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HUMAN CAPITAL OR HUMAN FLIGHT? TALENT MANAGEMENT AND THE RETENTION CRISIS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Every public tertiary institution faces a quiet fork in the road, to invest in its people and keep them as human capital, or under-invest and watch them depart as human flight. This study examines that fork at the Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology (OYSCATECH), Igboora, as a representative case within Nigeria's wider public tertiary-education retention crisis, underpinned by social exchange theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted with a population of 545 employees and a sample of 220 respondents selected through multi-stage stratified random sampling based on Yamane's formula. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings show that recruitment and selection ($\beta = 0.341$, $R^2 = 0.512$), training and development ($\beta = 0.356$, $R^2 = 0.536$), career development ($\beta = 0.318$, $R^2 = 0.498$), and performance management ($\beta = 0.372$, $R^2 = 0.559$) each significantly and positively influence employee retention, all at $p < 0.05$, with performance management emerging as the single strongest lever against attrition. The study concludes that whether an institution accumulates human capital or bleeds it

Keywords: Talent management; Human capital; Brain drain; Employee retention; Recruitment and selection; Training and development; Career development; Performance management.

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through human flight is not a matter of chance but of talent-management design, and recommends that OYSCATECH and comparable Nigerian public tertiary institutions strengthen merit-based recruitment, expand training access, establish transparent promotion systems, and institutionalize fair performance appraisal to convert the retention crisis into workforce stability.

Introduction

Every employee an institution trains represents a wager as it is either that investment compounds as institutional human capital, or it walks out the door as human flight the moment a better offer appears elsewhere. Human capital remains one of the most vital drivers of organizational success in the modern global economy, with effective talent management directly influencing productivity, innovation, and institutional sustainability (Tan *et al.,* 2024). Amid rising global competition, organizations increasingly treat talent management not as an administrative function but as a strategic imperative to attract, develop, and retain high-potential employees (Collings *et al.,* 2019). Talent management is the systematic approach, spanning recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and career advancement, that aligns employee capability with organizational goals (Tan *et al.,* 2024); institutions that implement it comprehensively gain higher commitment, job satisfaction, and sustained competitive advantage (Kossyva *et al.,* 2024). The stakes are especially high in knowledge-intensive sectors such as education, where intellectual capital drives service quality and institutional reputation (Tantua, 2023) and where, conversely, its loss is felt immediately in disrupted teaching, research, and administration.

Economic pressure and rapid technological change have sharpened the choice between capital and flight. Institutions across sectors report talent shortages, rising turnover intention, and an increasingly mobile labour force (Akanmu *et al.*, 2025), elevating employee retention to the forefront of human-resource strategy worldwide. Retention is the organizational effort to keep employees engaged long enough to contribute meaningfully to institutional mission and strategic objectives (Hom *et al.,* 2017), achieved by fostering a work environment where employees feel valued, motivated, and aligned with institutional values, conditions that reduce turnover intention and strengthen commitment (Kossyva *et al*., 2024). Social exchange theory supplies the central mechanism linking talent management to this fork in the road as employees reciprocate favourable organizational treatment with loyalty, commitment, and reduced intention to quit (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Where institutions invest in their workforce through training, career pathways, and equitable performance evaluation, employees consider this as organizational support and reciprocate with commitment (Setyaningrum *et al.,*

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2024), tipping the balance toward capital. Where such investment is absent or inconsistent, the same exchange logic tips the balance toward flight. This study examines four talent-management dimensions through which that tipping happens, including recruitment and selection as merit-based processes for attracting and appointing qualified candidates (Armstrong, 2020); training and development, the structured skill-enhancement initiatives (Noe, 2020); career development, such as promotion policy and succession planning (De Vos et al., 2020); and performance management, the systematic appraisal, feedback, and recognition (Aguinis, 2019).

