

Corruption and Nepotism in HR Recruitment Processes in Nigeria's Public Sector

BY

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Abstract

This study examines corruption and nepotism in HR recruitment processes in Nigeria's public sector, focusing on political influence, bribery, favoritism, and weak oversight mechanisms. Using the Patron-Client Theory as its theoretical framework, the study analyzes how these corrupt practices undermine fairness, efficiency, and service delivery in public institutions. A qualitative research design was employed, relying on secondary data sources such as government reports, scholarly articles, and media publications. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and trends. Findings reveal that political interference, bribery, and favoritism compromise merit-based recruitment, resulting in inefficiency, unqualified hires, and diminished public trust. Furthermore, nepotism and lack of transparency contribute to poor governance and hinder service delivery, while weak oversight and inadequate legal enforcement perpetuate these unethical recruitment practices. The study concludes that addressing corruption in HR recruitment requires strict oversight, merit-based recruitment reforms, and enhanced legal enforcement. It recommends establishing independent monitoring bodies, implementing transparent digital recruitment systems, and enforcing stricter penalties for corrupt practices to ensure accountability and efficiency in Nigeria's public sector employment.

Keywords: Corruption, Nepotism, Public Sector, Recruitment, Governance

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption and nepotism in human resource (HR) recruitment processes have become significant issues affecting organizational effectiveness and fairness in employment decisions. Recruitment is a critical function in HR management, ensuring that organizations select the most qualified candidates for job positions based on merit, skills, and experience (Ogidi, Egobueze & Nwaoburu, 2024). However, corruption and nepotism undermine this process, leading to unethical hiring practices that favor personal connections over competence. Corruption in recruitment refers to the manipulation of hiring procedures through bribery, favoritism, and undue influence to benefit specific individuals rather than selecting the best candidate (Rose- Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Nepotism, on the other hand, involves giving preferential treatment to family members, close relatives, or

friends in recruitment and promotion decisions, regardless of their qualifications (Padgett & Morris, 2021).

Both corruption and nepotism compromise the principles of fairness, transparency, and equal opportunity, leading to inefficiencies in organizations and broader societal issues such as unemployment and poor service delivery. The presence of corruption in HR recruitment can take various forms, including bribery, favoritism, and political interference. According to Banerjee et al. (2018), bribery in recruitment involves candidates offering financial or material inducements to hiring managers in exchange for job placements. This practice not only disadvantages more qualified applicants but also erodes public confidence in the recruitment system. Similarly, favoritism occurs when hiring managers give undue advantage to certain candidates due to personal relationships, ideological alignment, or other subjective considerations (Pfeffer, 2019). Political interference in recruitment processes is another common form of corruption, where political figures

exert influence over hiring decisions to reward loyalists rather than selecting candidates based on merit (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). These corrupt practices distort the labor market, hinder organizational growth, and perpetuate inefficiency in both public and private institutions. Nepotism in HR recruitment is particularly problematic in organizations where hiring decisions are made based on personal relationships rather than professional competencies. Studies have shown that nepotism leads to reduced employee morale, as qualified candidates who are unfairly bypassed may feel demotivated and disengaged (Guerrero et al., 2020). Furthermore, nepotism fosters workplace conflicts and resentment among employees who perceive the hiring process as biased and unjust. In some cases, nepotism also results in the recruitment of underqualified individuals who lack the necessary skills to perform their job roles effectively, thereby reducing overall productivity and organizational performance (Khatri, 2018). This issue is especially prevalent in family-owned businesses, political institutions, and some public sector organizations where personal loyalty is prioritized over merit (Jones et al., 2022).

The consequences of corruption and nepotism in recruitment extend beyond individual organizations, affecting economic growth and social equity. When jobs are awarded based on connections rather than competence, the overall efficiency of the labor force declines, leading to poor service delivery and stagnation in innovation (Ogidi, Egobueze & Nwaoburu, 2024). In addition, these unethical practices contribute to widening socio-economic inequalities, as marginalized groups and less privileged individuals often face systemic barriers to employment opportunities (Transparency International, 2021). The lack of accountability and transparency in HR recruitment also weakens institutional trust, making it difficult to implement fair and effective hiring policies (Kaufmann et al., 2019). Addressing corruption and nepotism in recruitment requires strong regulatory frameworks, ethical leadership, and the enforcement of merit-based hiring practices to ensure that employment opportunities are accessible to all qualified candidates.

