ISA Journal of Business, Economics and Management (ISAJBEM)

Homepage: https://isapublisher.com/isajbem/

Volume 3, Issue 6, Nov-Dec, 2026 ISSN: 3049-1835

Recruitment and Promotion Practices in the Nigerian Civil Service: Implications for Service Delivery

Okpanachi Olubojo God'spower

Department of Public Administration, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba

Received: 07.09.2026 | **Accepted:** 19.10.2026 | **Published:** 03.11.2026

***Corresponding Author:** Okpanachi Olubojo God'spower

DOI: *10.5281/zenodo.23909882*

Abstract **Original Research Article**

Recruitment and promotion determine the quality of personnel entering the civil service, the conduct rewarded within it, and the leadership available to implement public policy. This chapter examines recruitment and promotion practices in the Nigerian Civil Service and their implications for service delivery. It adopts a qualitative documentary and narrative-review approach, drawing mainly on federal constitutional and administrative instruments, official reform documents and relevant Nigerian scholarship, with selected state-level evidence. Anchored in Weberian bureaucratic theory and Equity Theory, the chapter argues that Nigeria has a substantial formal framework for merit, representation and career progression, but its service-delivery value is weakened by political influence, opaque selection, subjective appraisal and delayed promotion. These weaknesses create skills mismatch, perceived injustice, weak accountability and limited responsiveness to citizens. The chapter proposes a model of representative merit that combines transparent competence thresholds with inclusive access. It recommends competency-based recruitment, auditable digital processes, objective performance evidence, timely promotion, credible appeals, capacity development and stronger links between career advancement and measurable service standards.

Keywords: recruitment; promotion; Nigerian Civil Service; merit; federal character; service delivery.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

1.0 Introduction

The civil service is the permanent administrative machinery through which the government translates laws, budgets and political commitments into services. Its effectiveness depends not only on policy design and financial resources, but also on the competence, integrity and motivation of the officials who implement decisions. Recruitment determines the skills and public-service values brought into government, while promotion identifies the conduct and performance that the institution rewards. When these processes are credible, they strengthen professionalism, continuity and public confidence; when manipulated, they reproduce weak capacity and institutional unfairness (OECD, 2019, 2021).

In Nigeria, the Federal Civil Service Commission is constitutionally associated with appointment, promotion and discipline, while the Public Service Rules, schemes of service and related guidelines regulate entry and career progression (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999/2023, 2021; Federal Civil Service Commission, 2004). The federal character principle adds the legitimate objective of broad representation. The policy challenge is therefore not

merit versus inclusion, but how to build open and auditable procedures that secure both competence and representative access (Idike et al., 2019).

Although Nigeria has federal and state civil services, this chapter focuses primarily on the Federal Civil Service because its constitutional provisions and central policy instruments provide the clearest national framework. Selected state-level studies are used to illustrate wider administrative patterns, without assuming complete uniformity across jurisdictions. The aim is to examine the formal and informal dimensions of recruitment and promotion and evaluate their implications for competence, motivation, accountability and service delivery. The chapter proceeds from conceptual and theoretical clarification to institutional analysis, practice, consequences, challenges and reform priorities.

2.0 Conceptual and Analytical Clarifications

2.1 Recruitment

Recruitment is the organised process through which an institution identifies a staffing need, attracts applicants, assesses suitability and appoints an individual to a defined role. Selection is the evaluative stage, while placement concerns matching the successful applicant to a position. Merit-based recruitment should therefore rest on job-relevant evidence rather than certificates alone. It encompasses technical knowledge, ethical judgement, communication, digital competence, problem-solving ability and commitment to public-service values (OECD, 2021).

2.2 Promotion

Promotion is advancement to a higher grade involving greater responsibility, status and usually remuneration. Civil-service promotion may draw on seniority, qualifications, examinations, performance records, experience, conduct and vacancy availability. Seniority can protect continuity and limit arbitrary preference, but it may reward the passage of time rather than readiness for higher responsibility. Performance-based promotion is stronger only where objectives, ratings and access to developmental assignments are fair and verifiable (Ogah & Akinbo, 2024; Sakpere, 2021).

