Cronbach's alpha reliability assessment (with a minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70). Data analysis would proceed in two stages: descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) to characterise the sample, followed by Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analysis to test the strength, direction, and joint explanatory power of the three motivational factors on employee job performance.

Ethical considerations would include obtaining informed consent from respondents, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of civil servants' responses — a particularly important consideration given the hierarchical and politically sensitive nature of Nigerian public administration — and seeking appropriate institutional clearance from the relevant Civil Service Commission or Head of Service before data collection.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This paper extends Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to the Nigerian public sector by explicitly classifying job security and work-life balance as hygiene factors and learning and development as a motivator, a classification that is broadly consistent with both the Malaysian comparator evidence and the Nigerian literature reviewed above. This contributes to ongoing debates in African management scholarship about the applicability of Western-developed motivation theories to African administrative contexts, suggesting that the underlying motivator-hygiene distinction travels reasonably well, even as the specific policy levers required to satisfy each factor — for example, pension reform and IPPIS-related payroll integrity in Nigeria — differ substantially from their Malaysian or Western equivalents.

5.2 Practical and Policy Implications

For Nigerian public sector human resource managers, the framework suggests three priorities. First, addressing job security concerns through timely confirmation of appointments, transparent tenure policies, and reliable pension administration is likely to reduce dissatisfaction, even if it does not, by itself, produce exceptional performance gains. Second, work-life balance interventions, such as flexible resumption arrangements, realistic workload distribution, and family-friendly leave policies, represent an underused lever given the strength of this relationship in comparable studies. Third, and most consequentially, investment in structured, well-assessed learning and development programmes, rather than informal mentoring alone, is likely to yield the largest performance returns, reinforcing calls from Nigerian scholars (Ituma Odanwu et al., 2024; Awotunde & Aregbeshola, 2024) for the Federal Civil Service

Commission and State Civil Service Commissions to prioritise adequately funded, competency-based training architecture.

5.3 Limitations

This paper is conceptual and comparative rather than empirical: the correlation and regression figures discussed in Section 2.3 were generated from a Malaysian public sector sample (Yang, 2025) and are used here solely to illustrate plausible relationships and to inform the proposed Nigerian methodology; they should not be interpreted as findings from Nigerian data. The Nigerian and African studies cited are drawn from diverse sectors, states, and sample sizes, and their findings, while directionally convergent, are not strictly comparable in magnitude. Primary data collection among Nigerian public sector employees, following the methodology proposed in Section 4, is required before the propositions advanced in Section 3 can be considered empirically validated for the Nigerian context.

6. Conclusion

This paper has synthesised Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory with recent Nigerian and African empirical literature to develop a conceptual framework linking job security, work-life balance, and learning and development to employee job performance within the Nigerian public sector. The convergence between the Malaysian comparator evidence and the Nigerian literature reviewed suggests that these three motivational factors are likely to matter significantly for Nigerian civil service performance, with learning and development appearing to offer the greatest performance leverage, but with job security and work-life balance remaining essential preconditions for preventing dissatisfaction and disengagement. Future research should implement the proposed cross-sectional survey methodology among a defined Nigerian public sector population, generating primary Nigerian data capable of empirically testing the propositions advanced here and informing evidence-based human resource policy reform within Nigeria's federal, state, and local civil services.

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