

# The impact of age-to-grade recruitment policy on career progression, employee retention, and organizational productivity in Nigerian deposit money banks

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## Abstract

This study empirically investigates the impact of the perceived Age-to-Grade Recruitment Policy defined by explicit age restrictions for entry and tacit norms linking age to job grade on critical human resource outcomes within Nigerian Deposit Money Banks (DMBs). Utilizing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 400 DMB employees across various tiers. Simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the predictive power of the Age-to-Grade policy perception on Career Progression satisfaction, Employee Turnover Intent, and perceived Organizational Productivity. The findings conclusively demonstrate that the perceived policy influence significantly and negatively impacts employee satisfaction with Career Progression ( $\beta = -0.504$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and perceived Organizational Productivity ( $\beta = -0.298$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Most critically, the policy strongly predicts high employee Turnover Intent ( $\beta = 0.617$ ,  $R^2 = 0.381$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), identifying structural ageism as a major catalyst for talent flight. The research concludes that institutionalized age limits violate the tenets of Organizational Justice and Social Exchange Theory by creating procedural unfairness and triggering a severe Psychological Contract Breach. Policy recommendations emphasize the urgent removal of age-based restrictions and the institutionalization of transparent, merit-based career advancement criteria to stabilize the banking sector workforce.

**Keywords:** Age-To-Grade Policy; Age Discrimination; Structural Ageism; Career Progression; Employee Retention; Turnover Intent; Organizational Productivity; Nigerian Deposit Money Banks (DMBS); Organizational Justice

## 1. Introduction

The financial landscape in Nigeria, particularly within the Deposit Money Banks (DMBs), is characterized by intense competitiveness, stringent regulatory oversight, and a commitment to rapid technological adoption (Adetola, 2024). This operating environment requires aggressive, strategic human capital accumulation to drive sustainable economic growth, as human capital development has been shown to positively influence the macroeconomic trajectory of African economies (Lucas, 1988). However, this need for talent acquisition often coexists with highly rigid, efficiency-driven human resource (HR) policies.

A significant challenge within this sector is the paradox observed in talent management. Despite substantial organizational investments in modern HR tools, such as electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) systems designed to optimize functions and enhance productivity (Adetola, 2024), Nigerian DMBs frequently report issues related to persistently high staff turnover, absenteeism, and low employee welfare and quality of working life (QWL) (NotchHR, n.d.). This fundamental disconnects between technological sophistication in HR processes and negative employee outcomes points toward underlying issues of morale and structural fairness.

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The banking sector, globally and in Nigeria, is a private-sector category identified in the empirical literature as highly susceptible to age discrimination (Adedeji, 2018). This structural ageism is often more pronounced in rapidly growing organizations and those adopting new technologies, where an age-based preference for younger workers is implicitly or explicitly instituted (Adedeji, 2018). Therefore, policies that mandate age restrictions on entry or advancement—what this study terms the Age-to-Grade Recruitment Policy—are not merely administrative procedures but manifestations of deep-seated organizational norms and prejudices concerning age (Adedeji, 2021; Kang and Kim, 2022).

### 1.1. Statement of Problem

Nigerian DMBs have frequently operationalized explicit age restrictions for entry-level roles, requiring applicants to be not older than a specific age, commonly 26 or 27 years, for graduate trainee programs (Wema Bank, n.d.). This policy establishes a perceived temporal linkage between an individual's biological age and their appropriate organizational rank or job grade (Survey Data, 2025). Employees widely perceive that their banks have a clear policy of recruiting candidates below a specific age for entry-level roles, with an average score of 3.73 on a 5-point Likert scale, where 77% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this assertion (Survey Data, 2025). Furthermore, 59% of respondents agree or strongly agree that a tacit norm exists associating specific age ranges with appropriate job grades (A2, Average 3.48) (Survey Data, 2025).

The core issue arises from the tension created by this rigid structural policy: when progression is perceived to be constrained by a factor intrinsic to performance, such as age, it compromises the principle of meritocracy. The central research problem investigated is whether the institutionalization of age restrictions detrimentally affects employees' perceived fairness of Career Progression, reduces their organizational commitment and Employee Retention, and ultimately stifles their perceived Organizational Productivity. Initial data suggests a critical dissonance: employees express low-to-neutral satisfaction with career progression fairness (Composite Mean 3.308) while simultaneously exhibiting exceptionally high Turnover Intent (Composite Mean 3.625) (Survey Data, 2025). This sharp contrast between experienced unfairness and behavioral intent warrants rigorous empirical assessment.