2.3 Civil Service, Public Service and Service Delivery

The civil service principally comprises permanent career officials working in government ministries and departments, whereas the public service is broader and includes commissions, statutory agencies, parastatals and other publicly funded bodies. This distinction matters because some instruments reviewed here formally apply to the wider Federal Public Service, although the chapter concentrates on career civil servants. Service delivery refers to the accessible, timely, reliable, equitable and responsive provision of public benefits. Recruitment affects these outcomes through competence and person-job fit; promotion affects them through motivation, retention, leadership succession and organisational justice (Thomson, 2004).

3.0 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Weber's Bureaucratic Theory

Weber's ideal bureaucracy emphasises hierarchy, specialisation, written records, impersonal rules and appointment based on technical competence (Weber, 1978). Applied to recruitment and promotion, public office should not be distributed as personal patronage, and advancement should follow known criteria administered by authorised institutions. The theory is valuable because predictable rules and professional competence protect the civil service from arbitrary pressure. Its limitation is that procedural compliance can become an end in itself: a formally correct examination may test irrelevant knowledge, while rigid hierarchy may suppress innovation.

3.2 Equity Theory and Combined Relevance

Equity Theory explains how employees compare their contributions, qualifications, effort, performance and experience with the rewards received by themselves and others (Adams, 1965). Where connections appear more influential than performance, employees may reduce effort, disengage or pursue informal influence. Weberian theory therefore explains the need for lawful,

competence-based administration, while Equity Theory explains why the perceived consistency of those rules affects motivation. Neither theory fully captures Nigeria's political and patronage pressures, but together they provide a useful institutional and behavioural framework.

4.0 Methodological Approach

This chapter adopts a qualitative documentary and narrative-review approach. Materials comprise constitutional and administrative instruments, official recruitment and performance-management documents, peer-reviewed articles, books and institutional reports. Searches of Google Scholar, journal platforms, institutional repositories and official government websites used combinations of the terms "civil service recruitment Nigeria," "promotion practices," "federal character and merit," "performance appraisal," and "service delivery." Priority was given to sources directly addressing personnel practices and public-sector outcomes; recent materials were preferred, while foundational theoretical works were retained. Evidence was organised thematically around recruitment, promotion, fairness, competence, employee behaviour and service-delivery consequences. The chapter does not claim a systematic review or original field data. Its analysis is weighted towards the Federal Civil Service, with selected state-level evidence used cautiously to illuminate broader patterns.

5.0 Institutional and Regulatory Framework for Recruitment and Promotion

5.1 Appointment, Promotion and Administrative Rules

The Federal Civil Service Commission exercises constitutional functions relating to appointment, promotion and discipline, while ministries and extra-ministerial departments operate staff committees and human-resource processes under central rules (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999/2023; Federal Civil Service Commission, 2004). The Public Service Rules regulate appointment, confirmation, career progression, discipline and separation, supported by schemes of service, circulars and promotion guidelines (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). These instruments make personnel decisions acts of constituted authority rather than private managerial discretion.

5.2 Federal Character and Representative Merit

Federal Character Commission guidance emphasises public advertisement, transparency and balanced representation (Federal Character Commission, n.d.). In a diverse federation, public institutions should not be monopolised by a few states or groups. Yet inclusion and competence are not opposites. Transparent minimum competence thresholds should first protect service quality, after which representative considerations can operate among qualified candidates. This model of representative merit widens access without treating federal character as a substitute for capability or merit as a cover for unequal opportunity (Idike et al., 2019).

5.3 Performance Management Reform

The federal Performance Management System seeks to replace weak appraisal routines with agreed objectives, key result areas, competencies, feedback, accountability and citizen-oriented results (OHCSF, 2022a, 2022b). This reform is crucial because promotion cannot be genuinely performance-based unless performance is planned, reviewed and documented. However, evidence on appraisal practice indicates that bias, leniency, politicisation and weak implementation can undermine formal systems (Pillah, 2023; Sakpere, 2021).

6.0 Recruitment Practices and Service-Delivery Consequences

6.1 Formal Procedure and Competency Assessment

Civil-service recruitment should begin with an approved workforce need and proceed through advertisement, screening, examination or interview, selection, appointment and placement. Open advertisement expands the applicant pool, while

structured scoring reduces personal discretion. A stronger process links each vacancy to service outputs and assesses verified qualifications, job knowledge, ethical reasoning, communication, digital literacy and practical problem-solving. Work samples and structured interviews are more defensible than relying on credentials or unstructured conversations alone (Federal Character Commission, n.d.; OECD, 2021).

