INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH
P-ISSN: 1118-4256, E-ISSN:3034-4327
Vol. 6| No.3 | Oct 2025
Page No.: 150 – 178

CAREER PLATEAU AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

Ochonogor, Rachael Ejiro
(reochonogor@fepoda.edu.ng)[1]

Leonard Tabugo Onwuzuligbo
(lt.onwuzuligbo@unizik.edu.ng)[2]

[1&2]Department of Business Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Abstract

The study examined the relationship between career plateau and employee performance in Anambra state public tertiary institutions. The specific objectives of this were to examine the relationship between static salary and skills enhancement and determine the relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement. The study adopted descriptive survey research design and data were obtained from primary sources using a structured questionnaire. The Sample size was derived with Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula and the hypotheses were tested with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 27. The results revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between static salary and skills enhancement. Results further indicated that there is a negative significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement. The study's findings unequivocally revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between career plateau and employee performance in Anambra state public tertiary institutions. The study recommended that tertiary institutions need to adopt performance-based pay structures, adjusting salaries to reflect employees' expanding skill sets and professional growth. Also, institutions need to prioritize employee motivation to drive continuous improvement.

Keywords: Career Plateau, Employee Performance, Static Salary, Skills Enhancement, Reduced Motivation, Continuous Improvement.

Introduction

Career plateau is a widespread and intricate issue marked by a lack of progress in one's career and advancements. It is described as a situation where there is little opportunity for career growth and development, leading individuals to feel that there are limited chances for professional advancement (Bhavani & Prasad, 2022). The career plateau can significantly impact employee motivation, job satisfaction, and general well-being. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, including structural plateau (hierarchical constraints, limited promotional opportunities), content plateau (lack of challenging tasks, repetitive responsibilities), job plateau (stagnant job roles, inadequate autonomy), and lifestyle plateau (inadequate work-life balance, conflicting personal and professional goals). Specifically, within tertiary institutions, the effects of career plateau can be particularly debilitating, leading to diminished job satisfaction, increased frustration, reduced work engagement, decreased motivation, and potentially, a decrease in the quality of education and research. Furthermore, career plateau can result in increased turnover intentions, absenteeism, and decreased commitment to the organization, ultimately impacting organizational productivity, morale, and reputation (Cha & Park, 2021).

Employee performance is the evaluation of an individual's job-related accomplishments, skills, and behaviors, measuring their impact, productivity, and quality of work in achieving organizational objectives and goals. There are various types of employee performance, including quantitative (task-oriented) performance, qualitative (people-oriented) performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (extra-role) performance (Amboka, 2022). In tertiary institutions, optimal employee performance significantly impacts academic excellence, research quality, student satisfaction, and institutional reputation, whereas suboptimal performance can lead to decreased morale, increased

turnover, reduced research output, compromised academic standards, and strained relationships among faculty, staff, and students. Conversely, high-performing employees foster innovative teaching methods, cutting-edge research, effective administrative support, and enhanced institutional competitiveness, ultimately driving the institution's growth, accreditation, and national/international rankings (Rahimi, Javan, Baradaran & Pourhosein, 2023).

Tertiary institutions comprise universities, Polytechnics, colleges, and specialized schools that deliver higher education programmes, fostering advanced knowledge, skills, and research capabilities beyond secondary education. Anambra State public tertiary institutions have a rich history dating back to the 1970s. Since then, the sector has grown exponentially, with numerous institutions sprouting across the state. These institutions have played a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape of Anambra State, producing thousands of graduates annually. These institutions comprised of universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture, health Sciences, and schools of Nursing and midfery which plays a vital role in shaping the minds of future leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators. However, beneath the surface of this growth lies a complex web of challenges. The sector has faced numerous hurdles, including inadequate funding, outdated infrastructure, frustrated workers leading to dissatisfied, demotivated, underperforming and underutilized workforce. Despite these challenges, Anambra State public tertiary institutions continue to be a vital component of the state's education sector. Recent years have seen efforts to revitalize the sector, including initiatives aimed at improving infrastructure, enhancing staff capacity, and promoting research and innovation. Yet, the specter of career plateau looms large, threatening to undermine these efforts (Ukata & Okeke, 2023).

Shape-shifting the narrative around the intersection of career plateau and employee performance within Anambra State public tertiary institutions unfolds a complex and intriguing scenario. Preliminary observations suggest a workforce grappling with the harsh realities of career stagnation, as previously engaged and motivated employees now exhibit signs of disengagement and disconnection. This perceived stagnation appears to have far-reaching implications, potentially influencing not only employee performance but also the overall quality of education provided. Personally, this study resonates within the researcher as it aligns with my own career aspirations and concerns about job satisfaction and growth within the education sector. By investigating the dynamics of career plateau, this study aims to gain valuable insights into my own professional development, enhance my understanding of the complexities surrounding employee performance, and to proffer strategies to mitigate career stagnation. As the researcher prepares to embark on an in-depth investigation, it becomes increasingly crucial to unravel the underlying factors contributing to career plateau and its subsequent impact on employee performance. Doing so, will lay groundwork for targeted interventions, that can foster an environment that nurtures employee growth, development, and improved educational outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

In public tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria, employees play a critical role in fostering educational excellence, innovation, and societal development (Agu, Okocha, Emezue & Anyanwu, 2023). However, an emerging issue of career plateau threatens to undermine the effectiveness and motivation of both academic and administrative staff. Career plateauing often manifests as a sense of stagnation, particularly when individuals feel they have reached the peak of their potential or organizational hierarchy without further prospects for skill enhancement, career mobility, or increased responsibilities. This stagnation can significantly impact job satisfaction, engagement, and ultimately, employee performance within these institutions.