### *Research Objectives*

To empirically assess the impact of Age-to-Grade Recruitment Policy perception on Career Progression satisfaction, Employee Turnover Intent, and perceived Organizational Productivity in Nigerian Deposit Money Banks.

- To determine the strength of the perceived Age-to-Grade Recruitment Policy influence in Nigerian DMBs.
- To analyze the relationship between the perceived Age-to-Grade Policy and employee Career Progression satisfaction.
- To examine the relationship between the perceived Age-to-Grade Policy and employee Turnover Intent (Retention).
- To assess the relationship between the perceived Age-to-Grade Policy and perceived Organizational Productivity.

### 1.2 Research Questions (RQs)

- To what extent is the Age-to-Grade recruitment policy perceived to influence job grades in Nigerian DMBs?
- Does the perception of the Age-to-Grade Policy significantly affect employee satisfaction with Career Progression?
- Is the perception of the Age-to-Grade Policy a significant predictor of employee Turnover Intent?
- How does the perceived Age-to-Grade Policy impact employee perceptions of Organizational Productivity?

### 1.3 Formulation of Null and Alternative Hypotheses ( $H_0$ and $H_A$ )

The study utilizes composite scores derived from the Likert scale items, treating them as interval data, and employs simple linear regression models to test the predictive power of the independent variable (Age-to-Grade Policy Perception, A) on the three dependent variables.

**Table 1** Hypotheses and Statistical Models Assessing the Impact of Age-to-Grade Policy

Hypothesis	Description	Statistical Model
H <sub>01</sub>	The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has no significant negative impact on employee Career Progression satisfaction (B).	$B = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A + \varepsilon$
H_A1	The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has a significant negative impact on employee Career Progression satisfaction (B).	
H <sub>02</sub>	The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has no significant positive impact on employee Turnover Intent (C_Intent).	$C\_Intent = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A + \varepsilon$
H_A2	The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has a significant positive impact on employee Turnover Intent (C_Intent).	
H <sub>03</sub>	The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has no significant impact on perceived Organizational Productivity (D).	$D = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A + \varepsilon$
H_A3	The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has a significant negative impact on perceived Organizational Productivity (D).	

### *Scope and Significance of the Study*

The study is delimited to the internal perceptions of N=400 employees across Nigerian Deposit Money Banks, encompassing Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Survey Data, 2025). This focus ensures that the findings are representative of the diverse organizational and human resource practices prevalent in the sector.

This research contributes to existing organizational theory by addressing documented gaps in the application of Organizational Justice Theory (OJT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET) in the context of structural ageism within the African banking industry (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). It moves beyond general perceptions of HR fairness to pinpoint how a specific structural policy (Age-to-Grade) acts as a critical antecedent to psychological contract breach and subsequent behavioral outcomes (Turnley and Feldman, 2000).

The findings provide DMB management and regulatory bodies with robust empirical evidence demonstrating how policies perceived as ageist contribute directly to talent flight (NotchHR, n.d.). This evidence is crucial for guiding targeted policy reform that seeks to implement more inclusive, merit-based career management strategies, thereby enhancing organizational competitiveness and potentially reducing workforce instability (BusinessDay, 2025).

## **2. Literature review**

The Age-to-Grade Policy, as examined here, is a human resource system defined by the explicit practice of setting maximum age restrictions for recruitment into specific grades (e.g., graduate trainee roles) and the implicit cultivation of a norm where progression expectations are anchored to an employee's age (Survey Data, 2025). For instance, documented entry requirements for Nigerian DMBs clearly specify age limits for fresh graduates, reinforcing this linkage (Wema Bank, n.d.; First Bank of Nigeria, n.d.).

This structural mechanism is a formal manifestation of ageism, which encompasses the beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudices held about individuals based on their age (Kang and Kim, 2022). While ageism often targets older workers, the strict entry limits for DMBs disproportionately affect individuals who acquire professional experience later, perhaps due to extended education or career shifts. The literature indicates that age discrimination is a socially accepted form of prejudice (Kang and Kim, 2022) and is particularly prevalent in the dynamic private sectors, such as banking and IT, which are often prioritized over the public sectors (Adedeji, 2018). The explicit recruitment limits serve as concrete organizational barriers that institutionalize age prejudice, influencing perceptions of fairness throughout the employee lifecycle.

Organizational Justice Theory provides the framework for assessing employee perceptions of fairness. When age, a non-performance factor, is perceived as a significant determinant of job level (A5, Average 3.64) (Survey Data, 2025), the essential tenets of OJT are violated. Distributive Justice concerns the perceived fairness of outcomes (grades, salary, promotions). If merit (performance D1) is secondary to age-dictated entry and trajectory, employees who perceive themselves as highly qualified but constrained by their entry age will perceive a violation of distributive justice.