6.2 Patronage, Informal Influence and Skills Mismatch

The central risk is the gap between formal rules and implementation. Nigerian research identifies political, ethnic and personal influence as recurring threats to merit-based recruitment (Bassey & Edemidiong, 2021; Omisore & Okofu, 2014). Evidence from Rivers and Ebonyi States similarly links politically influenced appointments with the displacement of suitable candidates, weak productivity and inefficient service delivery (Chinwendu & Godbless, 2023; Elekwachi & Ufomba, 2024). These studies should not be generalised to every institution, but they demonstrate how sponsorship can narrow applicant pools, create divided accountability and weaken supervisory authority.

6.3 Recruitment and Service Capacity

Poor recruitment produces skills mismatch, errors, delays and dependence on a small number of competent officers. It can enlarge payrolls without filling critical gaps in procurement, data analysis, project management and digital service design. Transparent digital platforms can create audit trails and reduce undocumented discretion, but technology is not automatically fair: criteria, accessibility, data protection, conflict-of-interest declarations and appeal procedures must remain visible. Recruitment reform should therefore combine workforce planning, competency testing, inclusive access and independent audit rather than merely transferring an opaque process online.

Workforce planning should also anticipate retirement patterns, succession needs, geographic distribution and emerging professional requirements. Recruiting only when vacancies become politically or administratively urgent encourages rushed selection and weak placement. Periodic skills inventories can show where ministries have numerical surpluses but capability shortages, allowing recruitment to target demonstrable service gaps rather than simply reproduce inherited establishment structures.

7.0 Promotion Practices and Service-Delivery Consequences

7.1 Criteria, Appraisal and Fairness

Promotion rewards contribution, retains experience, fills leadership positions and signals the behaviour the institution values. A mixed approach combining maturity on grade, relevant qualifications, examinations, performance evidence, conduct and vacancy constraints is defensible because no single indicator is sufficient. The difficulty arises when criteria are applied inconsistently, appraisal scores are inflated, or some officers receive preferred access to strategic assignments and training. Empirical evidence suggests that Nigerian public-sector appraisal systems often exist formally but are weakened by subjectivity, rating errors and politicisation (Pillah, 2023; Sakpere, 2021).

7.2 Delay, Motivation and Leadership Succession

Delayed promotion, unexplained outcomes or advancement without timely financial implementation weaken the perceived connection between effort and reward. Research associates transparent, merit-oriented promotion with commitment, efficiency, responsiveness and goal attainment, while opaque processes encourage disengagement and minimum compliance (Agbanero, 2023; Ogah & Akinbo, 2024). Promotion also determines who allocates work, evaluates subordinates and manages complaints. Assessment should therefore include integrity, team leadership, innovation, service improvement and readiness for greater responsibility—not only recall of general rules. Unsuccessful candidates should receive reasons, development guidance and access to a

credible appeal process.

The transition from traditional appraisal routines to the Performance Management System creates an opportunity to strengthen promotion evidence. Objectives should be agreed at the beginning of the cycle, reviewed periodically and supported by records that a moderation panel can test. Calibration across units is essential because an outstanding rating in one ministry should represent broadly comparable achievement elsewhere. Without common standards and managerial training, a new form may simply reproduce the weaknesses of the system it replaced (OHCSF, 2022b; Pillah, 2023).

8.0 Implications for Effective Service Delivery

8.1 Competence, Responsiveness and Accountability

Citizens experience the civil service through concrete transactions such as permits, pensions, regulatory decisions, social services and complaints. Recruitment that tests relevant capabilities improves accuracy and timeliness, whereas weak person-job fit encourages referrals, backlogs and procedural delay. Fair promotion adds discretionary effort by assuring employees that learning, integrity and problem-solving have career value. Merit-based entry may also reduce personal indebtedness to patrons, while evidence-based advancement can align individual incentives with institutional targets and service standards (OECD, 2021; OHCSF, 2022a).

The effects are cumulative. A poorly selected junior officer may initially create only local errors, but repeated weak recruitment eventually affects supervisory and managerial grades through internal promotion. Conversely, a credible system creates a positive pipeline in which competent entrants acquire experience, receive development and progress into leadership. Recruitment and promotion should therefore be evaluated together as a career system rather than as isolated administrative events.