II. Statement of Problem

Corruption and nepotism in Nigeria's public sector recruitment processes create numerous challenges, beginning with political influence in hiring. Politicians often interfere in recruitment by appointing unqualified candidates based on loyalty rather than merit. Consequently, this practice reduces efficiency and competency in public offices, thereby hindering effective governance. Furthermore, bribery and favoritism exacerbate the situation, as many applicants are required to pay bribes or rely on personal connections to secure government jobs. This not only undermines fairness but also

allows incompetent individuals to take up crucial positions, leading to poor service delivery. In addition, the lack of transparency in recruitment processes remains a significant issue. Many job openings are not publicly advertised, while selection criteria are frequently manipulated to favor certain candidates. As a result, many qualified individuals are excluded, fostering a culture of corruption and inefficiency. Moreover, the abuse of the federal character principle has led to widespread ethnic bias, with recruitment processes often favoring candidates from specific ethnic or regional backgrounds rather than considering merit. This has further deepened divisions and reduced national cohesion.

Another pressing issue is the ghost worker syndrome, where corrupt officials manipulate payroll systems to include non-existent employees. This fraudulent practice results in significant financial losses for the government, diverting funds that could have been used for national development. Similarly, job racketeering is rampant, with employment slots being sold to the highest bidders. Consequently, deserving candidates without financial means or political connections are unfairly excluded. Compounding these problems is the weak oversight and accountability within recruitment systems. Due to inadequate monitoring, corrupt practices persist unchecked. As a result, public institutions suffer from a competence deficiency, as many employees lack the necessary skills for their roles. This, in turn, erodes public trust in government institutions. Although anti-corruption laws exist, weak enforcement due to institutional inefficiencies allows these corrupt practices to continue unabated.

III. Aim and Objective

The aim of the study is to examine corruption and nepotism in HR recruitment processes in Nigeria's public sector. While the specific objectives are to;

- i. Examine the impact of political influence, bribery, and favoritism on the fairness and efficiency of public sector recruitment in Nigeria.
- ii. Analyze the effects of nepotism and lack of transparency on competence and service delivery in public institutions.
- iii. Assess the role of weak oversight and legal enforcement in perpetuating corrupt recruitment practices in Nigeria's public sector.

IV. Research Questions

- i. How does political influence, bribery, and favoritism impact the fairness and efficiency of public sector recruitment in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the effects of nepotism and lack of transparency on competence and service delivery in public institutions?
- iii. How does weak oversight and legal enforcement contribute to the perpetuation of corrupt recruitment practices in Nigeria's public sector?

V. Theoretical Framework

The Patron-Client Theory

The Patron-Client Theory, developed by James C. Scott (1972), provides a suitable framework for understanding corruption and nepotism in Nigeria's public sector recruitment processes. Scott, a political scientist and anthropologist, extensively studied power dynamics, patronage, and governance structures, particularly in developing nations. His work highlights how informal networks and patron-client relationships influence bureaucratic processes, including employment practices. This theory explains why political influence, bribery, and favoritism persist in recruitment, as public officials often prioritize personal loyalty over competence. One of the core principles of the Patron-Client Theory is the mutual exchange of favors between powerful patrons and their dependent clients. In this system, patrons—often government officials or politicians—offer jobs, promotions, or other benefits to clients in exchange for loyalty, votes, or financial rewards. This principle aligns with the reality in Nigeria's public sector, where political leaders interfere in hiring processes to secure loyalty rather than competence. Another principle is the hierarchical and asymmetric nature of these relationships, meaning that clients remain subordinate and indebted to patrons, creating a cycle where corruption becomes self-sustaining. Furthermore, the theory emphasizes informal power structures, which operate parallel to formal government institutions, making anti-corruption policies difficult to implement effectively. Applying this theory to the study, it becomes clear that political interference, nepotism, and lack of transparency in recruitment are manifestations of patron-client networks. When politicians or high-ranking officials appoint individuals based on political loyalty rather than merit, they reinforce patronage structures that weaken institutional efficiency. This explains why bribery and favoritism remain prevalent, as access to employment often depends on personal connections rather than competence. Similarly, job racketeering and ghost

