

EFFECT OF NEPOTISM IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS OF THE DELTA STATE CIVIL SERVICE FROM (2021 – 2025)

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically examined the effects of nepotism in the recruitment process of the Delta State Civil Service between 2021 and 2025. Theoretically anchored on the Patron-Client Theory, the study investigated the extent to which nepotistic practices influence candidate selection, compromise merit-based hiring, diminish workforce productivity, and affect public trust. A descriptive survey research design was adopted to carry out the investigation. The target population comprised public servants and job applicants within government ministries in Asaba. Using purposive and stratified random sampling techniques, a sample size of 350 respondents was selected, from which 320 valid questionnaires were successfully retrieved and analyzed. Data collection was executed using a structured four-point Likert scale instrument, and the obtained data was statistically analyzed using frequency counts, simple percentages, and the Chi-Square test at a 0.05 level of significance.

The empirical findings revealed that personal connections and political affiliations exert an overriding influence on candidate selection, with formal guidelines frequently bypassed to favor well-connected individuals. Secondly, nepotism severely undermines meritocracy, resulting in a system of reverse selection where highly qualified candidates are systematically sidelined. Thirdly, these practices drastically reduce employee efficiency and organizational performance by placing an unfair operational burden on competent staff, destroying workplace morale, and weakening discipline. Finally, favoritism completely damages public trust, fostering deep youth apathy and institutional alienation. Consequently, the study concludes that informal patronage networks have overshadowed formal bureaucratic procedures. It is therefore recommended that the state government guarantee the absolute administrative independence of the Civil Service Commission, digitalize the recruitment process through e-recruitment portals, strictly enforce merit-based employment criteria, and establish independent oversight committees to audit public employment exercises.

Keywords: *Nepotism, Recruitment Process, Meritocracy, Employee Efficiency, Public Trust, Patron-Client Theory.*

INTRODUCTION**Background to the Study**

The civil service is one of the key pillars of government in any democratic regime. It serves as an agency in respect of which the policies of the State are framed, executed, and administered. Nigeria's civil service is guided by the rule of recruitment and promotion on merit, professional skills, and neutrality as provided in the Public Service Rules and the Public Service Reform Policies in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2021). The role and effectiveness of civil service matter significantly in time of national development. For instance, Olaopa (2020) and Adegoroye (2022) in their separate research reports stress that merit-based recruitment is an effective strategy for achieving sustainable national development. It is expected that recruitment exercises for civil service jobs should be free from nepotism to guarantee quality manpower for effective governance.

Despite the aforementioned provisions and policies on Nigeria's civil service, Nigeria has had issues with corruption, patronage, nepotism, and other malpractices in public institutions, which have greatly affected the functioning of the civil service. For example, nepotism, as a form of corruption, has been a significant challenge in Nigeria's public administrations and institutions (Akeem 2021; Ezeani 2023). The country ranks abysmally on the global transparency and accountability indices. Specifically, Nigeria was ranked 145 among 180 nations on the Global Corruption Perceptions Index

2023 of Transparency International. Similarly, Okeke and Aniche (2022) observed that patron-client politics has had a significant effect on appointments into Nigeria's civil service.

Nigeria had a huge number of people employed in its public service. For example, the Nigeria's Federation's civil service has between 70,000 and 100,000 permanent staff. In addition, the combined number of staff employed in the local, state, and federal government civil service in the country exceeds 1.2 million (National Bureau of Statistics 2024; Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation 2022). Nonetheless, Nigeria's public service is unable to satisfy the huge appetite for jobs, particularly in the youth population. For instance, the country's unemployment rate was 33.3% in 2021 per the National Bureau of Statistics (2021; 2023). The country's youth unemployment rate was exceptionally high, reaching above 40% in several quarters in 2021-2023 (ILO 2024). The situation is worrisome given Nigeria's huge population. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 2022) reported that more than 60% of Nigerians are aged below 30 years. With the country's population further estimated to exceed 220 million in 2024 (World Bank 2024), scholars such as Adeyemi (2023) contend that the demand for formal jobs far exceeds what the country's economy can currently supply.