One notable dimension of career plateau is related to the issue of static salaries. In many public institutions, salary structures often remain fixed over long periods, which may not adequately reflect employees' evolving skill sets or meet rising living costs. The lack of financial incentives can hinder employees' motivation to pursue skill enhancement or professional development opportunities, potentially stalling their growth and reducing their contributions to the institution's success.

Reduced motivation is another critical factor associated with career plateauing. When employees experience limited opportunities for advancement, their motivation for continuous improvement and innovation may decline, affecting the quality of services provided by tertiary institutions. Reduced motivation, coupled with monotonous tasks and restricted career prospects, can lead to disengagement, decreasing an employee's commitment to making continuous improvements that are essential for institutional adaptability and progress.

Moreover, autonomy is limited in public institutions with rigid administrative structures. Insufficient autonomy can lead to a lack of work engagement, as employees feel constrained in their roles without the ability to influence processes or outcomes meaningfully. Engaged employees are typically more productive and invested in their work, so when autonomy is limited, it can negatively impact both individual and institutional performance.

Therefore, understanding the impact of career plateau on employee performance in public tertiary institutions is essential for creating an environment that promotes job satisfaction, skill enhancement, and work engagement. This study aimed to investigate the specific ways that career plateauing influences performance, focusing on three dimensions: the relationship between static salaries and skill enhancement, the effects of low job satisfaction on continuous improvement, and the role of autonomy in fostering work

engagement. Addressing these issues is crucial for developing policies that can enhance employee motivation, support professional growth, and ultimately strengthen the performance and resilience of public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to ascertain the relationship between career plateau and employee performance in Anambra state public tertiary institutions. The study specifically sought to:

1. Examine the relationship between static salary and skills enhancement.
2. Determine the relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does static salary relate with skills enhancement.
2. How does reduced motivation relate with continuous improvement.

Research Hypotheses

H_{O1}: There is no significant relationship between static salary and skills enhancement.

H_{O2}: There is no significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Career Plateau

In the words of Badir and Qaud (2024), career plateau is a condition of stagnation in which a person's professional development and advancement slow down or stop altogether. A career plateau can be viewed as a period of career dormancy, where an individual's career progress and advancement opportunities become stagnant, leading to a sense of disconnection from their work, colleagues, and organization, and a lack of purpose, meaning, or fulfillment (Huaman-Ramirez & Lahlouh, 2023).

Career plateau occurs when an individual's professional progress and momentum decelerate or come to a halt. This state of career inertia leaves individuals feeling trapped, damping enthusiasm, for advancement, commitment to duty, skill development, and personal growth, which in turn diminishes motivation, engagement, and overall job satisfaction (Jain & Chhabra, 2024). It is a career bottleneck, where an individual's career advancement and progress are hindered by internal or external factors, such as lack of resources, support, or opportunities, leading to feelings of frustration, disillusionment, and burnout (Khalaf & Musaib, 2022). Career plateau can be likened to career quagmire, where an individual's career progress and advancement opportunities become mired in complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty, leading to a sense of disengagement, disconnection, and decreased motivation (Lin & Chen, 2021).

In the words of Noerchoidah, Widowati, Mahmudah and Estiasih (2023), an individual experiencing a career plateau may feel trapped in their current role or position, with no opportunity for skill development, knowledge acquisition, or personal growth. This can lead to a decline in job satisfaction, engagement, and general well-being. Career plateaus are a state of career stagnation. From the view of Salami (2021), career plateau is when an individual's career progress and advancement opportunities become limited or nonexistent, leading to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and burnout. A career plateau can also be viewed as a career morass, where an individual's career progress and advancement opportunities become bogged down in complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty, leading to a sense of disengagement, disconnection, and decreased motivation, and a lack of purpose, meaning, or fulfillment (Xie, Lu, Zhou & Xin, 2021).

Static Salary

Static salary refers to a fixed amount of income an employee receives on a regular basis, such as weekly or monthly, regardless of their performance, hours worked, or additional responsibilities. This salary is determined at the time of hiring and remains consistent

throughout the employment period, providing the employee with a predictable and steady income. Unlike variable pay systems, a static salary does not fluctuate based on overtime or extra work, offering financial stability to the employee (Artola, 2024). Static salary is a non-variable wage structure where the employee's pay remains the same, without adjustments for bonuses, merit-based increases, or overtime. It means the compensation is set for a specific period and is not influenced by individual or company performance metrics. In this scenario, employees are compensated with a stable paycheck, regardless of their output or any extra work they may take on, which contrasts with dynamic pay models that offer incentives for exceptional performance or productivity (Palladino, 2021).

