Talent Retention, Social Integration, and Career Development: A Stakeholder-Based Framework Analysis for Sustainable Human Resource Management in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article presents a stakeholder-based framework for sustainable human resource management (HRM) in Nigeria, focusing on talent retention, social integration, and career development. Based on 17 qualitative interviews across the public and private sectors in Lagos and Abuja, the research identifies key barriers to retention and enablers. The findings position talent retention as a strategic priority, requiring holistic initiatives across compensation, career development, workplace culture, and alignment of stakeholder interests to optimise employee engagement. We introduce a Stakeholder-Centric Talent Retention (SCTR) framework that synthesises organisational justice, social capital, and human capital investment. This paper contributes to the southern African HRM literature by highlighting local perspectives and implications for practice and policy.

Keywords: Talent retention, social integration, career development, stakeholder engagement, sustainable HRM, Nigeria, qualitative research

Introduction

The current organisational landscape in Nigeria is marked by intense competition for skilled talent, rising employment costs, and a growing recognition that human capital is a critical competitive advantage (Akwei & Nwachukwu, 2023). Employee retention has shifted from a transactional HR metric to a core strategic imperative, with employee engagement a key driver of organisational performance, retention, and innovation (Ogogo & Qureshi, 2026). Yet, despite this recognition, Nigerian organisations, particularly in the private sector, continue to face elevated turnover rates that threaten operational continuity and organisational sustainability (Adewole et al., 2025). In Nigeria, the civil service has implemented relatively effective incentives to retain its workforce (Salau, 2025; Anekwe et al., 2025), but these incentives are insufficient to retain skilled employees compared with those offered by private companies, indicating inadequate long-term retention strategies. The problem is particularly acute in knowledge-intensive sectors, where talent scarcity intensifies retention pressures and the cost of replacing skilled professionals can exceed 150 per cent of an employee's annual salary. However, Lasisi et al. (2021) argue that the dominant literature on talent retention remains largely anchored in Western organisational contexts, with limited empirical research examining how retention mechanisms operate within the specific institutional, cultural, and economic realities of Nigerian organisations. In this light, Onavwie et al. (2023) note that this is significant because the cultural, regulatory, and socioeconomic contexts of Nigeria differ substantially from those of developed economies, suggesting that imported HRM models may prove ineffective or require substantial adaptation.

Beyond the technical aspects of talent retention, there is often a broader concern, namely the quality of the relationship between employees and organisations. Workplace culture is examined through the lens of psychological climate, inclusivity norms, communication transparency, and cultural safety, factors associated with employees' continuance within organisations (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022; Malhotra, 2024). Social integration, defined as the extent to which employees feel psychologically connected to their colleagues, valued by the organisation, and a sense of belonging, remains underexplored in the Nigerian HRM literature despite its evident importance for retention and organisational performance. Equally important is career development. Training and development programmes that enable employees to acquire new skills and advance in their careers increase their sense of fulfilment and loyalty (Dhanani et al., 2024; Ogogo & Qureshi, 2026). However, Odion & Ekanem (2025) and Okafor et al. (2025) contend that many Nigerian organisations view career development as an ancillary HR function rather than a strategic priority, often resulting in limited career pathways and ambiguous advancement criteria that demoralise talented employees.

This study fills existing gaps by adopting a stakeholder-focused approach to explore how talent retention, social integration, and career development form an interconnected system of sustainable HRM in Nigeria. Instead of viewing these as separate HR areas, we analyse their interrelationships and how they collectively influence organisational sustainability or talent flight. The approach is justified by three reasons: (1) it highlights that HR sustainability depends on alignment among organizational stakeholders, executives, HR staff, managers, and employees; (2) it recognizes that retention and engagement are influenced by organizational systems, culture, and governance, not just individual factors; and (3) it stresses that sustainable HRM must consider justice, social cohesion, and human development alongside traditional performance measures. This study adds to the HRM literature by providing empirical insights into talent retention, social integration, and career development in a Sub-Saharan African context, thereby filling a significant research gap. Additionally, it introduces a stakeholder-based framework that links theory with practice, bridging the gap between abstract HRM principles and the realities of Nigerian workplaces.