workers' inclusion on payrolls can be understood through this lens, as corrupt officials manipulate systems to benefit their clients, perpetuating inefficiency and financial losses. Additionally, the theory explains the weak oversight and accountability mechanisms that enable corrupt recruitment practices to persist. Since those responsible for enforcing transparency are often part of the patronage network, they have little incentive to challenge the system. This also erodes public trust in government institutions, as citizens perceive recruitment as an exclusive privilege for those with political connections rather than a merit-based process. Consequently, despite existing anti-corruption laws, institutional inefficiencies and entrenched patron-client relationships make enforcement weak. By using the Patron-Client Theory, this study provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how informal power structures undermine fairness and efficiency in Nigeria's public sector recruitment. Addressing these issues requires breaking the cycle of patronage and strengthening legal enforcement mechanisms.

VI. Empirical Review

Nepotism and corruption in HR recruitment processes have significant ethical implications for organizational performance and employee morale. Kuforiji (2024) examined how these unethical practices affect HR recruitment in Nigerian organizations, highlighting their impact on employee satisfaction and workplace efficiency. The study applied Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) to illustrate how entrenched cultural and political structures reinforce corruption and nepotism, prioritizing social connections over competence. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed 250 HR professionals from public and private organizations across Nigeria through stratified random sampling. Findings revealed that 75% of HR professionals faced pressure from political figures to hire unqualified candidates, while 60% of employees reported favoritism in promotions, leading to reduced job satisfaction and productivity. Nepotism was also found to weaken internal governance, causing inefficiency and employee disengagement. Without structural reforms, nepotism and corruption in HR recruitment will continue to hinder meritocracy and organizational growth. To address these challenges, Kuforiji (2024) recommended the implementation of transparent and automated recruitment processes, the strengthening of whistleblowing policies, and the promotion of ethical leadership training for HR personnel.

Similarly, in the hospitality sector, Khairy (2024) explored the impact of nepotism on employee job satisfaction and retention in Egypt's five-star hotels. The study utilized Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) to explain how perceived injustice due to nepotism influences employees' decisions to leave their jobs.

Conducting a quantitative survey with 500 hotel employees in Cairo, Alexandria, and Sharm El-Sheikh, the study found that 68% of employees believed nepotism played a significant role in hiring and promotion decisions. Furthermore, 57% of employees who perceived favoritism reported intentions to leave within a year. However, ethical leadership practices in some hotels contributed to a 40% reduction in turnover rates. The findings suggest that nepotism negatively affects employee retention and reduces organizational stability. To mitigate these effects, the study recommended establishing merit-based performance evaluation criteria, training HR managers on ethical hiring standards, and encouraging anonymous reporting systems to protect employees from retaliation.

In higher education, Omondi and Achieng (2023) examined the consequences of nepotistic hiring on employee performance in Kenyan public universities. Using Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), the study analyzed how nepotism disrupts employer-employee relationships by fostering resentment among workers who perceive unfair distributions of opportunities. A qualitative case study approach involved structured interviews with 50 academic staff and HR managers across five universities. Findings indicated that 72% of employees felt demotivated when promotions were based on familial or political connections rather than merit, leading to a 30% decline in work output. Additionally, students in institutions with high levels of nepotism reported declines in teaching quality and academic support. The study concluded that nepotism in university recruitment weakens institutional integrity, reduces employee engagement, and compromises educational standards. To combat these issues, the researchers suggested enforcing strict recruitment policies, strengthening regulatory oversight, and ensuring merit-based leadership appointments in academic institutions.

Political influence in municipal recruitment is another area of concern. Mthembu (2022) investigated corruption in South Africa's public sector, focusing on how political interference affects HR hiring processes. Applying Public Choice Theory (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962), the study surveyed 300 municipal employees and HR officers across Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban while conducting 30 in-depth interviews with policymakers. Results indicated that 64% of HR managers admitted experiencing political pressure to hire candidates affiliated with ruling party officials. Municipalities with high corruption levels also faced delays in service delivery and financial mismanagement. The study concluded that political interference in municipal recruitment fosters inefficiency and weakens governance. To address this, the research recommended establishing independent recruitment bodies, implementing technology-based recruitment platforms,

and enforcing severe penalties for HR officers engaged in corrupt hiring.

