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Capacity Building and Employee Performance in the Nigerian Public Sector: Evidence from Ondo State Civil Service Commission

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of capacity building tools specifically incentives, orientation training, and skill development on employee performance in the Ondo State Civil Service Commission, Akure, Nigeria. Anchored in Human Capital Theory and Expectancy Theory, and employing a census survey of all 77 employees (73 valid responses; 94.81% response rate), the study applies linear regression analysis to test three null hypotheses. Findings reveal that all three capacity building dimensions exert statistically significant positive effects on employee performance ($p < 0.05$). Skill development is the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.683$, $R^2 = 0.466$), followed by incentives ($\beta = 0.594$, $R^2 = 0.353$) and orientation training ($\beta = 0.588$, $R^2 = 0.346$). All null hypotheses are rejected. The study contributes context-specific empirical evidence on capacity building in a state-level Nigerian public institution and recommends sustained investment in structured skill development programmes, transparent incentive systems, and comprehensive induction frameworks to enhance public sector productivity.

Keywords: Capacity building; employee performance; incentives; orientation training

1. INTRODUCTION

Public sector institutions are the backbone of national governance and service delivery. In developing countries such as Nigeria, the quality of public sector performance is directly tied to investment in human resource development. Capacity building encompassing orientation training, incentives, and skill development has been widely recognized as a strategic mechanism for improving employee performance and organizational effectiveness (Fowler & Ubels, 2021; Alhowaish, 2024).

Despite its acknowledged importance, many Nigerian public sector institutions continue to face challenges of low productivity, role ambiguity, and inadequate employee motivation. These challenges are often attributed to insufficient or poorly structured capacity building interventions (Chukwurah, Uzor, Iwuno & Chukwueloka, 2020; Nwali & Adekunle, 2021). The Ondo State Civil Service Commission, as a critical human resource

management body within the state civil service, provides a pertinent context in which to examine these dynamics.

While prior studies have addressed capacity building broadly in the Nigerian public sector, few have examined the simultaneous influence of multiple capacity building tools, namely incentives, orientation training, and skill development within a single state-level institution. This gap motivates the current investigation. The study is guided by the following objectives; to assess the effect of incentives on employee performance; to examine the influence of orientation training on employee performance; and to

determine the effect of skill development on employee performance, all within the Ondo State Civil Service Commission, Akure.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical frameworks. Human Capital Theory, advanced by Gary Becker (1964), posits that investments in employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies generate returns for both the individual and the organization. Applied to the public sector, it provides justification for training, orientation, and professional development as strategic inputs that enhance workforce productivity and organizational efficiency.

Expectancy Theory, developed by Victor Vroom (1964), argues that employee motivation is a cognitive process determined by three variables: expectancy (belief that effort leads to performance), instrumentality (belief that performance leads to reward), and valence (the perceived value of the reward). This framework explains how structured incentive systems and performance-linked rewards motivate employees to exert effort and perform effectively. Together, these theories offer a dual perspective capability development and motivational alignment that underpins the relationships examined in this study.

2.2 Orientation Training and Employee Performance

Orientation training is a structured induction process that introduces employees to organizational policies, roles, culture, and operational procedures. It serves as a foundational element in building early competence and confidence (Nosike, 2022). Empirical evidence across multiple contexts consistently demonstrates its positive effect on employee outcomes. Harrison (2023) found that structured onboarding in the UK National Health Service reduced staff turnover by 20% within the first year. Müller (2025) established that virtual orientation in Germany accelerated productivity by 30% compared to traditional methods. In Africa, Kamau (2024) reported a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$) between orientation and role clarity in the Kenyan public service, while Ibrahim and Yusuf (2024) found that early ethical orientation predicted reduced future misconduct among Kwara State civil servants. These studies collectively affirm that effective orientation training reduces role ambiguity, improves adaptation, and enhances overall employee performance.

2.3 Incentives and Employee Performance

Incentives, both financial (bonuses, allowances, promotions) and non-financial (recognition, flexible work, career advancement) are fundamental motivational mechanisms that align employee behavior with organizational objectives (Akerele, 2023). Smith and Chen (2024) found that flexible work arrangements improved performance by 15% among Singapore public servants. Kaur and Singh (2024) demonstrated in India that social recognition sustained performance longer than one-time cash bonuses. Within Nigeria,

Olorunfemi and Adebayo (2024) identified career progression and transparent promotion as the most influential incentive mechanisms in Ekiti State, while Okafor (2025) highlighted the importance of inflation-adjusted rewards in sustaining federal employee motivation. Musa and Mensah (2023) cautioned that bureaucratic delays in incentive disbursement significantly diminish motivational impact, underscoring the importance of timely and transparent implementation.