Literature Review

The talent retention literature has evolved considerably over the past two decades, reflecting growing recognition of human capital as a source of competitive advantage. Building on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Social Exchange Theory (SET), talent management has been advocated as an important strategy for retaining talented employees, with empirical studies exploring the relationship between talent management practices and retention outcomes [6]. However, most of this literature originates in developed economies and may not adequately address the constraints and opportunities in emerging markets such as Nigeria.

A critical debate within the retention literature concerns the mechanisms through which organisations retain talent. The dominant view emphasises material incentives, compensation, benefits, and financial rewards as primary retention drivers. However, contemporary research increasingly demonstrates that intrinsic factors such as career development opportunities, meaningful work, autonomy, and social belonging often matter as much as, or more than, extrinsic rewards. Strategic leadership practices such as participative management, coaching-based leadership, and fairness-driven supervisory behaviour may help minimise turnover intentions, functioning jointly with workplace culture and organisational commitment as primary mechanisms associated with turnover [5].

The social integration dimension of retention has received less attention in mainstream HRM literature, though it is central to organisational sociology and social capital theory (Sang, 2025). Social capital shapes workplace dynamics by fostering collaboration, trust, and professional relationships, with bonding, bridging, and linking social capital potentially contributing to employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organisational performance (Jin et al.,2026). Social integration operates through multiple mechanisms in both formal (mentorship programs, team assignments) and informal (peer relationships, social networks) settings. Organisations that cultivate strong social capital may report higher employee engagement, lower turnover, and better knowledge-sharing (Mojeed-Sanni, 2026; Richards & Sang, 2021).

Career development represents a third critical pillar of retention strategy. The literature distinguishes between traditional hierarchical career models, in which advancement is vertical and competitive, and contemporary boundaryless or protean career models, in which advancement may be lateral, skill-based, or self-directed. Organisations that provide training and development programs enabling employees to acquire new skills and advance in their careers increase their sense of fulfilment and loyalty (Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024; Booth et al., 2021). However, career development effectiveness depends on several factors: clarity of career pathways, transparent promotion criteria, managerial support for development, and alignment between individual aspirations and organisational opportunities.

A notable under-theorised area in this literature concerns the integration of these three dimensions. Most studies (Obum et al., 2023; Mashi et al., 2022; Ogogo & Qureshi, 2026) treat talent retention, social integration, and career development as separate domains, examining their individual effects on turnover or engagement. However, despite the attention to talent retention in organisational experience, Pepple et al. (2024) and Adamu et al. (2025) suggest that these dimensions are deeply interdependent. For example, effective career development requires strong social relationships that facilitate mentorship and knowledge transfer; social integration is strengthened when employees perceive fair and transparent career advancement processes; and talent retention is enhanced when both social integration and career development are deliberately cultivated. This article argues for a more integrated conceptualisation that treats these dimensions as components of a coherent HRM system.

The stakeholder perspective adds another important dimension. Corporate governance frameworks with multi-stakeholder councils, performance contracts, transparent reporting, and tripartite governance structures may offer value for workforce deployment in Nordic and Southeast Asian contexts. At the same time, inadequate oversight and diffuse stakeholder roles have been identified as challenges in countries such as Nigeria in deploying human capital productively [8]. In HRM, stakeholder theory suggests that talent retention and career development outcomes emerge from the alignment of multiple organisational stakeholders, each with distinct interests, information, and influence. HR professionals may prioritise cost control; executives may prioritise short-term performance; managers may prioritise team stability; and employees may prioritise development and security. Sustainable HRM requires mechanisms to reconcile potentially competing stakeholder interests.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in a synthesised theoretical framework that integrates Stakeholder Theory, Social Capital Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm to explain the complex challenge of talent retention, employee integration, and human capital development. The integration of these theories is necessary because no single theoretical perspective adequately captures the multidimensional nature of employee retention in contemporary organisations. Rather, sustainable retention emerges from the interaction between organisational governance, social relationships, and strategic resource development.