8.2 Digital Transformation and Citizen Trust

Digital government requires more than computers; it requires employees capable of redesigning processes, analysing data, protecting information and supporting users. Evidence from the Cross River State Civil Service shows that inadequate digital tools, financing and digital capability can constrain e-governance and effective service delivery (Inakefe et al., 2024). Recruitment must therefore attract relevant skills, while promotion should recognise responsible innovation. Digitalisation should still preserve alternatives for citizens affected by poor connectivity or disability and should strengthen, rather than remove, human accountability.

8.3 Institutional Legitimacy and the Limits of Personnel Reform

Fair personnel systems strengthen legitimacy because citizens and employees can see that public authority is exercised according to defensible standards. Nigeria's challenge is to demonstrate both inclusion and competence through representative merit. Recruitment and promotion will not independently solve inadequate funding, obsolete procedures, political instability or corruption; competent employees still require clear mandates, resources, technology and supportive leadership. They are nevertheless enabling conditions: other reforms are unlikely to endure where implementers were poorly selected or have little incentive to perform.

9.0 Challenges Affecting Recruitment and Promotion

The principal obstacles are political interference, patronage networks, weak workforce planning, inconsistent rule interpretation, unreliable records, subjective appraisal, promotion backlogs, unequal developmental opportunities and limited sanctions for manipulation. Fragmentation compounds the problem because commissions, ministries, professional cadres and state services may apply related rules differently. Existing studies of recruitment, patronage and appraisal indicate that additional rules alone are insufficient when implementation, transparency and oversight remain weak (Bassey & Edemidiong, 2021; Elekwachi &

Ufomba, 2024; Sakpere, 2021).

Institutional dependence is another concern. Personnel bodies may possess formal authority yet remain vulnerable to pressure from political officeholders, senior administrators or informal networks. Employees may also avoid challenging questionable decisions when grievance procedures are slow or fear of retaliation is high. Weak records then make retrospective review difficult, allowing irregular practices to become normalised and reducing organisational learning.

10.0 Reform Strategies and Policy Recommendations

10.1 Transparent, Competency-Based Recruitment

Every recruitment exercise should originate from an approved workforce plan and a published job profile linked to service outputs. Eligibility criteria, assessment stages and scoring principles should be announced in advance. Structured assessment records, conflict-of-interest declarations, disability accommodations, secure complaints channels and independent observation should be retained for audit. Digital systems should support, not replace, procedural fairness.

10.2 Integrating Federal Character and Merit

Federal character should broaden opportunity and guide balanced representation among applicants who satisfy transparent competence thresholds. Aggregate recruitment reports should disclose applicant pools, representation, assessment methods and major deviations without exposing personal data. This would make both exclusion and competence claims testable and strengthen the legitimacy of constituted recruitment authorities.

10.3 Evidence-Based and Timely Promotion

Promotion should combine maturity on grade, examinations where relevant, documented objectives, behavioural competencies, integrity records, leadership potential and verified service improvements. No single supervisor should control the outcome; moderation panels and electronic records can reduce rating inflation and selective documentation. Decisions and corresponding benefits should be implemented promptly, with written feedback and independent appeal routes.

10.4 Capacity Development, Oversight and Service Results

Career progression should be connected to targeted development. Officers with competency gaps should receive training, while high-potential personnel should access competitive assignments across ministries. Manipulation should attract credible sanctions, and oversight bodies should publish aggregate findings and correct unlawful decisions. Consistent with international public-service capability principles, reform should be judged by reduced processing time, fewer complaints, improved reliability and citizen satisfaction—not merely by the number of recruitment or promotion exercises completed (OECD, 2019).

Each ministry should publish an annual personnel-process report showing vacancies advertised, stages completed, appeals received, promotion backlogs and the service indicators linked to staffing decisions. These reports need not disclose personal data; their purpose is to reveal patterns, delays and unexplained deviations. Periodic independent audits should test whether recruited competencies are actually used and whether promoted officers improve team and service performance. This closes the accountability loop between personnel administration and citizens' outcomes.