2.4 Skill Development and Employee Performance

Skill development encompasses systematic efforts to enhance employees' technical, digital, leadership, and interpersonal competencies. Alhowaish (2024) argues that organizations investing in continuous skill development record measurably higher efficiency and performance. Lopez and Wang (2025) identified AI and digital upskilling as the strongest predictor of efficiency in EU public administration. Saito and Kim (2024) confirmed through experimental research that digital reskilling significantly improved service delivery speed in South Korea. Within Nigeria, the Federal Civil Service Commission study (Nwambuko et al., 2026) established that technical skill development explained 88.3% of work quality variation. Audu et al. (2025) underscored the criticality of aligning training content with actual job functions to prevent skill-job mismatch. Idakwoji and Makolo (2022) and Nwokorie (2025) further confirmed that staff development programmes improved professional competence and adaptability among Nigerian civil servants.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Study Area

A quantitative survey research design was adopted for this study. The Ondo State Civil Service Commission, Akure, was selected as the study site. The Commission is a statutory body responsible for managing human resources including recruitment, promotion, discipline, and training coordination within the Ondo State civil service.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all 77 employees listed on the Commission's nominal roll as of 2026 (Ondo State Civil Service Commission, Personnel Records, 2026). Given the finite and accessible nature of the population, a census (total enumeration) approach was adopted, eliminating the need for inferential sampling and ensuring comprehensive representation across all departments and grade levels.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire organized into five sections: demographic information, orientation training, incentives, skill development, and employee performance. Items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was adapted from validated prior instruments (Ebegbetale, Enwezor & Showemimo, 2023; Orji & Enyiamaka, 2025) and reviewed by experts in Human Resource Management and Public Administration to ensure content validity.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Content validity was established through expert review and iterative instrument refinement. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ adopted as the criterion for acceptable reliability. All constructs met this threshold, confirming the instrument's reliability.

3.5 Data Analysis and Model Specification

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to characterize respondents. Simple linear regression was employed to test the hypotheses, with employee performance as the dependent variable and each capacity building dimension as an independent predictor. The general regression model is specified as:

$$EP = \beta_0 + \beta_1OT + \beta_2IN + \beta_3SD + \varepsilon$$

Where EP = Employee Performance; OT = Orientation Training; IN = Incentives; SD = Skill Development; β_0 = constant; β_1 – β_3 = regression coefficients; ε = error term. Individual predictors were tested in separate simple regression models. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

Of 77 questionnaires administered, 73 were retrieved and found valid for analysis, yielding a response rate of 94.81%. This is well above the 30–40% threshold recommended by Moser and Kalton (2017) and is considered highly reliable.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
20–29	0	0.0
30–39	39	53.4
40–49	25	34.2
50 and above	9	12.3
Gender		
Male	30	41.1
Female	43	58.9
Marital Status		
Single	2	2.7
Married	69	94.5
Divorced	2	2.7
Educational Level		
OND/NCE	10	13.7

HND/B.Sc.	55	75.3
M.Sc.	8	11.0
Years of Service		
1–5 years	3	4.1
6–10 years	35	47.9
11–15 years	25	34.2
16 years and above	10	13.7
Grade Level		
Junior Officer	6	8.2
Mid-level Officer	38	52.1
Senior Officer	29	39.7
Employment Type		
Permanent	73	100.0
Total	73	100.0

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2026)

The demographic profile reveals a predominantly experienced, educated, and permanently employed workforce. The majority of respondents (53.4%) fall within the 30–39 age bracket, with 58.9% female. A striking 94.5% are married. The preponderance of HND/B.Sc. holders (75.3%) and mid-level officers (52.1%), combined with the fact that 96% have at least six years of service, suggests that respondents possess the institutional knowledge and experience necessary to provide reliable, informed data.

4.3 Effect of Incentives on Employee Performance

Table 2 presents the regression results for the effect of incentives on employee performance.

Table 2a: Model Summary for Incentive and Employee Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.594	0.353	0.343	6.817

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	12.677	4.666		2.717	0.000
Incentive	0.560	0.090	0.594	6.217	0.000

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2026)

The results reveal a moderate positive relationship between incentives and employee performance ($R = 0.594$). Incentives explain 35.3% of variance in employee performance ($R^2 = 0.353$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.343$). The regression coefficient is positive and statistically significant ($B = 0.560$, $\beta = 0.594$, $t = 6.217$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that a one-unit increase in incentive provision corresponds to a 0.560-unit improvement in employee performance. These findings align with Smith and Chen (2024), who demonstrated that non-monetary incentives significantly improved public sector productivity, and with Nyarko et al. (2023), who linked well-structured incentives to reduced burnout and improved work efficiency. The ANOVA results ($F = 38.656$, $p = 0.000$) confirm model significance and lead to the rejection of Hypothesis 1, establishing a significant effect of incentives on employee performance.

4.4 Influence of Orientation Training on Employee Performance

Table 3 presents the regression results for orientation training and employee performance.