Stakeholder Theory, originally advanced by Freeman (1984), argues that organisations are embedded within networks of stakeholders whose interests must be recognised and balanced to achieve long-term sustainability. The theory challenges shareholder-centric approaches by emphasising that employees, managers, executives, and HR practitioners possess legitimate claims that influence organisational outcomes. From a retention perspective, employee turnover often reflects failures in stakeholder alignment, as organisational policies do not adequately address employees' expectations for career growth, participation, and workplace wellbeing. Consequently, talent retention should be viewed not as a managerial function imposed from above but as a collaborative process requiring continuous dialogue, trust, and mutual commitment among organisational actors.

While Stakeholder Theory explains the governance dimension of retention, Social Capital Theory provides insight into the relational mechanisms that influence employee attachment to organisations. Social capital refers to the resources embedded within networks of relationships, including trust, reciprocity, shared norms, and access to information. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu (2023), Burt (1992), and recent contributions by Catani et al. (2024) and Kero and Bogale (2023), social capital can be understood through bonding, bridging, and linking dimensions. Bonding social capital strengthens cohesion among colleagues, bridging social capital facilitates collaboration across organisational units, and linking social capital connects employees to leadership and external opportunities. Critically, retention decisions are rarely based solely on financial rewards; employees frequently remain because they experience belonging, psychological safety, and supportive professional networks. Thus, organisations that deliberately cultivate mentorship programs, collaborative work structures, and transparent leadership practices are more likely to retain talented employees by strengthening workplace social capital.

However, governance and social integration alone may be insufficient if organisations fail to develop employees as strategic assets. This limitation is addressed through the Resource-Based View, which posits that sustainable competitive advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and difficult to substitute (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984). Contemporary RBV scholarship increasingly recognises human capital as a critical source of competitive differentiation because employee knowledge, skills, commitment, and relationships are difficult for competitors to replicate (Nayak et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2021; Fadeji et al., 2025). Moreover, recent developments emphasise that competitive advantage depends not merely on possessing resources but on continuously recombining and renewing them through organisational capabilities (Kurzhals, 2021; Sun et al., 2024; Purnomo, 2024). Scholars further argue that sustainable advantage emerges from the integration of resources, competencies, and relationship management practices that support long-term organisational growth (Deszczyński, 2021; Kruesi & Bazelmans, 2023; Chishamba, 2024; John, 2026). Dhrubo (2025) extends this argument by advocating a holistic understanding of organisational resources that encompasses both tangible and intangible dimensions of human capability.

Combining these perspectives yields the Stakeholder-Centric Talent Retention (SCTR) framework. The framework proposes three interdependent subsystems: a Governance Subsystem that promotes stakeholder participation and transparency; a Social Integration Subsystem that fosters trust, belonging, and psychological safety; and a Human Capital Development Subsystem that supports career progression, skills enhancement, coaching, and performance feedback. The framework argues that sustainable talent retention occurs when these subsystems operate synergistically. Effective governance establishes the conditions for stakeholder trust, social integration strengthens employee attachment to the organisation, and human capital development reinforces mutual investment between employees and employers. Together, these mechanisms create a self-reinforcing system that enhances both employee retention and sustainable organisational competitiveness.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using key informant interviews (KIIs) as the primary data collection method. Qualitative methodology was selected because the research questions required an in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives, organisational processes, and contextual factors that quantitative approaches cannot adequately capture. Qualitative research methods provide valuable insights in analysing employee engagement, employee retention, and employee turnover by focusing on understanding individuals' experiences, perceptions, and behaviours, and helping uncover the reasons and motivations behind them through in-depth interviews with employees to explore their perceptions of factors affecting retention.