Delta State is among the states in Nigeria where civil service recruitment and employment matters have come under the limelight in recent years, partly because of its relative economic significance. As a major oil-producing state, Delta State derives huge revenue from the Nigeria National Oil Company (NNOC) partly because of the 13% derivation formula that the state enjoys (Federal Accounts Allocation Committee 2023). In fact, oil accounts for about 70-80% of the revenue of the Nigerian budget and above 80% of the foreign exchange earnings (OPEC Report 2023; Central Bank of Nigeria 2024). Aghalino (2021), for instance, argues that Nigeria's Niger Delta region is critical to the country's finances because the area supplies the country with crude oil. The Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of the state has grown substantially over time, registering between ₦50 billion and ₦80 billion as of 2021-2024 (National Bureau of Statistics 2024). Consequently, Delta State's allocation from the derivation oil fund is adequate to allow for recurrent and capital appointments into the civil service in all MDAs such as education, health, and revenue collection agencies (Oloruntoba 2022).

It is noteworthy that despite the huge number of vacancies in the public service, the exercise of appointing new staff is often fraught with controversies due to allegations of unfairness, nepotism, and favoritism. For instance, Akindele (2022) and Olaniyan (2023) note that the recruitment process of civil service staff in Nigeria is largely dominated by patronage and nepotism. As a result, the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (2022) estimated that approximately 30-40% of jobs available in various public institutions in the sub-national governments are allocated on non-meritocratic grounds. The estimation is considered high because of the lack of transparency and availability of data on appointments and recruitment in the public service. Nonetheless, studies such as those of the World Bank (2022) and Rotberg (2021) indicate that merit-based recruitment into public positions enhances institutional productivity. By contrast, Rotberg (2021) adds that nepotism and patronage in appointments lead to unprofessional civil service and poor governance. However, as noted by the OECD (2023), merit-based appointments enhance accountability, quality, and efficacy of public institutions.

The inefficiency of Nigeria's civil service has been demonstrated by the sluggishness of policy implementation as well as lacklustre performance of public agencies and parastatals. The inefficiency has prompted the EFCC (2022) to take strong actions against corruption and other vices that have impeded effective governance, including patronage networks in appointments to public offices. For instance, Dike (2021) asserts that corruption in public service appointments undermines the moral and professional standards of public institutions and discourages civic trust in government.

Between 2021 and 2025, Delta State has been recruiting into the civil service, with the education and health sectors being the most in need of manpower. This is because, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), Delta State's population size is second to Lagos State in Nigeria.

Consequently, the number of school-age children and patients in the health sector is also very high. As a result, the state government has been recruiting on a regular basis to fill vacant positions in education, health, and special agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service. Nonetheless, questions regarding the transparency and fairness of the recruitment process have been raised, especially on the criteria used to select successful candidates and the reasons for rejecting others (Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre 2023; Premium Times 2024). Although the introduction of e-recruitment has increased transparency, the selection of candidates remains open to manipulation and nepotism in the process. According to *Premium Times* (2024), the shift of application processes to online platforms did not eliminate the element of human factor in recruitment. Additionally, the *Public Service Institute of Nigeria* (2023) highlighted weaknesses in the supervisory and auditing mechanisms in the Delta State Civil Service recruitment, which encourages nepotism. For example, Olufemi (2022) explains that Delta State Civil Service lacks standard audit procedures to reveal malpractices and punish the responsible parties.

Statement of the Problem

The Delta State Civil Service recruitment process is required to uphold merit principles, fairness, transparency, and equality as stipulated by the Public Service Rules and civil service regulations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). Ideally, the state's public service recruitment should be free from nepotism and favoritism to ensure that appointments are made on merit, providing the best talent to appropriate positions. However, nepotism and corruption have significantly compromised the integrity of public service recruitment in the State. Nepotism is a form of favoritism where positions are allocated based on kinship ties, friendship, or political affiliations. In the context of Delta State Civil Service, nepotism has become a key hindrance to achieving optimal service delivery in public organizations. According to the *Transparency International* Global Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, Nigeria ranks 145th among 180 countries in terms of ease of doing business and good governance. Similarly, Okeke and Aniche (2022) expounded that patron-client politics is a major impediment to effective recruitment in the Nigerian civil service system.

Delta State Civil Service recruitment processes are guided by the principles of merit, fairness, transparency, and equality as stipulated by Nigeria's Public Service Rules and civil service policies (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2021). Ideally, appointments to public positions should be based on competition, merit, and transparency to guarantee quality manpower for effective governance. However, the current practice of civil service recruitment in the state is veiled with nepotism and other forms of corruption. Nepotism, which entails favoring relatives, friends, and political allies in recruitment matters, has been a major impediment to quality service delivery in public institutions. For instance, Transparency International's Global Corruption Perceptions Index 2023 ranked Nigeria 145th among 180 countries in terms of governance and transparency. Similarly, Okeke and Aniche (2022) observed that patron-client politics has greatly influenced the recruitment process in Nigeria's civil service.