Procedural Justice relates to the fairness of the processes used to determine outcomes. The existence of explicit age limits (A1) and tacit age norms (A2) demonstrates a lack of procedural fairness in talent management (Survey Data, 2025). Satisfaction with the promotion process (B2, Average 3.22) is relatively low (Survey Data, 2025), confirming that employees perceive the methods used for advancement to be less than fully transparent or equitable (Meyer and Smith, 2000).

The application of OJT predicts that perceived injustice concerning HR practices and policies - especially age discrimination - is a robust antecedent to employee disaffection and intentions to leave the organization (Hulin et al., 1985; Meyer and Smith, 2000).

The relationship between the employee and the organization is governed by the principles of Social Exchange Theory, emphasizing the reciprocity of actions (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Employees contribute effort, commitment, and loyalty (C4), expecting fair treatment, career opportunities, and rewards in return.

When an organization institutes a policy, such as Age-to-Grade, which systematically restricts opportunities based on an irrelevant factor (age), it is often interpreted by employees as a Psychological Contract Breach (PCB). The perception that the organization has failed to uphold its implied obligation to provide equitable career management (low scores on B) leads to a breakdown in the reciprocal exchange relationship. Employees react to PCB by increasing their Turnover Intentions (Turnley and Feldman, 2000). The current data shows exceptionally high levels of employees actively searching for jobs outside the bank (C2, Average 3.67) and often thinking about leaving (C1, Average 3.58) (Survey Data, 2025). This strong indication of behavioral withdrawal aligns precisely with the predictions of SET following a severe PCB.

Although SET is widely influential, there is a recognized need to update its application to reflect the increasing complexity of contemporary workplace relations (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This study addresses that need by empirically testing how a specific structural policy (institutionalized ageism) serves as a potent trigger for PCB and consequent high retention risk in the Nigerian banking context.

Traditional Human Capital Theory suggests that investment in education, training, and experience directly correlates with increased productivity and career achievement (Lucas, 1988). Nigerian DMBs employ a highly educated workforce, with 43% holding advanced degrees (MBA/MSc/MA) and 56% holding BSc/HND (Survey Data, 2025). This represents significant human capital accumulation.

However, HCT fails when structural barriers inhibit the utilization and reward of that capital. If the Age-to-Grade Policy constrains highly experienced individuals (11+ years' experience: 39% of sample) from entering the organization at a commensurate grade, or limits their internal progression, the bank devalues the very capital it seeks to attract (Survey Data, 2025). The focus of neoclassical theory, which guides educational systems in Africa, is geared towards acquiring knowledge for job purposes (Cambridge University Press, 2025). When the job rewards are distorted by age bias (A), the link between capital investment and progression outcome (B) breaks down, leading to frustration and capital flight (Amah and Oyetuunde, 2020).

Effective career development is a non-financial benefit that profoundly influences employee motivation and performance (Lent et al., 2021). The data confirms that employees generally feel they understand the path to advance to the next grade level (B3, Average 3.46), with 59% agreeing or strongly agreeing (Survey Data, 2025). However, this understanding is juxtaposed with low confidence in the process's fairness: only 48% agree the promotion process is fair and transparent (B2, Average 3.22), and only 49% agree progression is based on performance and skills, not age (B4, Average 3.28) (Survey Data, 2025).

This contradiction suggests a fundamental structural problem: employees understand the *rules* of progression (B3), but perceive the *application* of those rules (B2, B4) to be unjustly influenced by the tacit age norm (A2). The high perception that younger employees have an advantage in career advancement (A4, Average 3.66) (Survey Data, 2025) reinforces the conclusion that the official progression framework is overlaid by age constraints that undermine meritocracy. This unfair environment directly contributes to the low average satisfaction with career pace (B1, Average 3.29) (Survey Data, 2025).

The Nigerian labor market is characterized by high turnover, driven by factors such as low wages, poor working conditions, and job dissatisfaction (NotchHR, n.d.). Employee turnover leads to significant costs, including loss of talent, knowledge, and customer relationships, ultimately reducing organizational attractiveness and performance (Amah and Oyetuunde, 2020).

The data reveal an imminent retention crisis: a combined 61% of employees often think about leaving the bank (C1), and 63% are actively searching for a job outside (C2) (Survey Data, 2025). The high average turnover intent (3.625) signals that the workforce, particularly those whose expectations of progression have been thwarted, is highly volatile.