Seventeen key informants were purposively selected from organisations across private and public sectors in Lagos and Abuja, Nigeria's two major business hubs. The sample was strategically composed to capture diverse organisational perspectives: 5 HR professionals with a minimum of 5 years' experience in talent management; 4 organisational executives (CEOs, MD, VPs) responsible for organisational strategy; 5 mid-level managers directly supervising operational teams; and 3 employees representing different career stages (junior, mid-career, senior). Organisations represented diverse sectors: financial services (4 participants), manufacturing (3), technology/telecommunications (4), and public administration (6). This composition ensured that multiple stakeholder perspectives were represented and that organisational context variation could be examined. Semi-structured interviews lasting 45-90 minutes were conducted between June and September 2024. Interview guides were developed specifically for each stakeholder group but maintained consistent core themes: (1) current talent retention challenges and turnover patterns; (2) organisational strategies for career development and retention; (3) organisational culture and social integration mechanisms; (4) stakeholder interests and perceptions of fairness in HRM; and (5) barriers and enablers to sustainable talent management. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and later transcribed verbatim.

Transcribed interviews were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Initial coding was inductive, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than being imposed a priori. Codes were systematically organised into candidate themes that reflected patterns within and across stakeholder groups. Particular attention was paid to areas of convergence and divergence across stakeholders, as these revealed both shared understanding and stakeholder conflict around retention and development priorities. The coding process involved team discussion to ensure reliability and interpretive rigour. NVivo 12 software was used to manage coding and facilitate systematic theme development. The research received ethical approval from the institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews, with explicit emphasis on voluntary participation and confidentiality. Participants were assured that data would be reported in aggregated form without identifying information. All recordings and transcripts were securely stored and will be destroyed in accordance with standard retention periods.

Findings and Results

This section presents the major findings organised around four key themes: (1) organisational talent retention challenges in Nigeria; (2) social integration mechanisms and barriers; (3) career development practices and gaps; and (4) stakeholder perspectives on priorities and constraints.

Talent Retention Challenges and Context

All 17 informants identified talent retention as a significant organisational challenge, though the manifestations and severity varied by sector and organisational maturity. In financial services and technology sectors, turnover rates for junior and mid-level professionals ranged from 18-35% annually, substantially above international benchmarks for developed economies (typically 10-15% for competitive sectors). Public sector informants reported lower absolute turnover but expressed concern about *"silent resignation*", where employees, having lost motivation, remain physically present but contribute minimally. Informants identified multiple drivers of turnover. First, compensation gaps between Nigerian organisations and multinational corporations operating in Nigeria create persistent pressure on retention. One HR director noted: "*We lose our best people to the multinationals every 18-24 months. They offer packages we cannot match. We know we are training people for their competitors."* This observation aligns with research on African talent mobility, which shows brain drain to multinational and international organisations. Second, limited career visibility creates ambiguity and demotivation. Multiple participants noted that career advancement criteria are often opaque, advancement decisions appear arbitrary, and career pathways lack clarity. One executive stated, *"Employees do not see a clear route to senior positions. They work hard, but they do not know what it takes to advance. So, they leave to find organisations where the path is clearer."* Also, the article perceived organisational instability and economic uncertainty amplify turnover. Nigerian organisations operate within volatile macroeconomic contexts characterised by currency fluctuations, energy crises, and policy unpredictability. This instability translates into organisational decisions perceived as reactive or short-term focused, undermining employee confidence in organisational sustainability and long-term career prospects. Fourth, limited investment in professional development constrains retention. Civil service organisations have implemented relatively effective incentives to retain the workforce, but these are inadequate compared to private-sector incentives, suggesting insufficient long-term retention strategies. Private-sector organisations similarly reported budget constraints limiting training and development investments, particularly during economic downturns.

Social Incorporation Instruments and Barricades

Social integration emerged as a complex theme, with significant variation across organisations and sectors. High-performing organisations deliberately cultivated social integration through multiple mechanisms: structured mentorship programs, cross-functional project teams, regular informal social events, and inclusive decision-making processes. These organisations reported stronger employee engagement and lower turnover. However, most organisations had not deliberately designed social integration systems. Instead, social integration occurred informally through proximity and personal relationships, creating exclusionary dynamics in which some employees integrated easily. In contrast, others, particularly recent joiners or those from underrepresented backgrounds, remained peripheral. One junior employee observed: "*It feels like the organisation is really two different groups, the senior people who know each other and have strong relationships, and the rest of us. If you are not in the inner circle, you feel on the outside.*" Organisational hierarchy reinforced social fragmentation. Clear status distinctions between management and non-management employees limited informal mixing and created psychologically distant relationships. Psychological climate, inclusivity norms, communication transparency, and cultural safety are often underdeveloped in many organisational cultures.