The unemployment situation in Nigeria, especially among the youth, has also exacerbated the situation. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021; 2023), the country's unemployment rate was 33.3% in 2021. In the same year, more than 40% of Nigerian youths were either unemployed or underemployed, according to the ILO (2024). Such a high unemployment rate has created near-craze for jobs, especially in the civil service, which is perceived to offer job security and other social amenities. Consequently, the competition for the limited civil service jobs in Nigeria has intensified, creating room for corruption, nepotism, and favoritism in the recruitment process. According to African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (2022), between 30-40% of public institutions' appointments in Nigeria are through non-meritocratic means. In addition, Okeke and Aniche (2022) noted that patron-client networks have significantly influenced appointments in the public service system in Nigeria. Even though the Public Service Rules require advertisements

of all available positions, competitive and transparent recruitment exercises, and awarding contracts based on quality and cost-benefit analysis, these guidelines are not always implemented.

However, recent reports indicate that corruption and nepotism are rampant in Delta State Civil Service recruitment, despite the provisions for merit-based recruitment as outlined in the Public Service Rules. For instance, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (2023) noted that Delta State Civil Service recruitment processes have been questioned in recent years due to allegations of favoritism and nepotism. The reports add that despite the computerization of Delta State Civil Service recruitment, the selection of candidates still takes place through manual methods and is, therefore, vulnerable to manipulation in favor of relatives, friends, and political allies. However, there is limited information on the extent to which nepotism affects the merit-based recruitment of staff in Delta State Civil Service between 2021 and 2025. This study, therefore, seeks to establish the effect of nepotism in the recruitment process of Delta State Civil Service.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the effects of nepotism in the recruitment process of the Delta State Civil Service between 2021 and 2025.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Examine the extent to which nepotism influences recruitment in the Delta State Civil Service.
2. Assess the effect of nepotism on merit-based recruitment in the civil service.
3. Determine the effect of nepotism on employee efficiency and performance in the civil service.
4. Evaluating the Effect of Nepotism on Public Trust

This section discusses the effects of nepotism on public perception and trust in the Delta State Civil Service. Wherever nepotism takes part in the recruitment process, there is bound to be a decrease in public trust in the government systems in place.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the research undertaken:

1. The extent to which nepotism affects the recruitment process of the Delta State Civil Service.
2. How nepotism affects merit-based recruitment in the Delta State Civil Service.
3. The effect of nepotism on the overall performance of the civil service personnel.
4. How nepotism affects public trust in the Delta State Civil Service.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are postulated for this study:

- H₀₁: Nepotism has no significant effect on the recruitment process of the Delta State Civil Service.
4. How does nepotism affect public trust in the Delta State Civil Service?

Research Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, the following null hypotheses will be tested:

- H₀₁: Nepotism has no significant influence on recruitment practices in the Delta State Civil Service.
- H₀₂: Nepotism has no significant effect on merit-based recruitment in the Delta State Civil Service.
- H₀₃: Nepotism has no significant effect on employee efficiency and performance in the Delta State Civil Service.
- H₀₄: Nepotism has no significant effect on public trust in the Delta State Civil Service.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute immensely to the existing body of literature on the effects of nepotism in the civil service recruitment process. The findings of this study will be significant to policymakers, civil service authorities, and recruitment panels in Delta State in tackling the rampant nepotism in the recruitment process. Specifically, the study will shed light on the effects of nepotism in the civil

service recruitment process, thus helping the policymakers and relevant government agencies take remedial measures.

In addition, this study will add to the pool of knowledge on the effects of nepotism in civil service appointments. Therefore, it will serve as a reference material for future researchers who may be interested in similar studies.

Scope of the Study

This study will focus on nepotism in the recruitment process of the Delta State Civil Service between 2021 and 2025. The study will be limited to the effects of nepotism on merit-based recruitment, employee efficiency and performance, and public trust.