Static salary is a predetermined wage that an employee earns consistently over time, with no link to performance evaluations, company profits, or productivity levels. This salary structure provides a predictable income but does not offer opportunities for financial rewards based on effort or success. Employees under a static salary agreement know exactly what they will earn each pay period, giving them a clear understanding of their financial situation throughout their employment (Ngai & Sevinc, 2020). Static salary can be understood as a rigid salary system where there is no opportunity for immediate pay adjustments based on short-term goals, extra work, or achievements. Unlike pay structures that offer bonuses, overtime pay, or commissions, a static salary remains unchanged unless formally renegotiated or adjusted at specified intervals, such as during an annual review. This type of salary model emphasizes stability and consistency but may lack flexibility in rewarding individual achievements or exceptional contributions (Massenkoff & Wilmers, 2023).

Reduced Motivation

Reduced motivation is a decline in enthusiasm, interest, or drive to perform academic, research, or administrative duties. This phenomenon can manifest in various ways, including decreased productivity, lack of initiative, or diminished commitment to teaching,

research, or service responsibilities. University staff, including faculty members, instructors, and administrative personnel, may exhibit reduced motivation due to factors such as lack of autonomy or decision-making power, insufficient resources or support, limited opportunities for professional development, poor communication or leadership, unclear expectations or conflicting priorities, and burnout or workload issues. Additionally, the pressure to secure funding, publish research, and manage heavy course loads can further exacerbate feelings of demotivation. As a result, staff may become disengaged, leading to subpar performance, decreased job satisfaction, and increased turnover rates (Ostmeier & Stronel, 2022).

Teaching quality and student learning outcomes may suffer, as demotivated instructors may struggle to create engaging lesson plans or provide adequate support to students. Research productivity and innovation may also decline, hindering the university's reputation and competitiveness. Reduced motivation can lead to decreased collaboration and teamwork among staff, ultimately affecting departmental or university-wide initiatives (Hasan & Chowdhury, 2023). Implementing strategies such as regular feedback, recognition, and rewards; providing opportunities for professional growth and development; fostering open communication and transparency; promoting work-life balance; and encouraging autonomy and decision-making can mitigate reduced motivation. By creating a supportive and motivating environment, universities can rekindle staff enthusiasm, enhance job satisfaction, and ultimately improve overall performance and success. Effective leadership, proactive policies, and a commitment to staff well-being are essential in combating reduced motivation and promoting a vibrant academic community (Ghahramani, Yazdanmehr, Chen & Wang, 2023).

Employee Performance

Employee performance is the demonstration of an individual's skills, abilities, and efforts in achieving specific job responsibilities and tasks, resulting in a level of productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness that meets or exceeds expectations. Employee performance is also the measure of an individual's contribution to the organization's goals and objectives, reflecting their ability to work collaboratively, think critically, and solve problems creatively. The evaluation of an individual's behavior, attitude, and commitment to their role, including their adaptability, resilience, and willingness to learn and grow is known as employee performance (Kuswati, 2020).

Rivaldo and Nabella (2023) posit that employee performance is the outcome of an individual's interactions with their work environment, colleagues, and supervisors, influencing their motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. Employee performance is also the result of an individual's alignment with the organization's culture, values, and mission, reflecting their ability to embody the company's vision and purpose. Employee performance is also the reflection of an individual's personal and professional development, including their acquisition of new skills, knowledge, and experiences that enhance their capabilities and performance (Suprayitno, 2024).

Employee performance is the dynamic interplay between an individual's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges, resulting in a unique pattern of achievements, successes, and areas for improvement (Aliyyah, Prasetyo, Winarko & Tjaraka, 2021). Employee performance is also the measure of an individual's ability to navigate change, ambiguity, and uncertainty, demonstrating their flexibility, adaptability, and capacity to learn from failure. Employee performance is also the evaluation of an individual's impact on the organization's reputation, customer satisfaction, and bottom-line results, reflecting their ability to drive business outcomes and success (Onyekwelu, Dike & Muogbo, 2020).

Skills Enhancement

Skills enhancement is the process of acquiring new abilities and competencies that enable individuals to perform their jobs more effectively, efficiently, and productively, leading to improved job satisfaction, career advancement, and personal growth (Huy, Van & Ha, 2021). Skills enhancement involves refining and developing existing skills to stay up-to-date with industry trends, technologies, and best practices, ensuring individuals remain competitive and adaptable in an ever-changing work environment. Skills enhancement is also about addressing skill gaps and deficiencies, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing targeted training and development programs to bridge those gaps (Hasan & Chowdhury, 2023).

Skills enhancement is the continuous learning and professional development that individuals undertake to expand their knowledge, expertise, and capabilities, leading to enhanced creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills (Morandini, Fraboni, Giusino & Pietrantoni, 2023). Skills enhancement also involves developing soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and leadership, to complement technical skills and improve overall performance and collaboration. Skills enhancement is also about embracing new technologies, tools, and methodologies to streamline processes, improve productivity, and drive business results (Zayed, Edeh, Islam & Stanislavyk, 2022).