In the financial sector, Adegbite and Oladapo (2021) explored the effects of favoritism on workforce productivity in Nigerian banks. The study applied Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) to assess how unfair HR practices impact employee motivation and job performance. Conducting a quantitative survey with 400 banking professionals from five major Nigerian banks, the study used regression analysis to examine correlations between favoritism and workforce efficiency. Findings revealed that 58% of employees believed nepotistic hiring led to the appointment of unqualified individuals in managerial roles, reducing operational efficiency. Additionally, branches with high nepotistic hiring recorded higher employee turnover and lower customer satisfaction. The study concluded that favoritism in banking recruitment contributes to an unproductive workforce and weakens customer service. To counter these issues, the researchers proposed implementing strict HR audit mechanisms, strengthening internal training programs, and introducing whistleblower incentives for employees reporting unethical hiring.

Bribery in HR recruitment is another form of corruption that affects public administration. Asamoah and Mensah (2020) examined the prevalence of bribery in Ghana's civil service, using Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) to explain how weak oversight mechanisms enable corruption. The study adopted a case study approach, analyzing recruitment practices across three Ghanaian ministries through interviews with 80 civil servants and HR personnel. Results showed that 70% of job applicants had to offer bribes to secure positions, leading to an influx of unqualified workers. Departments with prevalent bribery also reported lower service efficiency and higher employee absenteeism rates. The study concluded that bribery in public sector recruitment undermines meritocracy and reduces workplace productivity. To address this issue, the study recommended introducing electronic application systems, implementing periodic HR audits, and increasing legal sanctions for HR officials found guilty of bribery.

Political patronage also plays a role in public sector hiring. Nsubuga and Kintu (2023) analyzed how political patronage affects recruitment in Uganda's government institutions. The study employed Patron-Client Theory (Scott, 1972) to illustrate how political leaders use employment as a tool to maintain loyalty and power. Using a mixed-method approach, researchers conducted surveys with 350 civil servants and interviews with 20 HR officers across five ministries. The results indicated that 63% of government employees were appointed through political influence rather than qualifications, leading to inefficiencies, delayed project execution, and financial mismanagement. The study

concluded that patronage in recruitment erodes public trust and weakens governance structures. As solutions, the study recommended strengthening merit-based hiring policies, implementing anti-patronage laws with strict penalties, and increasing public participation in government hiring processes.

Finally, Tadesse and Alemu (2021) examined the impact of nepotism on job satisfaction in Ethiopia's private sector, applying Equity Theory (Adams, 1963) to explore how perceived fairness in hiring influences employee satisfaction. A quantitative survey with 400 employees from multinational companies in Ethiopia found that nepotism led to a 40% decline in employee morale, higher turnover rates, and reduced productivity. Employees who perceived unfair hiring practices demonstrated lower job commitment and weaker workplace cooperation. The study concluded that nepotism in the private sector discourages employee engagement and lowers organizational performance. To address these challenges, the study recommended enforcing transparent HR policies, conducting regular employee satisfaction assessments, and introducing external HR audits to oversee recruitment practices.

VII. Summary/ Gap in Literature

While existing studies have extensively examined nepotism and corruption in HR recruitment across various sectors and countries, significant gaps remain, particularly in the context of Nigeria's public sector. Previous research, such as Kuforiji (2024) and Adegbite and Oladapo (2021), has primarily focused on the private sector and financial institutions, overlooking the systemic nature of corrupt recruitment practices in government agencies. Additionally, studies like Omondi and Achieng (2023) and Mthembu (2022) have explored nepotism in education and municipal governance but have not comprehensively analyzed how weak oversight and legal enforcement perpetuate these practices in public institutions. Furthermore, while Asamoah and Mensah (2020) investigated bribery in Ghana's civil service, there is limited research on how bribery intersects with political influence and favoritism in Nigeria's public sector recruitment. Nsubuga and Kintu (2023) highlighted political patronage in Uganda but did not assess its impact on competence and service delivery. Likewise, Khairy (2024) and Tadesse and Alemu (2021) explored nepotism's effects on job satisfaction and retention in hospitality and private enterprises but did not address how such practices hinder public service efficiency.