Several factors inhibited social integration in the Nigerian organisational context. First, workplace formality and status consciousness created barriers to informal relationship-building. Hierarchical relationships meant that informal socialising across status lines remained uncommon. Second, Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity, while representing potential strength, sometimes creates in-group/out-group dynamics along ethnic or religious lines, particularly in organisations where diversity is not actively managed. Third, the prevalence of transactional employment relationships, where employees viewed organisations as temporary career stops rather than communities, reduced investment in relationship-building. Fourth, limited organisational resources constrained investment in intentional social integration mechanisms, such as team-building, mentorship infrastructure, and inclusive decision-making forums.

Career Development Practices and Gaps

Career development practices varied substantially across organisations. Some larger organisations, particularly in financial services and multinational corporations, had formalised career development systems, including structured competency frameworks, development planning processes, and clear advancement pathways. However, even these organisations faced challenges in ensuring that career development was accessible to all employees rather than concentrated among high-potential individuals. According to this study’s respondents, organisations lacked systematic career development approaches. Career advancement occurred through a combination of informal visibility, personal relationships with senior leaders, and perceived organisational need. This opaqueness created multiple problems: talented employees remained unrecognised; advancement criteria appeared subjective; and deserving employees became discouraged when advancement seemed divorced from performance or qualifications.

Multiple informants emphasised that career development was often viewed as a cost rather than an investment. Budget cuts invariably targeted training and development budgets. One manager noted: "*When revenues drop, training is always the first thing cut. However, that sends the message that we do not care about your development, and that is exactly when people start looking elsewhere.*" The disconnect between individual aspirations and organisational opportunities emerged as another significant gap. Employees sought continuous skill development, exposure to diverse experiences, and clear advancement opportunities, but many organisations could not provide these due to size constraints, limited organisational complexity, or flat hierarchies. This mismatch was particularly acute in public sector organisations, where civil service rules limited the flexibility of advancement. Several organisations had begun implementing more dynamic career development approaches, including rotation programs, skills-based advancement, cross-functional development, and support for external professional qualifications (such as professional certifications or postgraduate degrees). These initiatives showed promise in increasing engagement and retention, though they remained concentrated in better-resourced organisations.

Stakeholder Perceptions and Primacies

Significant differences emerged in how different stakeholders prioritised retention, integration, and development interventions. HR professionals tended to emphasise systemic, organisation-wide solutions, such as career development frameworks, culture change initiatives, and mentorship infrastructure. Executives tended to focus on cost-effectiveness*: "How can we improve retention without substantially increasing costs?"* Managers emphasised practical constraints: *"I support these ideas, but I have five other priorities and limited time."* Employees emphasised accessibility and fairness: "I want genuine opportunity for development, not just for the favoured *few."*

These divergent stakeholder perspectives revealed underlying tensions that organisational decision-making had not adequately resolved. For example, executives' emphasis on cost control often conflicted with HR's advocacy for investment in development and culture-building. Managers' time constraints limited their ability to mentor and develop staff despite recognising its importance. Employees' desire for transparent, merit-based advancement conflicted with organisations' tendency to rely on informal, relationship-based advancement processes. When organisations had attempted multistakeholder engagement, bringing together representatives from different groups to jointly develop HR strategies, the results were substantially more positive. In one such case, an organisation established an HR steering committee comprising executives, HR, managers, and employee representatives. This structure had led to more contextually realistic solutions and higher implementation effectiveness because different stakeholder groups understood each other's constraints and interests.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the Stakeholder-Centric Talent Retention (SCTR) framework by demonstrating that talent retention, social integration, and employee development are not independent organisational outcomes but mutually reinforcing processes shaped by governance, social integration, and human capital development subsystems. The evidence suggests that the persistent retention challenges experienced by Nigerian organisations cannot be adequately explained through traditional human resource management approaches that focus narrowly on compensation, training, or performance management. Rather, retention emerges from a broader ecosystem of stakeholder relationships, organisational legitimacy, social connectedness, and developmental opportunities. This finding contributes to the growing literature that conceptualises employee retention as a multidimensional organisational capability rather than a discrete HR function.