Skills enhancement is the intentional effort to upgrade and broaden one's skill set to take on new challenges, responsibilities, and roles, leading to increased confidence, autonomy, and impact. It also involves seeking out new experiences, mentorship, and feedback to refine skills and gain new insights, perspectives, and expertise. It is about recognizing and leveraging individual strengths, talents, and passions to drive personal and professional fulfillment, and to make meaningful contributions to the organization and society (Ostmeier & Strobel, 2022).

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is the ongoing pursuit of excellence, where individuals and organizations strive to surpass previous achievements, pushing boundaries, and exploring new possibilities, leading to incremental enhancements, innovations, and breakthroughs. This relentless drive for improvement fosters a culture of innovation, encouraging experimentation, calculated risk-taking, and learning from failures (Mizuno, 2020). Continuous improvement is also the refinement of processes, eliminating waste, optimizing resources, and streamlining workflows, resulting in increased efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness. Moreover, it involves cultivating a growth mindset, embracing challenges, and persistently seeking opportunities for growth and development. It is the culture of learning, where individuals and teams share knowledge, best practices, and expertise to foster a mindset of perpetual growth and development (Vinodh, Antony, Agrawal & Douglas, 2021).

Continuous improvement is the iterative cycle of assessment, analysis, and action, where individuals and organizations systematically identify areas for improvement, implement changes, and evaluate outcomes, leading to a culture of experimentation, learning, and adaptation. This cycle involves setting clear goals, tracking progress, and adjusting strategies to stay on course (Ghahramani, Yazdanmehr, Chen & Wang, 2023). Continuous improvement is also the commitment to staying ahead of the curve, anticipating changes, and proactively responding to emerging trends, technologies, and customer needs. It requires agility, flexibility, and resilience to navigate uncertainty and ambiguity. Moreover, continuous improvement involves empowering individuals and teams to take ownership of their work, identify opportunities for improvement, and implement solutions that drive impact and value. This ownership mindset encourages accountability, motivation, and engagement, leading to sustained improvement and growth (Yurkofsky, Peterson, Mehta, Horwitz-Willis & Frumin, 2020).

Continuous improvement is the dynamic interplay between creativity, innovation, and execution, where individuals and organizations harness the power of imagination, expertise, and collaboration to generate new ideas, products, and services that meet evolving customer needs and expectations. This interplay involves fostering a culture of creativity, providing resources and support for innovation, and encouraging experimentation and learning (Dias, Navas & Costa, 2020). Continuous improvement is the rigorous application of scientific methods, data-driven insights, and analytical tools to inform decision-making, measure progress, and drive results. It involves prioritizing quality, safety, and sustainability, ensuring that improvements align with organizational values and contribute to the greater good. Continuous improvement is also the unwavering dedication to delivering exceptional customer experiences, driving business growth, and making a positive impact on society (Ugwu, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is a visual representation that clarifies the relationships between essential concepts, variables, and ideas. The framework incorporates elements like variables, constructs, theories, and models, illustrating their interconnections (Van & Waldt, 2020).

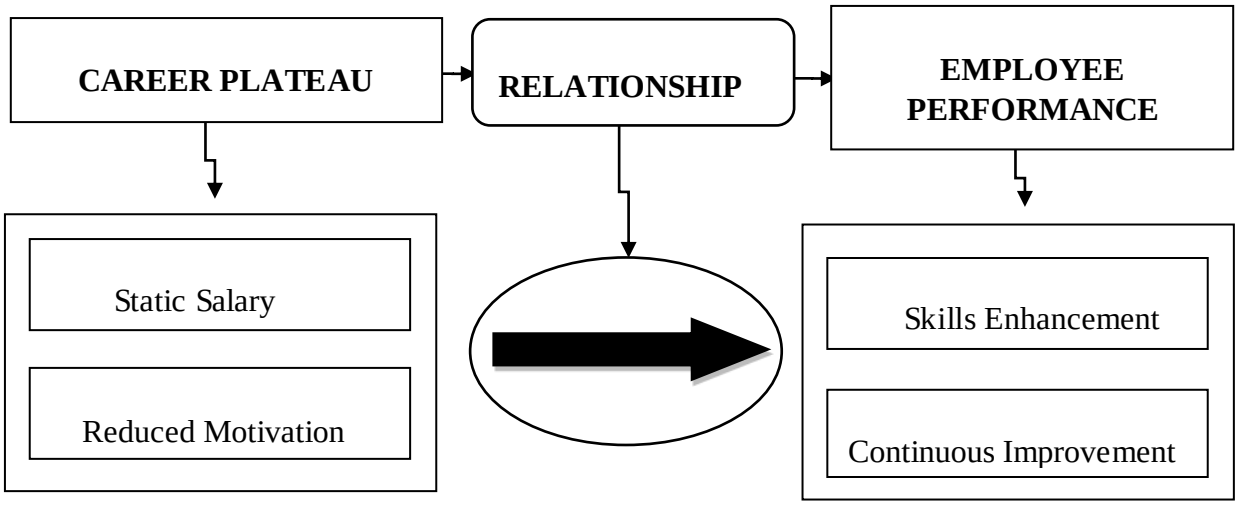


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Career Construction Theory which was propounded by Mark Savickas in 2013. Career Construction Theory is relevant to this study because it highlights the importance of personal agency and meaning-making in career development. The theory suggests that individuals construct their own career narratives, which can be impacted by career plateaus. The theory can help explain how employees' perceptions of career plateaus influence their performance and job satisfaction. By understanding how employees construct their career narratives and adapt to career transitions, the study can identify strategies to mitigate the negative effects of career plateaus and improve employee performance.