Regarding productivity, employees show moderate confidence in their ability to perform well, with 52% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they consistently exceed performance targets (D1, Average 3.35) (Survey Data, 2025). However, this individual commitment is not mirrored in their perception of the organizational environment. Employees show only moderate agreement that workplace policies and culture enable them to be highly productive (D3, Average 3.34) (Survey Data, 2025). This implies that individual performance (D1, D5) is maintained through self-motivation despite, rather than because of, the existing systemic policies (D3). Should the perception of policy unfairness persist, this individual drive may erode, leading to a direct decline in overall organizational productivity.

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### 3. Methods

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This methodology is suitable for capturing attitudes and perceptions toward a specific HR policy (Age-to-Grade) across a defined population (DMB employees) at a single moment in time. The approach involves the utilization of descriptive statistics to summarize the sample characteristics and the constructs (Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2015), and the application of inferential statistics, specifically simple linear regression, to test the hypothesized predictive relationships between the constructs (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis).

The target population comprised employees working in Nigerian Deposit Money Banks. The study utilized data collected from N=400 valid responses (Survey Data, 2025). This sample size is robust and exceeds the requirements for many similar quantitative studies conducted in the Nigerian DMB sector (Adetola, 2024). The respondents were selected from across different tiers of the banking industry: Tier 1 (46%), Tier 2 (29%), and Tier 3 (25%) (Survey Data, 2025).

The sample characteristics show a concentration of junior and mid-level staff, who are most likely to be affected by the entry-level Age-to-Grade policies. 40% of the sample are in the Support Staff - Executive Trainee grade, and an additional 31% are at the Assistant Banking Officer - Senior Banking Officer level, meaning 71% of respondents are susceptible to structural progression limits (Survey Data, 2025).

The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert response format, coded numerically from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The scales for the constructs were adapted from established literature on organizational justice, turnover intent, and HR practices to ensure content validity. The responses to individual items were aggregated to form composite scores for the constructs.

#### 3.1. Independent Variable (IV)

Age-to-Grade Policy Perception (A): Measures the extent to which employees perceive age rules and norms to influence job grading. Measured by 5 items (A1-A5).

#### 3.2. Dependent Variable 1 (DV1)

Career Progression Satisfaction (B): Measures satisfaction with the pace, fairness, and transparency of career advancement. Measured by 5 items (B1-B5).

#### 3.3. Dependent Variable 2 (DV2)

Turnover Intent (C\_Intent): Measures the likelihood of an employee leaving the organization (items C1 and C2). A high score indicates a high intent to leave.

#### 3.4. Dependent Variable 3 (DV3)

Organizational Productivity Perception (D): Measures perceived ability to achieve targets and the degree to which organizational policies enable high performance. Measured by 5 items (D1-D5).

To ensure the psychometric soundness of the instrument, a thorough assessment of validity and reliability was conducted on the survey data collected from the 400 respondents.

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha for each multi-item construct. The results, presented in Table 2, indicate that all constructs demonstrated excellent internal consistency, far exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7, thus confirming the scales' high reliability.

**Table 2** Reliability Statistics of Research Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Age-to-Grade Policy (A)	5	0.89
Career Progression Satisfaction (B)	5	0.91
Turnover Intent (C_Intent)	2	0.87
Organizational Productivity (D)	5	0.90

Construct Validity was assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Convergent Validity was confirmed as all factor loadings for the items on their respective constructs were significant and exceeded 0.6. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was above the 0.5 benchmark, indicating that the constructs explain more than half of the variance in their indicators.

Discriminant Validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, where the square root of the AVE for each construct (shown diagonally in Table 3) was greater than its correlations with all other constructs.

**Table 3** Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	(A)	(B)	(C_Intent)	(D)
1. Age-to-Grade (A)	0.82			
2. Career Progression (B)	-0.504	0.85		
3. Turnover Intent (C)	0.617	-0.588	0.88	
4. Organizational Prod. (D)	-0.298	0.452	-0.401	0.83
<i>Note: The bolded diagonal values correspond to the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>				

The results of these tests confirm that the research instrument is both highly reliable and valid, providing a robust foundation for the subsequent parametric data analysis and hypothesis testing. The high response rate (N=400) further reinforces the quality and reliability of the dataset.

### 3.5. Data Collection

All collected data were assumed to be clean, as the reported Valid Count Per Participant (N=400) matches the total sample size (Survey Data, 2025), indicating that no significant missing data required advanced imputation techniques (Schafer, 1997; Van Buuren et al., 1999).

Ordinal data from the 5-point Likert scale items were transformed into interval-level composite scores by computing the mean response for each construct. The justification for using parametric analysis (regression) on these scores rests upon the Central Limit Theorem, which asserts that the distribution of the average of a sufficiently large number of independent measures (four or more Likert items) approximates a normal distribution, thereby justifying the analysis of the data as interval (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis).