Operational Definition of Terms

1. Nepotism: This refers to the practice of giving employment or favor to relatives, friends, and political allies in recruitment matters even when more qualified individuals are available.
2. Recruitment: This refers to the procedure of attracting, choosing, and appointing suitable candidates to fill vacant positions.
3. Civil Service: This refers to the employment sector consisting of civil servants who work for the government.
4. Meritocracy: This refers to a system of giving positions and rewards based on ability, quality, and effort rather than a person's social connections.
5. Efficiency: This refers to the ability of civil servants to perform their duties effectively and productively.
6. Public Trust: This refers to the belief and confidence of the public in government institutions such as the Delta State Civil Service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of pertinent literature on the effects of nepotism in the recruitment process of the Delta State civil service between 2021 and 2025. The chapter highlights the various research works carried out on the subject matter by different researchers. It discusses the conceptual framework of nepotism and recruitment, theoretical review, empirical studies on recruitment in general and in Nigeria specifically, and an appraisal of the literature. The chapter is organized based on issues surrounding nepotism and recruitment as discussed in the reviewed literature.

The chapter offers a review of the existing literature on recruitment and nepotism, which will form the basis for the current study. The review provides background information on the concepts of nepotism and recruitment, theoretical underpinnings of nepotism in public administration, and a discussion of empirical studies on the prevalence of nepotism in the recruitment processes of various organizations. Besides, the chapter gives reasons why nepotism continues to thrive in the recruitment process and its effects. The review of the literature also reveals gaps in the area of the state recruitment in general and that of Delta State between 2021 and 2025 in particular, which justify the need for this study.

Conceptual Framework

Nepotism in Public Sector Recruitment

Nepotism is widely reported in public administration and recruitment. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2024) defines nepotism as "an administrative corruption practice where a duly appointed authority grants a position of employment to one's close relatives or associates instead of fulfilling the legal and institutional requirements for recruitment." On the other hand, Zakari and Button (2022) define nepotism as a "soft form of corruption" involving kinship and social ties. By giving preference to relatives, friends, and ethnic groups in employment, nepotism causes significant disruptions to the formal institutional processes of recruitment. The practice of nepotism, therefore,

reflects the informal networks that pervade public administration and hinder the rule of law and meritocracy. The conceptual understanding of nepotism is further discussed by several scholars in relation to the theoretical aspects of public administration.

According to the classical bureaucratic organizational theory, nepotism is a corruption-centered activity that is significantly detrimental to the operations of bureaucracies. Weber's (1983) bureaucracy model emphasizes meritocracy in personnel recruitment, arguing that positions should be given to the most qualified individuals based on the skills and competencies required for the job. Similarly, Transparency International (2023) notes that nepotism is entirely at odds with meritocracy and undermines institutional integrity in public administration. By giving preference to close relatives, friends, or ethnic groups at the expense of merit-based recruitment, nepotism causes adverse disruptions to institutional operations and outcomes. In addition, Martini (2021) argues that in many developing democracies, bureaucracy is largely characterized by patronage networks where recruitment is based on personal relationships rather than professional qualification. This view is shared by many scholars who argue that nepotism in public administration has become an entrenched phenomenon.

Empirical studies on nepotism are informative, as they provide a firm foundation for discussing the prevalence of the practice in the civil service recruitment of Delta State between 2021 and 2025. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and UNODC's (2024) report on nepotism, bribery, and corruption in Nigeria, about 60% of public servants in the country were employed through nepotism, bribery, and corruption. Only 40% of public servants were recruited through merit-based selection. In many ways, this confirms the assertion of several public administration scholars that corruption is deeply entrenched in Nigeria's public administration recruitment system. Notably, Nigeria's public administration scholars have revealed that many respondents in the NBS-UNODC report admitted to using personal connections to secure jobs. For instance, Adebimpe (2022) and Otu (2023) agree that nepotism takes various forms in Nigeria, including family, social, and political nepotism. Family nepotism is manifested when relatives and close family members are hired. Social nepotism is realized when individuals are hired based on friendship and personal connections. Political nepotism is the most prevalent form of nepotism in Nigeria, and it is characterized by family members, friends, and even members of one's ethnic group being employed based on political connections.

In addition, this report reveals the rampant use of bribery and corruption in recruiting public servants in Nigeria. According to the NBS-UNODC report, about 19% of public servants in Nigeria attributed their jobs to both personal contacts and bribery, while 13% attributed their employment to personal contacts. Similarly, Transparency International's (2023) report on bribery indicates that bribe-taking by public officials is a significant impediment to sustainable development in many countries, including Nigeria. Generally, the involvement of public officials in bribery and corruption undermines the achievement of sustainable development goals in Nigeria. This is because bribery and corruption promote the misallocation of resources and impede service delivery in the public sector.