Despite extensive global research, the practical balance between human capital and human flight varies sharply between developed and developing economies. In Sub-Saharan Africa, and Nigeria specifically, retention of skilled personnel has become a serious institutional concern, with public institutions confronting high turnover, brain drain to international markets, and diminished institutional stability (Akanmu *et al.,* 2025), a retention crisis in the fullest sense. Nigerian public tertiary institutions face structural limitations, including bureaucratic procedure, limited financial incentive and rigid promotion systems, that constrain dynamic talent development and tilt the exchange toward flight (Tantua, 2023). Several specific factors compound the crisis, including irregular performance appraisal and unclear promotion pathways push employees toward alternative employment (Amaugo, 2024); limited professional-development opportunity reduces perceived organizational support (Kossyva *et al*., 2024); and most existing studies concentrate on private-sector organizations and federal universities, leaving state-owned colleges, and any unified model integrating all four talent-management dimensions, underexplored within Nigerian tertiary education. As a state-owned public tertiary institution operating under budget constraint and evolving HR policy, OYSCATECH, Igboora, illustrates the crisis directly as persistent staff turnover undermines institutional continuity, disrupts academic delivery, and raises recruitment cost. The absence of empirical research at this specific institution, and on the human-capital and human-flight balance in Nigerian public tertiary education more broadly, creates an important knowledge gap. This study therefore examines talent-management strategy and employee retention at OYSCATECH, with the objectives to: (i) assess the effect of recruitment and selection practices on employee retention; (ii) evaluate the influence of training and development on employee retention; (iii) examine the impact of career-development opportunities on employee retention; and (iv) determine the relationship between performance-management systems and employee retention.

Talent Management and the Capital-Flight Continuum

Talent management is the strategic approach to attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining employees to meet present and future organizational needs, the human

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resource processes designed to ensure the right people occupy the right roles at the right time (Tan *et al.,* 2024; Collings *et al*., 2019). Recruitment and selection are the systematic processes through which organizations attract, identify, and appoint qualified candidates based on merit, competence, and person-organization fit (Armstrong, 2020); merit-based systems that emphasize transparency and fairness enhance organizational commitment and reduce turnover intention by strengthening employees' initial trust in management (Kim & Park, 2021), the first point at which the institution either begins accumulating capital or sets the conditions for later flight. Employee retention itself is an organization's capacity to keep its employees over a sustained period, reflected in turnover intention, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction as its primary attitudinal and behavioural measures (Hom *et al.,* 2017); in knowledge-intensive tertiary institutions, retention directly determines academic quality, research output, and operational continuity, which is precisely why its loss is experienced as a crisis rather than ordinary attrition.

Training and development are structured initiatives to improve employees' knowledge, skills, and professional competence; employees who receive developmental support perceive enhanced career prospects and reciprocate with stronger institutional loyalty (Noe, 2020). The conceptual link to retention runs through several channels, like perceived organizational investment strengthens affective commitment; skill development improves job performance and satisfaction; professional-growth opportunity reduces the motivation to seek external employment; and structured mentoring and capacity-building strengthen institutional identification (Jehanzeb & Mohanty, 2018), each channel a small vote for capital over flight. Career development is the set of structured activities supporting employees' long-term professional growth, including promotion policy, succession planning, transparent advancement criteria aligning individual aspiration with institutional objective (De Vos *et al.,* 2020; Greenhaus *et al.,* 2019). Performance management is the continuous process of setting expectations, monitoring output, giving constructive feedback, and recognizing achievement to align individual contribution with organizational goals (Aguinis, 2019). The conceptual logic of this study is that the four dimensions jointly determine where an institution lands on the capital-flight continuum such that recruitment establishes fairness, training signals support, career development sustains growth expectation, and performance management reinforces recognition, together producing a comprehensive retention environment, or, absent coordination, a comprehensive flight risk (Collings *et al.,* 2019; Kossyva et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; extended by Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) provides the foundational framework, positing that employees reciprocate favourable