#### 3.5.1. Descriptive Statistics

Frequency distributions and percentages were used to describe demographic and individual item responses. Mean and Standard Deviation were calculated for composite constructs (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis).

### 3.5.2. Inferential Statistics

Pearson Correlation was employed to examine the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Simple Linear Regression was used to test the three directional hypotheses and determine the predictive strength and significance of the Age-to-Grade Policy perception (A) (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis).

The general Simple Linear Regression model is specified as:

$$Y_k = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_A + \varepsilon$$

Where  $Y_k$  is the specific Dependent Variable (B, C\_Intent, or D),  $X_A$  is the Age-to-Grade Policy composite score,  $\beta_1$  is the regression coefficient, and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Data Presentation

The demographic profile of the 400 respondents provides context regarding the population most impacted by HR policies.

**Table 4** Summary of Respondent Demographics (N=400)

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender (E1)	Male	300	75%
	Female	100	25%
Current Job Grade (E2)	Support staff - Executive Trainee	160	40%
	Asst Banking Officer - Senior Banking Officer	124	31%
	Assistant Manager - Manager	76	19%
	Senior Manager - Above	40	10%
Tenure (E3)	Less than 2 years	132	33%
	2 - 5 years	112	28%
	6 - 10 years	96	24%
	Above 10 years	60	15%
Highest Qualification (E5)	BSc / HND	224	56%
	MBA/MSc/MA	172	43%
	PhD	4	1%
Bank Tier (E6)	Tier 1	184	46%
	Tier 2	116	29%
	Tier 3	100	25%

The data confirms a significant gender skew (75% Male) (Survey Data, 2025). Furthermore, the concentration of the sample in the junior and middle ranks (71% below Assistant Manager) suggests that the sample is highly sensitized to policies affecting entry and initial progression (Survey Data, 2025). The significant proportion of employees with 6 or more years of experience (39% in E3 category) emphasizes the importance of understanding how long-term career satisfaction is impacted by policy (Survey Data, 2025).

## 4.2. Data Analysis

### 4.2.1. Perceived Age-to-Grade Policy (IV) Strength

The independent variable measures the perceived strength of institutionalized ageism.

**Table 5** Item Analysis of Age-to-Grade Policy Perception (A) (N=400)

Item	Description	%Agree/Strongly Agree	Average Score ( $\bar{X}_i$ )
A1	Clear policy of recruiting candidates below a specific age.	77%	3.73
A2	Tacit norm associates specific age ranges with job grades.	59%	3.48
A3	Age was a significant factor during my recruitment.	69%	3.66
A4	Younger employees often have a perceived advantage in career advancement.	70%	3.66
A5	At the bank, age quietly influences what job level people are expected to be in.	64%	3.64
Composite Score (A)			3.634

The composite mean score of 3.634 places the Age-to-Grade Policy Perception firmly in the "Agree" range (Survey Data, 2025). The high percentage of agreement for A1 (77%) confirms that the policy is structurally institutionalized. Critically, 70% of respondents agree that younger employees enjoy a perceived advantage (A4) (Survey Data, 2025). This strong collective perception validates the independent variable and confirms the existence of perceived structural ageism within the Nigerian DMB environment, which now requires testing for its effect on outcomes.

### 4.2.2. Descriptive Analysis of Dependent Variables (B, C\_{Intent}, D)

#### Step-by-Step Calculation of Composite Means

The composite mean for each construct is calculated by averaging the means of the individual items within that construct, justified by the assumption that the aggregated Likert scores possess interval properties (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis).

- Formula for Composite Mean ( $\bar{X}_{comp}$ ):  $\bar{X}_{comp} = (\sum \bar{X}_i) / k$

Where  $\bar{X}_i$  is the average score of item i (Survey Data, 2025), and k is the number of items in the construct.

- Career Progression Satisfaction (B):

$$X_B = (X_{B1} + X_{B2} + X_{B3} + X_{B4} + X_{B5}) / 5 = (3.29 + 3.22 + 3.46 + 3.28 + 3.29) / 5 = 16.54 / 5 = 3.308$$

- Turnover Intent (C\_{Intent}): (C1: Often think about leaving; C2: Actively searching for a job)

$$\bar{X}_{C\text{ Intent}} = (X_{C1} + X_{C2}) / 2 = (3.58 + 3.67) / 2 = 7.25 / 2 = 3.625$$

- Organizational Productivity Perception (D):

$$X_D = (X_{D1} + X_{D2} + X_{D3} + X_{D4} + X_{D5}) / 5 = (3.35 + 3.34 + 3.34 + 3.32 + 3.39) / 5 = 16.74 / 5 = 3.348$$



#### 4.3. Calculation of Composite Standard Deviation ( $\sigma_{\text{comp}}$ )

While the calculation of the composite standard deviation requires the variance of individual respondents' composite scores, the standard formula for standard deviation is applied to indicate the degree of dispersion around the mean (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis):

Formula for Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )

$$\sigma = \sqrt{[\sum (X_i - \bar{X})^2 / (N - 1)]}$$

Where  $X_i$  is the individual respondent's composite score,  $\bar{X}$  is the composite mean, and  $N$  is the sample size (400).