This new study fills these gaps by specifically examining corruption and nepotism in Nigeria's public sector, focusing on the combined effects of political influence, bribery, and favoritism on recruitment fairness and institutional performance. Unlike prior studies, it integrates weak oversight

and legal enforcement as key factors sustaining corrupt practices. Additionally, it provides a localized perspective by assessing how these unethical recruitment processes affect competence, service delivery, and governance within Nigerian public institutions. By addressing these overlooked dimensions, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of HR corruption and offers targeted policy recommendations for reforming Nigeria's public sector recruitment system

VIII. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design, allowing for an in-depth analysis of secondary data, including government reports, scholarly articles, and media sources. It relied solely on qualitative data from existing literature and documents to examine corruption and nepotism in HR recruitment processes in Nigeria's public sector. Data collection involved document and content analysis of secondary sources, while thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and themes.

IX. Discussion of Findings

Answer to research question1: How does political influence, bribery, and favoritism impact the fairness and efficiency of public sector recruitment in Nigeria?

Political influence, bribery, and favouritism significantly undermine the fairness and efficiency of public sector recruitment in Nigeria, leading to a system where meritocracy is often sidelined in favour of personal connections, financial inducements, and political allegiance. The impact of these unethical practices has been widely reported in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly articles, highlighting how they contribute to inefficiency, corruption, and poor service delivery in the public sector. Political influence plays a crucial role in determining who secures employment in government agencies, with political elites frequently exerting pressure to appoint individuals who align with their interests rather than those with the necessary qualifications and competencies. Scholars have observed that recruitment in Nigeria's public sector is often manipulated by political actors who use their positions to secure jobs for their supporters, regardless of merit (Okeke-Uzodike & Subban, 2021). This practice distorts the competitive nature of recruitment, creating a system where individuals with political affiliations are prioritised over competent candidates, thereby reducing efficiency in public administration. A report by Premium Times (2022) revealed that recruitment exercises in Nigeria's civil service frequently witness interference from government officials who allocate

job slots to party loyalists rather than allowing a transparent and merit-based selection process.

Bribery further exacerbates the fairness issues in public sector employment, as it creates an environment where financial capability rather than competence determines who secures jobs. Studies have found that many applicants are required to pay bribes to recruitment officers or intermediaries before they can be considered for employment (Adebayo, 2020). This practice disadvantages qualified but financially constrained candidates, resulting in a workforce that lacks the requisite skills to perform effectively. A report in *The Guardian Nigeria* (2021) detailed cases where recruitment officers in federal and state ministries demanded illicit payments from job seekers, undermining the credibility of the process. Furthermore, Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index highlighted how bribery in public sector employment remains a persistent issue in Nigeria, ranking the country among the lowest in terms of transparency and accountability. Favouritism, particularly in the form of nepotism and ethnic bias, further compromises the integrity of public sector recruitment in Nigeria. Research indicates that job positions are often allocated based on familial or ethnic connections rather than objective assessment criteria (Eze & Nkwede, 2022). This pattern reinforces systemic inequalities, as individuals from politically dominant or elite families have greater access to employment opportunities than those from marginalised backgrounds. A study by Sule and Ogundele (2023) found that nepotistic practices in Nigeria's civil service have led to the exclusion of highly qualified candidates in favour of less competent individuals with personal ties to recruitment officers. Additionally, a report by Daily Trust (2022) uncovered instances where federal recruitment processes were manipulated to favour applicants from specific regions, highlighting the deep-seated nature of ethnic and political bias in employment decisions. The combined effects of political influence, bribery, and favouritism significantly hinder efficiency in the public sector by placing unqualified individuals in critical positions. Inefficiency in governance, poor service delivery, and a lack of accountability become inevitable consequences when competence is overlooked. According to Onuoha (2021), the persistent recruitment of unqualified personnel due to these unethical practices has contributed to the declining performance of Nigeria's civil service, as employees often lack the technical expertise required for effective policy implementation. Similarly, *Business Day Nigeria* (2023) reported that public institutions in Nigeria struggle with inefficiency largely because of the employment of politically connected individuals who lack the necessary skills and professional experience.