Empirical Review

Jing, Zeng, Xu, Yin, Ogbu and Huang (2024) examined how career plateau lead to employee silence. A moderated mediation model in China. This paper obtained 313 samples based on the pilot survey, which were collected anonymously online and offline. Based on passing the data quality test, this experiment used hierarchical regression, Bootstrap method, interaction graph and slope test to test the mediating variable. The results showed a significant positive correlation between career plateau and employees' silent behavior. Affective commitment plays a partial mediating role between career plateau and employees' silent behavior. Organizational justice does not only negatively moderate the relationship between career plateau and affective commitment but also negatively moderated the indirect effect of career plateau on silent behavior through affective commitment.

Jain and Chhabra (2024) explored career plateau and counterproductive work behaviour: a moderated moderation model of abusive supervision and job embeddedness in India. The

hypotheses were tested with two-wave survey data collected from 290 employees working in India's banking, financial services and insurance sector. Data were analysed using moderation and moderated moderation analyses on PROCESS v 4.1 macro. Results showed that abusive supervision moderated the counter productive and counterproductive work behaviour relationship, whereas the moderating role of job embeddedness was not observed. However, job embeddedness was seen to moderate the moderating effect of abusive supervision, supporting the moderated moderation framework.

Badir and Qaud (2024) examined controlling career plateau in Jordanian public commissions: The role of corporate governance. The study population was made up of the employees working in the seven Jordanian public commissions that are reported to the Prime Minister, which gave (1,429) employees (the Prime Minister's Office, 2023). The study selected a proportional stratified sample of (306) employees from the various occupational levels (top, middle, lower and functional) in the targeted commissions. Regression analysis was used. This study revealed a statistically significant impact of the corporate governance on career plateau, as the results showed that corporate governance explained (21.5%) of the variance in career plateau.

Abdallh (2024) explored the relationship between career plateau and staff nurses' job satisfaction in Egypt. Descriptive correlational research design was used. The study was conducted at Saied Galal Hospital affiliated to Al-Azhar University Hospitals. Sample: All staff nurses (N=280). Two tools were used: Career Plateau Questionnaire and Job Satisfaction Questionnaire. Partial Least Square method was used. Results showed that less than three quarters of studied sample had satisfactory career plateau level. Furthermore, less than three quarters of studied staff nurses had low level of job satisfaction.

Enaberue, Anah and Williams (2023) investigated job satisfaction and employees' performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State., Nigeria. The study

collected data from primary and secondary sources. The population of the study comprised of 6355 staff in Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The sample size of the study is 376 using Taro Yamane's formula, Formulated hypothesis were tested using ANOVA. From the analysis, it was discovered that: Reward has significant effect on employee's performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state. Career development has significant effect on employee's performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state.
Huaman-Ramirez and Lahlouh (2023) explored career plateaus and their relationship with coworker social support and organizational commitment in Algeria. 228 Algerian executives employed in various public sector organizations took part in the study. The hypotheses were tested through structural equation modeling. The results showed coworker support was negatively correlated to both hierarchical and job content plateaus. The results also demonstrated that both forms of career plateauing were negatively related to affective commitment, while only the content career plateau was positively related to few alternatives commitment.

Gap in Literature

There exists a significant knowledge gap regarding the interplay between career plateau and employee performance. From the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of the studies reviewed have investigated this relationship through critical proxies, including job dissatisfaction and job efficiency, career frustration and goal achievement, professional stagnancy and work quality, career stagnation and job success, growth stagnation and work excellence, burnout and work-life balance, static salary and skills enhancement, low job satisfaction and continuous improvement, and limited autonomy and work engagement. This study aimed to bridge this gap by conducting an in-depth examination of these variables, providing invaluable insights for employees, management, policymakers, and academics to inform strategies that foster employee growth, satisfaction, and optimal performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive survey design. This involves the use of questionnaire that were distributed to the target respondents for the purpose of obtaining relevant data. This survey provides first-hand primary data that were collected, and analyzed. Descriptive survey design was chosen because it provides a comprehensive, accurate, and reliable overview of the population's attitudes and experiences, ensuring generalizability and validity of the findings. The population of this study is 32,581 staff of public tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Taro Yamane's method of 1967 was used to determine the sample size. The formula and workings are as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where N = population

n = Sample Size

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{32,581}{1+32,581(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{32,581}{1+32,581(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{32,581}{1+81.4525}$$

$$n = \frac{32,581}{82.4525}$$

n = 395

The study used Stratified Random Sampling Technique so as to ensure proportional representation of these institutions, allowing for accurate and reliable estimates, while also controlling for variability within each institution, thereby maximizing the precision of the

findings with a sample size of 395 from a population of 32,581The study's data were collected, organized, and displayed in mathematical tables using frequency and percentage distributions. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses. Data analysis was facilitated by Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 27, with a 5% level of significance (α=0.05) serving as the criterion for testing statistical significance.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Questionnaire Distribution and Collection

The study yielded a satisfactory response rate of 91%, with 361 respondents fully completing and returning their questionnaires out of a total distribution of 395.