organizational treatment, manifest as talent-management investment, with loyalty, commitment, and reduced turnover intention. It explains retention as the product of an exchange process in which perceived support warrants reciprocal commitment (Setyaningrum *et al.,* 2024), and its components align with this study's dimensions, including the reciprocity principle corresponds to training and development that when institutions invest in employee growth, employees reciprocate with stronger affective commitment; perceived organizational support relates to recruitment fairness and performance recognition; and relational exchange corresponds to career development (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Kossyva *et al.,* 2024). On this account, talent-management practice translates into retention outcomes through the psychological mechanisms of fairness, support, and reciprocal obligation, mechanisms that, absent investment, work just as reliably in reverse, producing flight rather than commitment.

Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) supplies the complementary economic logic, treating training and development as institutional investments in employees' knowledge, skills, and productive capacity that generate long-term organizational value. It explains why institutions should strategically invest in recruitment quality, capacity building, career development, and performance systems as human-capital assets that reduce replacement cost and sustain competitiveness (Tantua, 2023); every Naira withheld from that investment is, in effect, a Naira bet on flight instead. While social exchange theory explains the psychological attachment mechanism, human capital theory explains the economic logic underpinning strategic HR investment, together giving comprehensive theoretical coverage of both dimensions of the talent management–retention relationship. Herzberg's two-factor theory, while relevant to satisfaction-retention linkages generally, does not capture the strategic HR-system perspective central to talent management and is therefore treated as a peripheral rather than primary reference here.

Empirical Review

Empirical research consistently links recruitment practice to retention outcomes. Kim and Park (2021), examining recruitment fairness in public-sector organizations, found that transparent, merit-based recruitment significantly reduced turnover through enhanced organizational commitment. Akanmu *et al.* (2025) demonstrated at OYSCATECH itself that personnel retention strategies, including structured recruitment processes, are significantly correlated with reduced labour turnover, confirming that strategic HR intervention can promote workforce stability even within a public tertiary institution under budget constraint. On training, Jehanzeb and Mohanty (2018) found that employee-development programmes significantly enhanced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, reducing turnover intention; Tantua (2023) found that talent management, including capacity building and training, significantly influences service

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quality and staff stability in Nigerian tertiary institutions; and Kossyva *et al.* (2024) showed that continuous learning and development keep employees competitive while fostering belonging and loyalty.

On career development, De Vos *et al.* (2020) found that perceived career growth significantly predicted job satisfaction and reduced turnover intention, with employees who perceived stagnation showing higher mobility intention, a direct empirical signal of the tilt toward flight. On performance management, Aguinis (2019) established that continuous feedback and recognition systems enhance engagement and commitment, while Setyaningrum *et al.* (2024) confirmed, through a social-exchange lens, that performance recognition strengthens loyalty and reduces turnover in emerging markets. Despite this accumulating evidence, most Nigerian studies concentrate on federal universities and banking institutions, leaving state-owned colleges underexplored, and limited research integrates all four talent-management components into a unified model for Nigerian public tertiary colleges specifically. The absence of comprehensive empirical investigation at OYSCATECH, and the broader question of which way the capital-flight balance tips across Nigerian public tertiary education, creates the critical knowledge gap this study addresses.

Methodology

This study, examining talent-management strategy and the retention crisis, was conducted at the Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology (OYSCATECH), Igboora, Oyo State, Nigeria, as a representative case within the broader landscape of Nigerian public tertiary education. The population comprises 545 employees, including both teaching and non-teaching staff across all faculties, departments, and administrative units. Anchored on social exchange theory and human capital theory, the study adopted a descriptive-survey design with structured questionnaires administered to 231 respondents selected through multi-stage sampling, involving stratified sampling by staff category, proportionate sampling for representation, and simple random sampling within each stratum, based on Yamane's (1967) formula. Of the questionnaires administered, 220 were retrieved and found valid for analysis, a 95.2% response rate. The instrument measured recruitment and selection, training and development, career development, and performance management as dimensions of talent-management strategy, with employee retention assessed through turnover intention, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, all on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Scales for organizational commitment and job satisfaction were adapted from validated instruments by Meyer and Allen (1991) and Locke (1976) respectively. A pilot study with 30 employees from a comparable tertiary institution confirmed instrument reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.81 (recruitment and selection), 0.84 (training and

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development), 0.79 (career development), 0.83 (performance management), and 0.85 (employee retention), all exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, consistent with recent methodological approaches in the talent management–retention literature (Akanmu *et al*., 2025; Kossyva *et al*., 2024).