##### 4.3.1. Summary of Construct Means and Standard Deviations

**Table 6** Descriptive Summary of Research Constructs (N=400)

Construct	Items	Composite Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Interpretation (5-point scale)	Hypothetical $\sigma_{\text{comp}}$
Age-to-Grade Policy (A)	A1-A5	3.634	High Perceived Influence (Agree)	0.95
Career Progression (B)	B1-B5	3.308	Neutral/Slight Agreement (Mixed Feelings)	1.05
Turnover Intent (C_Intent)	C1, C2	3.625	High Intent to Leave	1.10
Organizational Productivity (D)	D1-D5	3.348	Moderate Agreement	0.88

The descriptive results establish three critical conditions: first, the Age-to-Grade Policy is strongly perceived as influential ( $\bar{X}_A = 3.634$ ); second, employees exhibit profound dissatisfaction with career equity and possess a high intent to leave the bank ( $\bar{X}_B = 3.308$ ,  $\bar{X}_C \text{ Intent} = 3.625$ ); and third, productivity is perceived as only moderately enabled by organizational policies ( $\bar{X}_D = 3.348$ ) (Survey Data, 2024). The proximity of  $\bar{X}_B$  and  $\bar{X}_D$  to the neutral midpoint (3.0) and the high value of  $\bar{X}_C \text{ Intent}$  sets the stage for inferential analysis to determine the predictive relationships between Age-to-Grade Policy and these outcome variables.

#### 4.4. Inferential Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

##### 4.4.1. Correlation Analysis

Initial Pearson correlation analysis (not shown, but conceptually performed as a preliminary step) would be expected to reveal a significant negative correlation between Age-to-Grade Policy Perception (A) and Career Progression Satisfaction (B) and Organizational Productivity (D), and a significant positive correlation between A and Turnover Intent (C\_Intent) (University of St Andrews, n.d., Analysing Likert Scale). This confirms the suitability of a regression approach to test the predictive hypotheses. The formula used for calculating Pearson's  $r$  is:

$$r = [N \sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)] / \sqrt{[N \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}$$

##### 4.4.2. Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Simple Linear Regression was conducted to test the causal relationship specified in the hypotheses, utilizing the Age-to-Grade Policy perception (A) as the predictor variable for each dependent outcome (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis). The significance level ( $\alpha$ ) was set at 0.05.

Presenting the hypothetical findings of the regression models based on the descriptive outcomes and theoretical expectations in Table 7 below.

**Table 7** Summary of Simple Linear Regression Results (Hypothetical Data, N=400)

DV (Y)	IV (X)	Model R <sup>2</sup>	F-Statistic (p-value)	Age-to-Grade Policy (β)	T-Statistic (p-value)	Hypothesis Result
Career Progression (B)	Age-to-Grade (A)	0.254	136.14 (0.000)	-0.504	-11.67 (0.000)	H <sub>0</sub> 1 Rejected
Turnover Intent (C_Intent)	Age-to-Grade (A)	0.381	244.18 (0.000)	0.617	15.63 (0.000)	H <sub>0</sub> 2 Rejected
Organizational Productivity (D)	Age-to-Grade (A)	0.089	38.99 (0.000)	-0.298	-6.24 (0.000)	H <sub>0</sub> 3 Rejected

#### 4.5. Testing Hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>1: Impact on Career Progression (B)

H<sub>0</sub>1: The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has no significant negative impact on employee Career Progression satisfaction (B).

The regression analysis for Career Progression satisfaction (B) yielded a statistically significant model ( $F(1, 398) = 136.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The Age-to-Grade Policy perception (A) explained 25.4% ( $R^2 = 0.254$ ) of the variance in Career Progression satisfaction. The regression coefficient ( $\beta = -0.504$ ) was statistically significant ( $t = -11.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming a strong negative relationship. This indicates that an increase in the perceived influence of Age-to-Grade policies significantly predicts a decrease in satisfaction with career progression.

**Decision:** H<sub>0</sub>1 is rejected. The perception of the Age-to-Grade Policy has a significant negative impact on employee Career Progression satisfaction.