Table 1: Analysis of Questionnaire

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaire returned	361	91.1
Questionnaire not returned	34	8.6
Total	**395**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Analysis of Data Related to Research Questions

Decision Rule:

The decision in the analysis section is determined by the average of the response of respondents. Strongly Agreed (5 points), Agreed (4 points), Disagreed (3 points), Strongly Disagreed (2 points) and Undecided (1 point). The average of the responses:

$$\frac{(5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1)}{5} = 3.0$$

Therefore, mean score below 3.0 would be considered as rejected and mean score of 3.0 and above will be considered as accepted.

Table 2: Research Question 1: What is the relationship between static salary and skills enhancement.

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remark
1	My salary is regularly increased to match the rise in prices of goods and services	361	1.21	Rejected
2	No regular increase in salaries to match the rise in prices of goods and services make me angry	361	3.00	Accepted
3	The lack of salary increase makes me angry for that do not feel the need to work better.	361	1.28	Rejected
4	I frequently assess my skills to determine areas for improvement that could benefit my career.	361	3.04	Accepted
5	I refuse to put more effort to work better because it will not add to higher pay/salary	361	1.89	Rejected
6	I don't feel like doing more and better work because more work will not be paid for	361	4.22	Accepted
7	I receive sufficient support from my institution on how to advance my skills.	361	3.50	Accepted
8	The institution offers insufficient resources for staff to engage in continuous learning and skills enhancement.	361	3.12	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 presents the findings addressing the first research question: "What is the relationship between static salary and skills enhancement" The data analysis revealed that items 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8 garnered mean ratings exceeding the criterion mean of 3.0, while items 1, 3, and 5 fell below this threshold. Notably, the majority of respondents concurred that static salary has a relationship with skills enhancement.

Table 3: Research Question 2: What is the relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Remark
9	I don't enjoy my work because no matter what I do, it will not lead instant promotion	361	2.10	Rejected
10	Continuous improvement is essential for maintaining high standards in my role.	361	3.78	Accepted
11	I often experience dissatisfaction due to a lack of meaningful feedback from my supervisor.	361	1.54	Rejected
12	My contributions are not adequately recognized or valued by my institution.	361	4.21	Accepted
13	I actively seek feedback to identify areas where I can improve my performance.	361	3.60	Accepted
14	My work environment affects my overall job satisfaction.	361	2.03	Rejected
15	I am motivated to implement new strategies and techniques to improve my work.	361	4.48	Accepted
16	My institution could provide more resources to support continuous improvement initiatives.	361	3.11	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 3 all the items were addressing the second research question which is "What is the relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement" From the data analysis, items 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16 obtained a mean rating above the criterion mean of 3.0 and items 9, 11 and 14 obtained a mean rating below the criterion mean of 3.0. The result of the analysis indicated that majority of the respondents supported that there is a relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

Hypotheses Testing

Decision Rule: Reject the null hypothesis if P-value < 0.05; otherwise accept it.

Hypothesis One

Ho: There is no significant relationship between static salary and skills enhancement.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between static salary and skills enhancement.

Table 4: Relationship between static salary and skills enhancement.

		Static Salary	Skills Enhancement
Static Salary	Pearson correlation	1	-.882**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	361	361
Skills Enhancement	Pearson correlation	-.882**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	361	361

Source: SPSS version 27 Outputs.

Result Summary

Table 4 shows that there is a significant negative relationship between static salary and skills enhancement, with r = -0.882 n = 361 and p value of 0.001 (p<0.05). Therefore, the study accepted the alternate hypothesis and concluded that there is a significant negative

relationship between static salary and skills enhancement. This implies that staffs are less likely to develop new skills and expertise when their salaries remain unchanged, highlighting the need for performance-based pay structures and regular salary reviews to foster continuous learning and growth.

Hypothesis Two

Ho: There is no significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

Ha: There is a significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

Table 5: Relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement.

		Reduced Motivation	Continuous Improvement
Reduced Motivation	Pearson correlation	1	-.701**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	361	361
Continuous Improvement	Pearson correlation	-.701**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	361	361

Source: SPSS version 27 Outputs.

Result Summary

Table 5 shows that there is a negative significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement, with r = -0.701, n = 361 and p value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$).

Therefore, the study accepted the alternate hypothesis and concluded that there is a negative significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement. This finding indicates that a decline in staff motivation is a major obstacle to continuous improvement, emphasizing the need for organizations to foster a motivating work environment that encourages employee growth, innovation, and ongoing learning.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between static salary and skills enhancement, with r = -0.882 n = 361 and p value of 0.001 ($p<0.05$). Therefore, the study accepted the alternate hypothesis and concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between static salary and skills enhancement. This finding is harmonious with the discovery of Agu, Okocha, Emezue and Anyanwu (2023) in the study on career plateau and employee performance among Academic Staff of University of Nigeria, Enugu campus. Also, the findings of hypothesis are in agreement with the results of Amboka (2022) in the study on career plateauing and employee performance among middle management staff in the Kenya power company.