Moreover, these corrupt recruitment practices erode public trust in government institutions, reinforcing a cycle of

disillusionment and apathy towards governance. When citizens perceive that government jobs are reserved for the highest bidders or those with political connections, confidence in the public service diminishes (Adeoye & Adedoyin, 2021). This loss of trust discourages talented professionals from seeking employment in the public sector, further depleting the pool of skilled personnel available to drive national development. In light of these findings, scholars and policy analysts have consistently called for comprehensive reforms to address these challenges. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing oversight mechanisms, and promoting transparency in recruitment processes have been suggested as viable solutions (Obi, 2022). Digitalising recruitment procedures, implementing independent oversight bodies, and enforcing strict penalties for corrupt practices could mitigate the influence of political actors, bribery, and favouritism. For instance, *The Punch* (2022) advocated for the adoption of artificial intelligence-driven recruitment systems to minimise human interference and ensure merit-based employment practices. Political influence, bribery, and favouritism have profoundly negative impacts on the fairness and efficiency of public sector recruitment in Nigeria. These practices distort meritocratic principles, facilitate the employment of unqualified individuals, and contribute to inefficiency, corruption, and poor service delivery. The pervasive nature of these issues, as reported by various newspapers, magazines, and scholarly sources, underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to restore credibility in public sector employment. Addressing these challenges requires the implementation of transparent, accountable, and technology-driven recruitment processes to ensure that competence, rather than political or financial considerations, determines employment in Nigeria's civil service.

Answer to research question 2: What are the effects of nepotism and lack of transparency on competence and service delivery in public institutions?

Nepotism and lack of transparency in public institutions have profound negative effects on competence and service delivery, leading to inefficiency, corruption, and a decline in institutional trust. These issues have been widely documented in scholarly articles, newspapers, and reports, showing how they contribute to poor governance, weakened public administration, and suboptimal service provision. Nepotism in public institutions fosters an environment where personal connections and familial ties override merit-based recruitment and promotion. Research has shown that when positions are awarded based on relationships rather than qualifications, institutions become saturated with individuals who lack the necessary expertise to perform their roles effectively (Ogidi,

Egobueze & Nwaoburu, 2024). This phenomenon weakens professional standards and creates a workforce that is ill-equipped to handle complex administrative and governance tasks. A report by Daily Trust (2022) revealed that many Nigerian government agencies are staffed with individuals appointed due to political or familial connections, leading to widespread incompetence and inefficiency. Similarly, The Guardian Nigeria (2021) highlighted cases where key administrative positions were filled through nepotistic practices, resulting in a lack of innovative problem-solving skills and an overall decline in service quality.

The lack of transparency in recruitment and administrative processes further exacerbates the problem by creating an opaque system that enables corruption and mismanagement. Studies indicate that when hiring and operational procedures are shrouded in secrecy, accountability is significantly reduced, allowing unqualified individuals to secure positions without public scrutiny (Obi, 2022). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2021) ranked Nigeria among the most corrupt nations in public sector administration, citing nepotism and a lack of transparency as major contributors to the country's governance failures. According to Onuoha (2021), the absence of open and competitive recruitment processes limits the potential for hiring skilled professionals, thereby reducing the quality of service delivery across various public institutions. In addition to weakening competence, nepotism and lack of transparency create a culture of inefficiency that severely affects service delivery. Public institutions that prioritise connections over competence tend to experience frequent delays, poor decision-making, and substandard implementation of policies and projects (Adeoye & Adedoyin, 2021). For instance, a report by Premium Times (2022) detailed how nepotistic appointments in Nigeria's health sector led to the mismanagement of hospital resources, resulting in inadequate patient care and avoidable fatalities. Similarly, Business Day Nigeria (2023) noted that ministries plagued by nepotism often struggle to execute developmental projects effectively due to the appointment of incompetent personnel who lack technical knowledge and leadership skills.