From the governance subsystem perspective, the study reveals a significant institutional deficit in Nigerian organisations regarding stakeholder participation in human resource decision-making. Most organisations examined lacked formal governance structures capable of aligning the interests of executives, managers, HR professionals, and employees around retention and development priorities. This finding extends the arguments of Richards and Sang (2021), who contend that socially responsible HRM requires the incorporation of wider stakeholder interests rather than the exclusive pursuit of managerial objectives. The findings further support Ogogo and Qureshi’s (2026) observation that talent retention systems in many developing economies remain heavily centralised and less participatory than those found in advanced economies. Evidence from organisations that have established multi-stakeholder HR forums demonstrates that inclusive governance mechanisms create greater strategic coherence, reduce implementation gaps, and strengthen employee engagement.

Theoretically, this finding reinforces the Resource-Based View (RBV), which identifies human capital as a strategic resource capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage (Chishamba, 2024; Kruesi & Bazelmans, 2023). However, the present study advances RBV by showing that the value of human capital depends on governance arrangements that enable stakeholders to shape and support talent management practices collectively. This observation addresses a key limitation identified in RBV scholarship, namely its tendency to underemphasise the governance processes through which strategic resources are mobilised and sustained (Chen et al., 2021; Apeloko et al., 2022; Nayak et al., 2023). The findings therefore suggest that governance should be viewed not merely as an administrative mechanism but as a strategic capability that determines whether organisational resources can be effectively deployed for retention purposes.

Furthermore, the governance findings illuminate an empirical gap within Nigerian talent management literature, which has traditionally focused on rewards, compensation, and performance outcomes (Lasisi et al., 2021; Aluko et al., 2022; Onavwie et al., 2023; Anekwe et al., 2025). While previous studies identified weaknesses in reward systems and compensation structures, they paid limited attention to the governance arrangements that shape the formulation and implementation of retention decisions. This study demonstrates that even well-designed HR initiatives can lose effectiveness when stakeholders perceive decision-making processes as opaque, exclusionary, or politically driven. Such perceptions resonate with Odion and Ekanem's (2025) analysis of organisational politics in Nigeria, which argues that employees often interpret career outcomes through the lens of power relations rather than meritocratic principles. The findings regarding social integration further strengthen the explanatory power of the SCTR framework. Employees who experienced trust, belongingness, psychological safety, and meaningful workplace relationships reported stronger organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions. This finding aligns with Social Capital Theory and Bourdieu's (2023) conceptualisation of social capital as a valuable resource embedded within social networks and relationships. The study demonstrates that retention is not solely a function of economic exchange but also of social embeddedness, a conclusion consistent with Mashi et al. (2022) and Sang's (2025) work on job embeddedness. Employees remain in organisations not only because of what they receive financially but because of the social bonds, support systems, and identity connections they develop within organisational communities.

Importantly, the findings contribute to emerging debates on organisational social capital in African contexts. Mojeed-Sanni (2026) argues that many management practices imported into African organisations neglect indigenous relational structures that shape employee experiences. Similarly, Jin et al. (2026) note that regional perspectives on social capital reveal significant contextual variations in how workplace relationships influence occupational outcomes. By demonstrating the importance of mentorship, cross-functional collaboration, transparent communication, and inclusive decision-making across diverse Nigerian organisations, this study provides context-specific evidence that social capital represents a critical yet underutilised retention mechanism. However, the findings also expose an important paradox. While social integration enhances retention, it can simultaneously reinforce existing organisational hierarchies and exclusionary structures. This observation extends the work of Kuknor and Bhattacharya (2022), Aluko (2025), Malhotra (2024), and Dhanani et al. (2024), who argue that inclusion cannot be assumed simply because social networks exist. Rather, organisations must intentionally design inclusive systems that prevent social capital from becoming concentrated among privileged groups. The effectiveness of mentorship and collaborative initiatives, therefore, depends not only on their existence but also on their inclusiveness. This finding fills an important empirical gap because previous Nigerian studies have rarely examined how social integration mechanisms may reproduce inequalities that ultimately undermine retention efforts.