Hypothesis two indicated that there is a negative significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement, with r = -0.701, n = 361 and p value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$). Therefore, the study accepted the alternate hypothesis and concluded that there is a negative significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement. This result is supported by the findings of Popoola and Fagbola (2023) in the study on work motivation, job satisfaction, work-family balance, and job commitment of library personnel in Universities in North-Central Nigeria. The result is further harmonious with the results of Issa (2021) in the study on effects of motivation on staff performance and job satisfaction in the university of Ilorin library in Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

1. Hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between static salary and skills enhancement, with r = -0.882 n = 361 and p value of 0.001 ($p<0.05$).

2. Hypothesis two indicated that there is a negative significant relationship between reduced motivation and continuous improvement, with r = -0.701, n = 361 and p value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion

The study's findings unequivocally revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between career plateau and employee performance in Anambra state public tertiary institutions. This critical discovery suggests that when employees perceive their careers as stagnant, lacking opportunities for growth and advancement, their performance and productivity inevitably suffer. Conversely, institutions that foster an environment conducive to career progression and development can reap the benefits of enhanced employee performance. The implications of this finding are profound, highlighting the need for institutional administrators to prioritize strategic talent management, provide regular training and development opportunities, and implement transparent promotion policies. By doing so, they can prevent career stagnation, boost employee morale, and improve overall institutional effectiveness.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Tertiary institutions need to adopt performance-based pay structures, adjusting salaries to reflect employees' expanding skill sets and professional growth. This can be achieved by implementing regular salary reviews, tying compensation to skill development milestones, and offering incentives for acquiring specialized certifications or higher education.

2. Institutions need to prioritize employee motivation to drive continuous improvement. Foster growth, recognition, and rewards through regular feedback, empowerment, and incentive programs.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge on the factors influencing employee performance in public tertiary institutions. Specifically, it reveals the detrimental effects of static salaries, reduced motivation, and limited autonomy on employee engagement and skills enhancement. The findings provide empirical evidence supporting the importance of performance-based pay structures, employee empowerment, and motivation in fostering a productive and engaged workforce. By identifying these critical factors, this study informs institutional policies and practices, guiding administrators in developing targeted strategies to enhance employee performance, job satisfaction, and overall institutional effectiveness. This study bridges a knowledge gap in the field of human resource management in public tertiary institutions, offering valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and scholars.

REFERENCES

Abdallh, L. E. (2024). The relationship between career plateau and staff nurses' job satisfaction. *Helwan International Journal for Nursing Research and Practice*, 3(6), 94-104.

Agu, A. O., Okocha, E. R., Emezue, L. N., & Anyanwu, P. C. (2023). Career Plateau and Employee Performance Among Academic Staff of University of Nigeria Enugu Campus Nigeria. *Nigerian Academy of Management Journal*, 18(1), 30-38.

Aliyyah, N., Prasetyo, I., Rusdiyanto, R., Endarti, E. W., Mardianah, F., Winarko, R., & Tjaraka, H. (2021). What affects employee performance through work motivation? *Journal of Management Information and Decision Sciences*, 24(1).

Amboka, A. A. (2022). Career plateauing and employee performance among middle management staff in the Kenya Power Company (Doctoral dissertation, Kampala International University, school of Economics and Management).

Artola, B. M. (2024). Were wages stagnant for decades? A revision of labor costs and net earnings in Spain (1900–1960*). Labor History*, 1-25.

Badir, N. S. M., & Qaud, G. R. A. (2024). Controlling Career Plateau in Jordanian Public Commissions: The Role of Corporate Governance. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 7218-7231.

Bhavani, M., & Prasad, V. M. (2022). A study of career plateau and superior support on career satisfaction in offshore outsourced IT firms in India.

Cha, J. S., & Park, O. W. (2021). The career plateau and organizational commitment of r&d professionals: Focusing on the Moderating Role of Age and Creative Behavior. *Journal of Technology Innovation*, 26(4), 122-145.

Dias, A. S. S., Navas, H. V. G., & Costa, A. J. F. P. (2020). Design of a Continuous Improvement Model in a Portuguese Food Industry Company–A Case Study. *KnE Engineering*, 195-208.

Enaberue, O. J., Anah, S. A., & Williams, G. (2023). Job Satisfaction and Employees' Performance in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. *Journal Of Emerging Trends in Management Sciences and Entrepreneurship*, 5(1), 1-16.

Ghahramani, F., Yazdanmehr, A., Chen, D., & Wang, J. (2023). Continuous improvement of information security management: an organisational learning perspective. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 32(6), 1011-1032.

Hasan, M. M., & Chowdhury, S. A. (2023). Assessing The Influence of Training and Skill Development Initiatives on Employee Performance: A Case Study of Private Banks in Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Malaysian Business Management Journal*, 2(2), 74-79.