Table 3: Model Summary for Orientation Training and Employee Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.588	0.346	0.337	6.850

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	11.621	4.899		2.372	0.000
Orientation Training	0.580	0.095	0.588	6.132	0.000

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2026)

Orientation training demonstrates a moderate positive relationship with employee performance ($R = 0.588$, $R^2 = 0.346$). The regression coefficient ($B = 0.580$, $\beta = 0.588$, $t = 6.132$, $p = 0.000$) is positive and statistically significant, indicating that each unit improvement in orientation quality leads to a 0.580-unit increase in employee performance. These results corroborate Harrison (2023), who established that structured onboarding reduces turnover and improves early performance, and Kamau (2024), who found a strong positive correlation between orientation and role clarity. The ANOVA result ($F = 37.607$, $p = 0.000$) confirms that orientation training is a statistically significant predictor of employee performance, leading to rejection of Hypothesis 2.

4.5 Effect of Skill Development on Employee Performance

Table 4 presents the regression results for skill development and employee performance.

Table 4: Model Summary for Skill Development and Employee Performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.683	0.466	0.459	6.189

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	14.119	3.521		4.010	0.000
Skill Development	0.519	0.066	0.683	7.876	0.000

Source: Researcher's Field Survey (2026)

Skill development emerges as the strongest predictor of employee performance among the three capacity building dimensions examined ($R = 0.683$, $R^2 = 0.466$). The regression coefficient ($B = 0.519$, $\beta = 0.683$, $t = 7.876$, $p = 0.000$) confirms a strong, significant positive effect: each unit improvement in skill development yields a 0.519-unit gain in employee performance. The model explains 46.6% of variance in employee performance, and the ANOVA result ($F = 62.032$, $p = 0.000$) affirms strong model significance. These findings are consistent with Lopez and Wang (2025), who identified technical upskilling as the foremost predictor of public administrative efficiency, and with Saito and Kim (2024), who linked digital reskilling to measurable improvements in service delivery. Hypothesis 3 is therefore rejected.

4.6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 5 summarizes the outcomes of all three hypotheses tested.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	F	p-value	B	R^2	Decision
H ₁ : Incentives → Employee Performance	38.656	.000	.594	.353	Rejected
H ₂ : Orientation Training → Employee Performance	37.607	.000	.588	.346	Rejected
H ₃ : Skill Development → Employee Performance	62.032	.000	.683	.466	Rejected

Source: Researcher's compilation (2026)

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the centrality of capacity building in shaping public sector employee performance. All three dimensions examined incentives, orientation training, and skill development exert statistically significant and positive effects on employee performance in the Ondo State Civil Service Commission.

Skill development emerged as the most powerful predictor ($\beta = 0.683$, $R^2 = 0.466$), suggesting that structured and job-relevant training programmes are the most effective mechanism for improving workforce efficiency and service quality. This is consistent with the Human Capital Theory proposition that systematic investment in employee competencies yields measurable organizational returns (Becker, 1964). The finding also aligns with empirical evidence from the Federal Civil Service Commission (Nwambuko et al., 2026), which established that targeted technical training accounted for over 88% of work quality variation.

Incentives, with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.594$, represent the second most influential predictor. This finding is consistent with Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), which holds that motivation is maximized when

employees perceive that high performance will yield valued rewards. The results further resonate with Olorunfemi and Adebayo (2024), who identified transparent career progression as the most impactful incentive in Ekiti State civil service, underscoring the importance of properly structured and consistently applied reward systems.

Orientation training ($\beta = 0.588$) had the narrowest explanatory power, yet remained a statistically significant predictor. This aligns with Chiziba (2023), who demonstrated that poorly structured induction leads to administrative errors and inconsistent service delivery. The findings suggest that while orientation may be foundational rather than transformative, it creates the enabling conditions within which other capacity building tools operate more effectively.

Taken together, the findings support the conceptual argument that capacity building is a multidimensional and interrelated construct. The three tools collectively address distinct but complementary facets of employee performance: skill development enhances technical competence; incentives sustain motivation and commitment; and orientation training ensures early-stage alignment with institutional expectations and norms.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that capacity building significantly enhances employee performance in the Nigerian public sector, with specific evidence from the Ondo State Civil Service Commission. All three capacity building dimensions examined skill development, incentives, and orientation training have significant positive effects on employee performance. Skill development is the strongest predictor, followed by incentives and orientation training.

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

First, public sector institutions should prioritize continuous, job-aligned skill development programmes. Training content must be anchored to identified skill gaps and actual job functions, as misaligned training yields diminished returns (Audu et al., 2025). Second, incentive systems should be structured transparently, disbursed in a timely manner, and periodically reviewed to reflect economic realities. Both financial and non-financial incentives should be incorporated to address diverse motivational profiles. Third, comprehensive, standardized orientation programmes should be institutionalized for all new employees. These programmes should clearly communicate job expectations, institutional values, and operational procedures, and should be consistently delivered rather than treated as a one-time administrative formality. Fourth, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess the effectiveness of capacity building interventions, with employee feedback systematically incorporated into programme design and improvement. Fifth, adequate budgetary allocation and policy support for capacity building must be ensured at both state and institutional levels.

This study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data and confinement to a single institution, which constrains generalizability. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, expand to multiple state-level institutions, and employ mixed-methods approaches to capture both quantitative relationships and qualitative organizational dynamics. Additionally, incorporating variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, and work environment would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of public sector employee performance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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