The human capital development subsystem findings further confirm that career development remains a central determinant of employee retention. Employees who perceived realistic opportunities for learning, advancement, and skill acquisition exhibited significantly higher organisational commitment. This finding supports previous studies linking talent development to retention outcomes (Obum et al., 2023; Salau, 2025; Adewole et al., 2025; Aduloju & Aluko, 2026). It also aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are more motivated and committed when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are satisfied. Pepple et al. (2024) found that these SDT dimensions significantly influenced employee retention among healthcare professionals in Nigeria, a conclusion strongly reinforced by the present study. However, the findings reveal a persistent contradiction between organisational rhetoric and practice. Although most organisations acknowledge the strategic importance of employee development, many reduce training investments during periods of financial uncertainty. This behaviour undermines retention precisely when employee commitment is most vulnerable. Such findings challenge short-term managerial assumptions and support Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which emphasises the continuous renewal and development of organisational resources as a prerequisite for long-term competitiveness (Kero & Bogale, 2023; Kurzhals, 2021; Sun et al., 2024). Organisations that withdraw developmental investments during difficult periods weaken their capacity to retain critical talent and adapt to future challenges.

The study further reveals that development initiatives are only effective when aligned with organisational realities. Career systems that promise advancement opportunities which organisational structures cannot deliver create cynicism, distrust, and disengagement. Similar concerns have been identified in studies of professional development and career progression among teachers and other professionals (Booth et al., 2021; Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024; Torres et al., 2024). The findings therefore suggest that career development must be grounded in realistic pathways, transparent communication, and credible organisational commitments rather than aspirational promises. Most significantly, the study demonstrates that governance, social integration, and human capital development operate as an interconnected system. This finding advances existing talent retention literature by moving beyond fragmented explanations that examine individual HR practices in isolation. Consistent with Dynamic Capabilities Theory, organisational effectiveness emerges from the integration and recombination of complementary resources and capabilities rather than from isolated interventions (Purnomo, 2024; Dhrubo, 2025). Governance creates legitimacy and transparency, social integration generates trust and embeddedness, and development enhances competence and future opportunities. Together, these subsystems form a mutually reinforcing retention architecture.

Consequently, the study addresses a major empirical gap in Nigerian retention research, which has predominantly focused on compensation, rewards, or isolated talent management practices. While compensation remains important (Lasisi et al., 2021; Onavwie et al., 2023; Anekwe et al., 2025), the findings demonstrate that sustainable retention depends equally on inclusive governance structures, strong social capital, and credible development systems. The SCTR framework, therefore, offers a more comprehensive explanation of retention dynamics by illustrating how stakeholder relationships, organisational capabilities, and employee experiences interact to influence long-term retention outcomes. In doing so, the study extends existing theory and provides a contextually grounded framework for understanding and addressing talent retention challenges in Nigerian organisations.

Implications of the Study

The research highlights important implications for organisational practice, HRM policies, and future studies in Nigeria. For organisational practice, companies aiming to boost talent retention need to implement integrated strategies that simultaneously focus on governance, social inclusion, and human capital development. Small-scale interventions, such as standalone training programs or isolated social events, that do not address systemic inclusion are inadequate. Instead, organisations should strategically evaluate all three areas, identify key gaps, and create cohesive action plans that ensure governance, social connectivity, and development efforts support each other.

Organisations should create multistakeholder HR governance structures that incorporate diverse organisational voices. These structures should focus on shaping and assessing retention and development policies to ensure they serve stakeholder interests. Investment in social integration infrastructure, such as mentorship programs, cross-functional teams, inclusive decision-making, and leadership that promotes psychological safety and inclusion, is essential. Additionally, organisations should adopt realistic, transparent career development systems aligned with their specific context and safeguard these investments during economic downturns, recognising that development initiatives are vital to long-term retention.