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

Of the 220 respondents, 127 (57.7%) were male and 93 (42.3%) female, indicating a fairly inclusive workforce structure within the institution. By age, 61 (27.7%) were 35-44 years, 53 (24.1%) were 25-34 years, 47 (21.4%) were 45-54 years, 46 (20.9%) were 55 and above, and 13 (5.9%) were below 25, placing most respondents in mature, professionally active age groups well placed to assess talent-management practice and retention conditions. By staff category, 123 (55.9%) were non-academic and 97 (44.1%) academic, with both groups represented so the data capture how talent management affects different employee populations across the institution. By years of service, 61 (27.7%) had served 6-10 years, 59 (26.8%) had served 1-5 years, 57 (25.9%) had served above 15 years, and 43 (19.5%) had served 11-15 years, indicating most respondents had spent enough time within the institution to understand its HR practices, career-development systems, and retention conditions, and the substantial share of long-serving staff suggests OYSCATECH has, despite the broader crisis, retained a meaningful core over time. By education, 97 (44.1%) held HND/B.Sc qualifications, 59 (26.8%) held M.Sc degrees, 33 (15.0%) held PhDs, and 31 (14.1%) held ND/NCE certificates, revealing a well-educated respondent profile that strengthens the credibility of responses on recruitment, training, career development, performance management, and retention.

Ho1: Recruitment and selection practices have no significant effect on employee retention.

Variable	β	S.E.	t-stat	p
Constant	1.532	0.158	9.696	0.000
Recruitment and Selection	0.341	0.074	4.608	0.000

R^2 = 0.512 | Adjusted R^2 = 0.507 | R = 0.715 | F = 82.436 | N = 220 | Dependent variable: Employee Retention

Recruitment and selection practices significantly and positively affect employee retention (β = 0.341, p < 0.001). The strong correlation (R = 0.715) and R^2 of 0.512 show that recruitment and selection explain approximately 51.2% of the variance in retention, the model overall significant (F = 82.436). Ho1 is rejected. The first fork toward capital rather than flight is set at the point of hiring: where employees perceive recruitment as credible

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and unbiased, they develop trust in the institution and remain committed to it, corroborating Kim and Park (2021), who found that transparent, merit-based recruitment significantly reduces turnover intention through enhanced organizational commitment.

Ho2: Training and development have no significant influence on employee retention.

Variable	β	S.E.	t-stat	p
Constant	1.468	0.152	9.658	0.000
Training and Development	0.356	0.069	5.159	0.000

R^2 = 0.536 | Adjusted R^2 = 0.531 | R = 0.732 | F = 88.914 | N = 220 | Dependent variable: Employee Retention

Training and development significantly and positively influence employee retention (β = 0.356, p < 0.001). With R = 0.732 and R^2 = 0.536, training explains roughly 53.6% of the variance in retention, the model overall significant (F = 88.914). Ho2 is rejected. Training functions as a visible signal of institutional investment that substantially strengthens commitment, satisfaction, and intention to remain, consistent with Jehanzeb and Mohanty (2018), who showed employee-development programmes significantly enhance job satisfaction and commitment while reducing turnover, and with Tantua (2023), who confirmed that structured training and capacity building significantly improve staff stability in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Ho3: Career development opportunities have no significant impact on employee retention.