Table 1: *Personnel Practices and Service-Delivery Pathways*

Personnel practice	Immediate institutional effect	Likely service-delivery outcome
Open, competency-based recruitment	Better person-job fit and technical capacity	Fewer errors, faster processing and more reliable decisions
Patronage-based recruitment	Skills mismatch and divided accountability	Delay, weak discipline and lower citizen trust
Transparent, timely promotion	Motivation, retention and credible leadership succession	Greater responsiveness and sustained performance
Opaque or delayed promotion	Perceived injustice, disengagement and risk avoidance	Minimum compliance, backlogs and weak problem-solving
Performance-linked progression	Alignment of individual effort with MDA targets	Improved accountability and measurable service standards

Note. Author's synthesis based on the literature and policy documents reviewed in this chapter.

11.0 Conclusion

Recruitment and promotion are foundational governance processes because they determine institutional capability, motivation and leadership succession. Nigeria's formal framework recognises merit, representation, career progression and performance, but its service-delivery value depends on consistent implementation. Recruitment should identify the competencies required to solve public problems, while promotion should reward verified results, integrity and readiness for greater responsibility. The central reform task is representative merit: inclusion must not displace competence, and merit must not conceal unequal access. Ultimately, reform credibility will depend not merely on new rules, but on whether constituted authorities apply them transparently and produce measurable improvements in citizens' experience of government.

References

Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267–299). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60108-2

Agbanero, I. (2023). Motivation and effective civil service: The Nigeria experience. *Uluslararası Yönetim Akademisi Dergisi, 6*(1), 28–34. https://doi.org/10.33712/mana.1177144

Bassey, J. E., & Edemidiong, E. E. (2021). Patronage versus merit: A systemic review of recruitment dynamics in the Nigerian public service. *AKSU Journal of Administration and Corporate Governance, 1*(2), 71–83.

Chinwendu, O., & Godbless, D. D. (2023). Recruitment and selection processes in public service organizations: Rivers State experience. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 5*(2), 123–133. https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2023.v05i02.011

Elekwachi, E., & Ufomba, H. (2024). Political patronage and bureaucracy: Studies in Nigeria and Indonesia. *Jurnal Mengkaji Indonesia, 3*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.59066/jmi.v3i1.564

Federal Character Commission. (n.d.). *Recruitment guidelines*. https://fcc.gov.ng/aboutfcc/recruitment-guidelines/

Federal Civil Service Commission. (2004).

Guidelines for appointments, promotion and discipline (Revised ed.).

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999/2023). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as amended*. Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre. https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Constitution-of-the-Federal-Republic-of-Nigeria-2023.pdf

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2021). *Public service rules*. Federal Government Printer.

Idike, A., Ukeje, I. O., Iwuala, H. O., Onele, J. C., Ekwunife, R. A., Nwachukwu, K., & Udu, O. (2019). The practice of inclusive representation in Nigeria bureaucracy: The federal character principle experience. *Cogent Social Sciences, 5*(1), Article 1601545. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1601545

Inakefe, G. I., Bassey, V. U., & Amadi, J. O. (2024). Evaluation of the policy and institutional implications of digital tools in e-governance reforms implementation for service delivery in Cross River State Civil Service, Nigeria. *SAGE Open, 14*(4), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241297047

Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation. (2022a). *Policy on performance management system for the Federal Public Service of Nigeria*.

Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation. (2022b). *Guidelines on performance management system for the Federal Public Service of Nigeria*.

Ogah, U. S., & Akinbo, T. M. (2024). Exploring promotion practices, impact on public servants' commitment, efficiency, responsiveness, and goal attainment in Nigeria. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 24*(2), 2557–2571. https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.2.3475

Omisore, B. O., & Okofu, B. I. (2014). Staff recruitment and selection process in the Nigerian public service: What is to be done? *International Journal of Human Resource Studies, 4*(3), 280–293. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v4i3.6367

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *Recommendation of the Council on public service leadership and capability*. OECD Publishing. https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0445

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). *Public employment and management 2021: The future of the public service*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/938f0d65-en

Pillah, T. P. (2023). Performance management system in Nigeria: An evaluation of new APER in the Federal Civil Service of Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research, 1*(4), 1–9.

Sakpere, R. O. (2021). Effectiveness of employees' performance appraisal in the Nigerian public sector: An empirical study. *World Journal of Social Science Research, 8*(3), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.22158/wjssr.v8n3p27

Thomson, W. (2004). *Delivering service in Nigeria: A roadmap*. The Presidency. https://servicom.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Delivering-Service-in-Nigeria-A-Roadmap-2.pdf

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.