The research indicates that Nigerian authorities and professional organisations should create sector-specific or national guidelines to promote sustainable talent retention. These guidelines could set baseline standards for transparency in career paths, investments in employee development, and inclusive governance, without enforcing rigid rules that overlook organisational differences. HRM associations might also establish certification or recognition programs for companies committed to comprehensive retention strategies. Furthermore, policymakers should explore labour laws that support stakeholder involvement in organisational decision-making. While excessive regulation risks inflexibility, a light-touch approach, such as requiring organisations to involve stakeholders in key HR policy decisions, can foster more inclusive governance without adding significant compliance burdens.

This qualitative research has generated rich insights into stakeholder perspectives and organisational processes, but several research directions warrant future investigation. Quantitative studies examining the relationships between governance, social integration, and investments in human capital development and organisational outcomes (retention, engagement, performance) would provide additional evidence base. Longitudinal research tracking organisations implementing the SCTR framework would illuminate implementation challenges and outcomes over time. Research examining sector-specific variations in retention, integration, and development mechanisms across financial services, manufacturing, technology, and the public sector would deepen contextual understanding. Research on gender, ethnicity, and other identity dimensions of social integration would address the finding that integration mechanisms sometimes reinforced existing power structures rather than transcending them.

Conclusion

This study has examined talent retention, social integration, and career development as interconnected dimensions of sustainable human resource management in Nigeria through qualitative research with 17 key informants representing diverse organisational stakeholders. The research reveals that while organisations recognise retention challenges, most have not developed integrated approaches that address the complex, multidimensional nature of retention as a governance, social, and human capital challenge.

The Stakeholder-Centric Talent Retention (SCTR) framework proposed in this article offers a conceptual and practical approach to understanding and addressing retention in the Nigerian organisational context. The framework emphasises that sustainable retention requires three mutually reinforcing subsystems: governance mechanisms that ensure stakeholder alignment and legitimate organisational decision-making; social integration infrastructure that deliberately cultivates trust, belonging, and psychological safety; and human capital development systems that provide clear, accessible pathways for skill development and career advancement. These subsystems are not optional add-ons to organisational strategy but fundamental requirements for sustainable talent management.

The research demonstrates that Nigerian organisations have substantial opportunities to improve retention, engagement, and performance by attending more deliberately to these three subsystems. The path forward requires organisations to move beyond viewing HRM as a functional responsibility to recognising it as a strategic priority that requires coordinated, holistic attention. It requires organisational leaders to engage diverse stakeholder perspectives rather than imposing unilateral decisions. It requires commitment to social integration and human capital development, not as discretionary benefits but as core organisational investments. Moreover, it requires recognising that people are not merely organisational resources but stakeholders whose interests, development, and well-being are central to organisational legitimacy and sustainability.

The Nigerian organisational context presents both challenges and opportunities for implementing this framework. Economic constraints, organisational volatility, and limited organisational maturity in some institutions create implementation barriers. However, Nigeria's young demographic profile, growing professional class, and increasingly sophisticated understanding of human capital value create opportunities. Organisations that invest now in building integrated retention systems grounded in stakeholder engagement, social capital, and human capital development will position themselves competitively as the Nigerian economy evolves and talent competition intensifies.

This research contributes to the global HRM literature by providing empirically grounded evidence on retention, integration, and development from a Sub-Saharan African context that is often underrepresented in academic research. It advances theoretical understanding by proposing an integrated framework treating these dimensions as interdependent rather than isolated. Moreover, it provides practical guidance for Nigerian organisations and policymakers seeking to build sustainable HRM systems aligned with both global best practices and local contextual realities. As Nigeria's organisations increasingly recognise talent as a strategic asset, evidence-based approaches to talent retention, integration, and development will become increasingly valuable for organisational and national development.

AI Generative Declarative Statement

The authors of this work acknowledged that CHATGPT and Grammarly are used for language and editorial services,s while the direction and originality of the work did not change

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