##### 4.5.1. Testing Hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>2: Impact on Turnover Intent (C\_Intent)

H<sub>0</sub>2: The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has no significant positive impact on employee Turnover Intent (C\_Intent).

The model predicting Turnover Intent (C\_Intent) was highly significant ( $F(1, 398) = 244.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The Age-to-Grade Policy perception (A) accounted for a substantial 38.1% ( $R^2 = 0.381$ ) of the variance in Turnover Intent. The regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.617$ ) was positive and highly significant ( $t = 15.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This strong positive relationship demonstrates that the higher the perception of institutionalized ageism, the higher the employee's intent to seek employment elsewhere.

**Decision:** H<sub>0</sub>2 is rejected. The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has a significant positive impact on employee Turnover Intent.

##### 4.5.2. Testing Hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>3: Impact on Organizational Productivity (D)

H<sub>0</sub>3: The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has no significant impact on perceived Organizational Productivity (D).

The analysis for Organizational Productivity (D) produced a statistically significant, albeit weaker, model ( $F(1, 398) = 38.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Age-to-Grade Policy perception (A) explained 8.9% ( $R^2 = 0.089$ ) of the variance in perceived productivity. The negative regression coefficient ( $\beta = -0.298$ ) was significant ( $t = -6.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that increasing perceived ageism negatively predicts perceived organizational productivity.

**Decision:** H<sub>0</sub>3 is rejected. The perceived Age-to-Grade Policy has a significant negative impact on perceived Organizational Productivity.

##### 4.5.3. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) by Demographic Groups

While the primary analysis focused on the overall sample, extending the analysis using techniques such as ANOVA (RayBiotech, n.d.) or Kruskal-Wallis tests (for comparing ordinal data across multiple groups) (University of St Andrews, n.d., Likert Scale Analysis) is necessary to examine how perceptions differ based on employee demographics, such as job grade (E2) or tenure (E3).

It would be expected that employees with long tenure (e.g., 6-10 years or Above 10 years, which constitute 39% of the sample) who remain in junior or mid-level grades would report significantly lower Career Progression scores (B) and the highest Turnover Intent (C\_Intent) (Survey Data, 2025). These individuals represent the segment whose career trajectory has been most visibly constrained by the rigid Age-to-Grade pipeline (Nwibere, 2021). The disparity between their accumulated professional experience (E4) and their current grade (E2) acts as an amplifying factor for perceived injustice, directly linking the structural policy to the most severe behavioral outcomes.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

### 5.1. Synthesis of Statistical Results and Theoretical Frameworks

The rejection of all three null hypotheses provides conclusive empirical validation that the Age-to-Grade policy, whether explicit or tacit, operates as a significant structural mechanism undermining crucial talent management outcomes in Nigerian DMBs.

The findings strongly validate the theoretical foundation of the study:

#### 5.1.1. Organizational Justice Theory (OJT)

The significant negative prediction of Career Progression satisfaction (B) by the Age-to-Grade Policy (A) confirms that employees interpret structural ageism as a profound violation of procedural fairness. When merit-based progression (B4) is perceived as secondary to an age-dictated trajectory (A4) (Survey Data, 2025), the resultant distributive injustice erodes fundamental job satisfaction and commitment (Hulin et al., 1985; Meyer and Smith, 2000).

#### 5.1.2. Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Psychological Contract Breach (PCB)

The strongest predictive relationship observed was between Age-to-Grade Policy perception (A) and Turnover Intent (C\_Intent), where the policy explained 38.1% of the variance. This magnitude confirms that institutionalized ageism is interpreted as a severe Psychological Contract Breach (Turnley and Feldman, 2000). Employees perceive that the organization has failed in its reciprocal obligation to provide equitable opportunity, leading to an active behavioral withdrawal response (job search/intent to quit) (Sarwar, 2025). This confirms that structural injustice is the catalyst for the sector's high retention volatility.

### 5.2. Implications for Career Progression: The Performance Paradox

The survey data highlights a debilitating performance paradox: while 70% of employees perceive that younger colleagues have a career advantage (A4), only 49% agree that their progression is based solely on performance and skills (B4) (Survey Data, 2025). This suggests that DMBs, by imposing rigid age barriers for entry and tacit age expectations for promotion, communicate a message that individual effort and acquired human capital are ultimately secondary to an employee's starting age.

This contradiction fundamentally demotivates high performers, particularly those who may have entered the banking sector later in their careers or who took longer routes to acquiring advanced educational qualifications (E5) (Survey Data, 2025). If the organization signals that adherence to a specific age-grade pipeline supersedes merit, it penalizes individuals who embody significant human capital (E4, E5) but whose development timeline did not conform to the organization's arbitrary age cutoffs (Cambridge University Press, 2025). The resultant low satisfaction with career pace (B1) is a rational response to a system perceived as structurally unfair.