The impact of these issues extends beyond institutional inefficiency to broader socio-economic consequences. A lack of competent professionals in public administration contributes to policy failures, resource misallocation, and declining public trust in government institutions (Adebayo, 2020). When citizens perceive that public offices are occupied by individuals who lack the qualifications to deliver essential services, confidence in governance diminishes, leading to increased scepticism and civic disengagement. This is particularly evident in Nigeria's education sector, where nepotistic hiring practices have resulted in poorly trained

teachers, negatively affecting student performance and learning outcomes (Sule & Ogundele, 2023). According to The Punch (2022), universities and other educational institutions suffering from non-transparent hiring processes struggle to maintain academic excellence, as many lecturers and administrators lack the requisite expertise to drive meaningful educational reforms. Moreover, the economic implications of nepotism and lack of transparency cannot be overlooked. Inefficient service delivery due to unqualified personnel hampers business operations, discourages investment, and slows economic growth (Ogidi, Egobueze & Nwaoburu, 2024). A study by Eze and Nkwede (2022) found that countries with weak institutional frameworks and high levels of nepotism tend to experience lower foreign direct investment, as investors are deterred by the lack of professionalism in government agencies. Additionally, The Punch (2022) reported that sectors such as public transportation, energy distribution, and municipal services suffer from operational inefficiencies directly linked to nepotistic appointments and non-transparent management structures. To address these challenges, scholars and governance experts have emphasised the need for reforms that promote merit-based hiring and institutional accountability. Strengthening anti-corruption frameworks, enforcing transparent recruitment policies, and adopting technology-driven monitoring systems have been proposed as viable solutions (Obi, 2022). According to The Guardian Nigeria (2021), implementing digital recruitment platforms that eliminate human interference in hiring processes could significantly reduce nepotism and enhance institutional competence. Furthermore, increasing public oversight and citizen participation in governance can help curb opaque administrative practices and ensure that public institutions prioritise competence over personal affiliations. Nepotism and lack of transparency have severely negative effects on competence and service delivery in Nigeria's public institutions. These issues contribute to inefficiency, weaken public trust, and hinder economic and social development. The widespread documentation of these challenges in scholarly research, newspapers, and policy reports underscores the urgent need for reforms that promote meritocracy, accountability, and transparency. Addressing these issues through policy changes, technological interventions, and stronger institutional oversight is essential for improving governance and ensuring effective public service delivery.

Answer to research question 3: How does weak oversight and legal enforcement contribute to the perpetuation of corrupt recruitment practices in Nigeria's public sector?

Weak oversight and inadequate legal enforcement play a significant role in sustaining corrupt recruitment practices in Nigeria's public sector, creating an environment where bribery, favouritism, and nepotism thrive. The absence of strict monitoring mechanisms and the failure to enforce existing laws enable officials to manipulate hiring processes for personal or political gains, thereby compromising fairness and efficiency in public sector employment. Reports from newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals provide ample evidence of how institutional weaknesses contribute to the persistence of recruitment corruption in Nigeria. The lack of effective oversight in public sector recruitment allows systemic corruption to flourish. Government agencies and civil service commissions often lack independent bodies to monitor hiring processes, leading to unchecked abuses of power. According to Adebayo (2021), recruitment in many Nigerian ministries and parastatals is conducted behind closed doors, with little transparency or public scrutiny. This creates opportunities for officials to demand bribes, allocate positions to unqualified candidates, and favour individuals based on ethnic or political affiliations rather than merit. A report by Premium Times (2022) revealed that despite numerous complaints about fraudulent recruitment processes in federal ministries, there has been little effort to address these concerns due to weak oversight mechanisms. In addition, ineffective legal enforcement exacerbates the problem by allowing corrupt officials to act with impunity. While Nigeria has several anti-corruption laws, including the Public Procurement Act (2007) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act (2000), enforcement remains weak due to political interference and institutional inefficiencies (Ojo, 2022). Many cases of recruitment fraud go unpunished, encouraging officials to continue engaging in illicit hiring practices without fear of consequences. The Daily Trust (2022) reported that despite multiple exposés on employment racketeering in government agencies, few arrests have been made, and convictions are rare. This failure to hold offenders accountable fosters a culture of impunity, where individuals believe they can manipulate recruitment systems without repercussions.