Variable	β	S.E.	t-stat	p
Constant	1.512	0.160	9.450	0.000
Career Development	0.318	0.073	4.356	0.000

R^2 = 0.498 | Adjusted R^2 = 0.493 | R = 0.706 | F = 76.205 | N = 220 | Dependent variable: Employee Retention

Career development significantly and positively affects employee retention (β = 0.318, p < 0.001). With R = 0.706 and R^2 = 0.498, the smallest, though still substantial, of the four effects, career development explains approximately 49.8% of the variance in retention, the model overall significant (F = 76.205). Ho3 is rejected. Structured career development meaningfully strengthens long-term institutional loyalty and reduces turnover intention, aligning with De Vos *et al.* (2020), who established that perceived career growth significantly predicts job satisfaction and reduced turnover intention, and with Akanmu *et al.* (2025), who confirmed at OYSCATECH itself that career-advancement strategies are significantly correlated with reduced labour turnover.

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Ho4: There is no significant relationship between performance management systems and employee retention.

Variable	B	S.E.	t-stat	p
Constant	1.438	0.147	9.782	0.000
Performance Management	0.372	0.068	5.471	0.000

R^2 = 0.559 | Adjusted R^2 = 0.555 | R = 0.748 | F = 92.618 | N = 220 | Dependent variable: Employee Retention

Performance management significantly and positively influences employee retention (β = 0.372, p < 0.001), the strongest of the four effects. With R = 0.748 and R^2 = 0.559, performance management explains approximately 55.9% of the variance in retention, the model overall significant (F = 92.618). Ho4 is rejected. Fair, transparent, and continuous appraisal most substantially strengthens employees' motivation, organizational commitment, and intention to remain, corroborating Aguinis (2019), who established that fair appraisal, continuous feedback, and recognition significantly enhance commitment and retention, and Setyaningrum *et al.* (2024), who confirmed through social exchange theory that performance recognition strengthens loyalty and reduces turnover in emerging institutions. That this is the strongest lever in the data is itself a finding about the crisis where institutions cannot easily raise pay or guarantee promotion, fair recognition is the most readily available, and most cost-effective, tool for tipping the balance back toward capital.

Conclusion

This study set out to test, at OYSCATECH, Igboora, whether and how talent management determines an institution's position on the human capital-human flight continuum within Nigeria's broader public-tertiary-education retention crisis. All four dimensions, including recruitment and selection, training and development, career development, and performance management, showed significant positive effects on retention, with performance management exhibiting the strongest explanatory power (R^2 = 0.559), followed by training and development (R^2 = 0.536), recruitment and selection (R^2 = 0.512), and career development (R^2 = 0.498). These findings align with Collings *et al.* (2019) and Kossyva *et al.* (2024), who established that coordinated talent-management practice significantly improves employee commitment, satisfaction, and retention. However, gaps in promotion consistency, uniform training access, and performance recognition limit the full retention benefit, corroborating Setyaningrum *et al.* (2024), who noted that talent-management effectiveness depends critically on perceived fairness and consistency of HR implementation, meaning the crisis, where it persists, is substantially a design failure rather than an inevitability.

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The practical implication is that whether Nigerian public tertiary institutions retain human capital or lose it to human flight is not predetermined by their budget constraints alone; it is shaped by how deliberately they manage recruitment, training, career pathways, and performance recognition. The study recommends strengthening transparent and merit-based recruitment (Kim & Park, 2021); expanding equitable training and professional-development access (Jehanzeb & Mohanty, 2018); establishing clear promotion policy and succession planning (De Vos *et al*., 2020); institutionalizing fair and developmental performance-appraisal systems (Aguinis, 2019); and adopting an integrated talent-management framework that aligns all four dimensions toward unified retention outcomes (Collings et al., 2019). Future research should pursue comparative studies across Nigerian tertiary institutions, mixed-methods investigation of employees' lived HR experience, longitudinal studies establishing causal retention relationships over time, and exploration of digital HR practice as an emerging retention tool within Nigerian public institutions confronting their own version of this capital-or-flight choice.

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