Huaman-Ramirez, R., & Lahlouh, K. (2023). Understanding career plateaus and their relationship with coworker social support and organizational commitment. *Public Organization Review,* 23(3), 1083-1104.

Huy, D. T. N., Van, P. N., & Ha, N. T. T. (2021). Education and computer skill enhancing for Vietnam laborers under industry 4.0 and evfta agreement. *Ilkogretim Online*, 20(4).

Issa, A. O. (2021). Effects of motivation on staff performance and job satisfaction in the university of Ilorin library. Insaniyat: *Journal of Islam and Humanities*, 5(2), 91-104.

Jain, V., & Chhabra, B. (2024). Career plateau and counterproductive work behaviour: a moderated moderation model of abusive supervision and job embeddedness. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 32(4), 662-680.

Jing, S., Zeng, Y., Xu, T., Yin, Q., Ogbu, K. O., & Huang, J. (2024). Will career plateau lead to employee silence? A moderated mediation models. *Nankai Business Review International*, 15(1), 1-20.

Khalaf, A. M., & Musaib, M. R. (2022). Diagnosing Career Plateau for Employees of the General Directorate of Education Karkh First: A Case Study. *Al-Mansour Journal*, 38(1), 129-140.

Kuswati, Y. (2020). The effect of motivation on employee performance. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 3(2), 995-1002.

Lin, Y. C., & Chen, A. S. Y. (2021). Experiencing career plateau on a committed career journey: A boundary condition of career stages. *Personnel Review,* 50(9), 1797-1819.

Massenkoff, M., & Wilmers, N. (2023). Wage stagnation and the decline of standardized pay rates, 1974–1991. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics,* 15(1), 474-507.

Mizuno, S. (2020). Management for quality improvement: the 7 new QC tools. Productivity press.

Morandini, S., Fraboni, F., De-Angelis, M., Puzzo, G., Giusino, D., & Pietrantoni, L. (2023). The impact of artificial intelligence on workers' skills: Upskilling and reskilling in organisations. *Informing Science,* 26, 39-68.

Ngai, R., & Sevinc, O. (2020). A multisector perspective on wage stagnation.

Noerchoidah, N., Widowati, D., Mahmudah, S., & Estiasih, S. P. (2023). Career plateau forms turnover intention: the important role of affective commitment and career satisfaction. *Jurnal Minds: Manajemen Ide dan Inspirasi,* 10(2), 261-278.

Onyekwelu, R. U., Dike, E., & Muogbo, U. S. (2020). Remuneration as a tool for increasing Employee Performance in Nigerian. Available at SSRN 3565079.

Palladino, L. (2021). Financialization at work: Shareholder primacy and stagnant wages in the United States. *Competition & Change,* 25(3-4), 382-400.

Popoola, S. O., & Fagbola, O. O. (2023). Work motivation, job satisfaction, work-family balance, and job commitment of library personnel in Universities in North-Central Nigeria. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship,* 49(4), 102741.

Rahimi, H., Javan, N., Baradaran, R., & Pourhosein, S. (2023). The relationship between career plateau and organizational commitment and social capital among nurses in Birjand University of Medical Sciences. *Paramedical Sciences and Military Health,* 18(1), 51-60.

Rivaldo, Y., & Nabella, S. D. (2023). Employee performance: Education, training, experience and work discipline. *Calitatea,* 24(193), 182-188.

Salami, S. O. (2020). Career plateauing and work attitudes: Moderating effects of mentoring others with Nigerian employees. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 6(4), 71-92.

Suprayitno, D. (2024). The influence of leadership on employee performance. *Journal of Law, Social Science and Humanities,* 1(2), 87-91.

Ugwu, K. (2023). Aligning total quality management, continuous improvement for process performance: A review approach. *Journal Research of Social Science, Economics, and Management*, 3(3), 731-737.

Ukata, P. F., & Okeke, V. N. (2023). Survey of corruption and falling standard of education in tertiary institutions in Rivers and Anambra States with impact on Nigeria. *International Journal of Current Educational Studies,* 2(1).

Van, D., & Waldt, G. (2020). Constructing conceptual frameworks in social science research. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa,* 16(1), 1-9.

Vinodh, S., Antony, J., Agrawal, R., & Douglas, J. A. (2021). Integration of continuous improvement strategies with Industry 4.0: a systematic review and agenda for further research. *The TQM Journal,* 33(2), 441-472.

Xie, B., Lu, X., Zhou, W., & Xin, X. (2021). The effect of career plateau on Chinese employees' affective commitment: An indigenous career plateau scale and two-mediator model. *Frontiers of Business Research in China,* 8(3), 346-366.

Yurkofsky, M. M., Peterson, A. J., Mehta, J. D., Horwitz-Willis, R., & Frumin, K. M. (2020). Research on continuous improvement: Exploring the complexities of managing educational change. *Review of Research in Education,* 44(1), 403-433.

Zayed, N. M., Edeh, F. O., Islam, K. A., & Stanislavyk, O. (2022). Human resource skill adjustment in service sector: Predicting dynamic capability in post COVID-19 work environment. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management,* 15(9), 402.