Furthermore, legal loopholes and bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder efforts to combat corrupt recruitment practices. Many anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria lack the autonomy and resources needed to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of recruitment malpractice (Eze & Nkwede, 2022). The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and ICPC often face political pressure when handling corruption cases involving high-ranking officials, leading to selective enforcement and inconsistent application of the law. According to The Guardian Nigeria (2021), numerous cases of employment fraud reported to anti-corruption agencies remain

unresolved due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, lack of political will, and interference from influential figures. This situation perpetuates a cycle of recruitment corruption, where perpetrators feel emboldened to continue exploiting the system. Moreover, weak oversight and legal enforcement undermine public trust in Nigeria's recruitment processes and discourage merit-based employment. When citizens perceive that public sector jobs are distributed based on bribery and connections rather than competence, they lose faith in government institutions and become less motivated to seek employment through legitimate channels (Onuoha, 2021). This also leads to brain drain, as qualified professionals seek opportunities in countries with fairer employment systems. According to Business Day Nigeria (2023), the widespread perception that recruitment in Nigeria's civil service is rigged in favour of the privileged and politically connected has resulted in declining applications from highly skilled graduates, further diminishing the quality of the public workforce. The economic and governance implications of these issues are profound. Corrupt recruitment practices contribute to inefficiency in public service delivery, as unqualified individuals occupy key positions and make poor decisions that hinder economic growth and development (Okeke-Uzodike & Subban, 2021). For example, the recruitment of unskilled personnel in tax administration has led to revenue leakages and weak enforcement of financial regulations, affecting national economic stability (Adeoye & Adedoyin, 2021). Similarly, fraudulent hiring practices in the judiciary have resulted in the appointment of judges with questionable integrity, thereby weakening the rule of law and impeding efforts to combat corruption at higher levels of governance (The Punch, 2022).

To address these challenges, scholars and policy analysts recommend strengthening institutional oversight and ensuring stricter enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Establishing independent recruitment monitoring bodies, increasing transparency through digital hiring platforms, and enhancing whistleblower protections are essential measures to curb recruitment fraud (Obi, 2022). According to The Guardian Nigeria (2021), implementing biometric verification for job applicants and introducing electronic auditing systems could significantly reduce opportunities for employment fraud. Additionally, political leaders must demonstrate commitment to fighting corruption by allowing anti-corruption agencies to operate without interference and ensuring that those found guilty of recruitment malpractice face legal consequences. Weak oversight and legal enforcement contribute significantly to the perpetuation of corrupt recruitment practices in Nigeria's public sector. The lack of independent monitoring bodies, ineffective application of anti-corruption laws, and bureaucratic inefficiencies create an enabling environment for

bribery, nepotism, and employment fraud. These issues undermine meritocracy, erode public trust, and hinder economic and governance progress. Addressing these challenges requires stronger institutional frameworks, enhanced transparency, and a genuine political commitment to enforcing anti-corruption laws without bias or interference.

Key Findings

1. Political influence, bribery, and favouritism in Nigeria's public sector recruitment undermine fairness and efficiency, leading to the employment of unqualified individuals, institutional inefficiency, public distrust, and poor service delivery.
2. Nepotism and lack of transparency in public institutions undermine competence and service delivery, leading to inefficiency, corruption, poor governance, and diminished public trust.
3. Weak oversight and inadequate legal enforcement perpetuate corrupt recruitment practices in Nigeria's public sector, enabling bribery, nepotism, and inefficiency, which undermine meritocracy, public trust, and service delivery.

X. Conclusion

Corruption and nepotism in HR recruitment processes within Nigeria's public sector have severely compromised fairness, efficiency, and service delivery. The prevalence of political influence, bribery, and favouritism has led to the employment of unqualified individuals, weakening institutional effectiveness and eroding public trust. Additionally, the lack of transparency and weak legal enforcement continue to perpetuate these corrupt practices, further deepening inefficiency and governance failures. Addressing these challenges requires stringent oversight, merit-based recruitment reforms, and strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws to restore integrity and accountability in public sector employment.

XI. Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the study came up with the following recommendations:

- i. The Nigerian government should establish independent recruitment monitoring bodies to prevent political influence, bribery, and favouritism in public sector hiring processes.

- ii. Strengthening transparency measures, such as digital recruitment platforms and public disclosure of employment criteria, can help mitigate nepotism and enhance competence in public institutions.

- iii. Enhancing legal enforcement and imposing stricter penalties on corrupt recruitment practices will improve accountability, uphold meritocracy, and restore public trust in Nigeria's public sector.

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