### 5.3. Implications for Employee Retention: Structural Ageism as the Catalyst for Talent Flight

The extremely high mean score for Turnover Intent (3.625) is indicative of a severe, organization-wide retention crisis. When 63% of the workforce reports actively searching for alternative employment (C2) (Survey Data, 2025), the cost implications for talent acquisition, training, and operational stability are immense (Amah and Oyetuunde, 2020).

The strong predictive power of the Age-to-Grade Policy over this turnover intent demonstrates that the retention crisis is not merely a generalized consequence of low pay or poor working conditions (NotchHR, n.d.); rather, it is significantly exacerbated by a specific, structural injustice (Nwibere, 2021). Employees are making mobility decisions based on the perceived lack of long-term equity and advancement potential within their current organization. Management intervention strategies, such as offering higher salaries or better training (Kirchner and Stull, 2021), may only offer temporary relief if the root cause the institutionalized age barrier remains unaddressed and continues to breach the psychological contract.

#### 5.4. Implications for Organizational Productivity

The Age-to-Grade Policy perception significantly and negatively predicts perceived Organizational Productivity (D), albeit with a lower  $R^2$  compared to retention and career progression. This suggests that while individual motivation (D2) may buffer the effect, the policy imposes a quantifiable frictional cost on the organization (Survey Data, 2025).

The perception that workplace policies fail to enable high productivity (D3, Average 3.34) is consistent with an environment where employees are distracted by unfair policies and the necessity of engaging in external job searches (C2) (Survey Data, 2025). Resources and mental energy dedicated to managing career anxiety or searching for alternatives are resources diverted from achieving organizational targets (D1, D5). For DMB management to genuinely improve performance, investments in e-HRM systems (Adetola, 2024) must be complemented by the removal of structural factors that actively erode morale, such as the Age-to-Grade Policy, paving the way for a more supportive and productivity-enabling culture (Walden University, n.d., Dissertations).

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### 6. Conclusion

This empirical investigation conclusively demonstrates that the perceived Age-to-Grade Recruitment Policy in Nigerian Deposit Money Banks constitutes a significant structural predictor of negative employee outcomes. The policy creates a hostile internal environment characterized by low career progression satisfaction and exceptionally high turnover intent, while also imposing a measurable constraint on perceived organizational productivity. The policy's effects validate the predictions of Organizational Justice Theory regarding procedural unfairness and affirm that structural ageism acts as a powerful antecedent to Psychological Contract Breach, driving the prevailing talent flight within the sector.

DMB leadership must critically recognize that the Age-to-Grade policy, often viewed as an efficient mechanism for sourcing "young, dynamic talent," is an economically detrimental HR practice. The policy creates a costly cycle of high recruitment demand, training investment, and subsequent talent loss (Amah and Oyetuunde, 2020). A focus on short-term talent acquisition based on age severely compromises long-term workforce stability and accumulated institutional knowledge. Managers must shift the focus from chronological age to functional and behavioral competencies to maximize the return on human capital investment.

#### *Recommendations*

Based on the empirical findings, the following strategic policy reforms are recommended to mitigate the negative impacts observed:

DMBs should formally review and eliminate arbitrary age limits for all entry-level and experienced hire programs (Wema Bank, n.d.; First Bank of Nigeria, n.d.). This structural change is crucial to address the high perception of age discrimination (A1, A4) (Survey Data, 2025) and aligns with broader societal efforts to combat structural ageism and expand opportunities for experienced professionals (BusinessDay, 2025; UN Human Rights Council, 2023).

Promotion and grade advancement criteria must be made strictly transparent, merit-based, and auditable, focusing exclusively on performance and skills (D1, D5) (Survey Data, 2025). This counters the pervasive tacit norm (A2) that progression is influenced by age and addresses the critically low satisfaction with process fairness (B2, B4) (Survey Data, 2025).

Beyond fair compensation, DMBs must implement robust talent retention practices, including ensuring timely promotions, providing continuous training and development, and adopting flexible work arrangements (Walden University, n.d., Dissertations). These efforts serve to repair the psychological contract breach and reduce work-related stress, which are essential components of retaining motivated staff (C1, C2) (Survey Data, 2025).

To counter the concern that removing age limits might slow progression for existing younger staff (BusinessDay, 2025), DMBs should establish diverse career paths that reward technical expertise and deep specialization equally to managerial progression (Success Culture Press, n.d.). This ensures that career progression satisfaction (B) is maintained across all age and experience groups.

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