It is noteworthy that the phenomenon of nepotism is deeply intertwined with what is known as elite capture of the bureaucracy, which provides a theoretical background for understanding the prevalence of nepotism in Nigeria. According to World Bank (2023) governance reports, the capture of bureaucracy by elites is a significant governance challenge in many countries. The capture occurs when policymakers and administrators use their positions to distort policy outcomes to favor their relatives, friends, and even ethnic groups. The outcome of such capture is that public administration becomes mired in corruption, mismanagement, and poor service delivery. In other words, elite capture of the bureaucracy promotes corruption in public administration. This explains the prevalence of nepotism in Nigeria's public administration, as political elites use their positions to appoint relatives, friends, and members of their ethnic groups to public positions.

In many ways, the social theory of interpersonal relationships provides a firm basis for understanding the prevalence of nepotism in Nigeria. According to this theory, nepotism is based on social interactions and exchanges that take place among family members and friends. Scholars of social exchange theory argue that family members and friends usually have obligations to provide social support to each other. For instance, Al Mulla's (2022) research on the social norms in the Middle East shows that social norms greatly influence the extent to which family members support each other economically. Based on Al Mulla's (2022) findings, family members in the Middle East feel obligated to support each other economically, which explains why family members support each other through nepotism by helping each other secure jobs. Gjinovci (2024) makes similar observations about social norms in Albania, arguing that people help each other out of a sense of duty, particularly when it comes to jobs. Therefore, based on the social exchange theory, the prevalence of nepotism in Nigeria can be attributed to social norms that make family members and friends feel obligated to support each other.

Finally, the economic theory of human capital provides a basis for understanding the negative effects of nepotism on human capital development and the economy of Nigeria. Prominent human capital theorists such as Becker and Schultz would argue that nepotism promotes the wasteful allocation of resources in an economy, thus hindering human capital development. World Bank (2023) reports indicate that investment in human capital is a critical determinant of human capital development and economic growth. By promoting nepotism in public administration, Nigeria is likely to experience a wasteful allocation of resources, which will ultimately impede human capital development and economic growth.

Meritocracy vs Nepotism in Nigerian Civil Service Recruitment

Meritocracy is a principle that requires recruitment to be based on qualification and competence rather than on an individual's social connections or other personal factors. According to the World Bank (2023), meritocracy is the hallmark of a functional bureaucracy that promotes positive governance. Merit-based recruitment supports institutional integrity and productivity by ensuring that the most suitable and competent individuals fill available positions. By contrast, nepotism in recruitment leads to poor performance in public administration because of the lack of adequate skills among the recruited individuals. The following section discusses the various aspects of meritocracy, nepotism, and their implications in the recruitment processes of Nigerian civil service.

Scholars on public administration have extensively researched meritocracy and its significance in the recruitment processes of various sectors. Rauch and Evans (2021) note that meritocracy has been a key pillar of recruitment in many countries, especially those with high levels of political stability and economic development. According to the scholars, merit-based recruitment promotes institutional integrity, leading to positive governance outcomes in countries that implement it. In addition, the report highlights the adverse effect of nepotism, favoritism, and other forms of corruption in recruitment, including the negative impact on institutional performance.

Empirical studies on meritocracy and recruitment have revealed the extent to which the principle is implemented in the Nigerian civil service recruitment system. According to the NBS and UNODC (2024) report on nepotism, bribery, and corruption in Nigeria, only 40% of public servants in Nigeria were recruited based on merit, while the remaining 60% were recruited based on nepotism, bribery, and a combination of the two. In many ways, this finding illustrates the severity of the corruption problem in the recruitment processes of Nigeria's public administration system. According to Rauch and Evans (2021), many developing countries struggle with the implementation of merit-based recruitment in public administration, which explains the high rate of nepotism in Nigeria's civil service recruitment. The scholars note that the practice is a result of the political and economic challenges that characterize many developing countries.

A comparison of meritocracy and nepotism highlights the differences between the two concepts and explains why nepotism has become so rampant in the Nigerian civil service. According to Transparency International (2023), nepotism is a corruption-centered practice that significantly affects the performance of public administrations worldwide. Unlike meritocracy, which requires recruitment to be based on professional competence, nepotism involves recruiting individuals based on their relationship with the recruiter. In most cases, nepotism is practiced by members of the elite in society, thus explaining why it has become such a pervasive problem in Nigeria's civil service recruitment system. According to Otu (2023), nepotism in public administration is largely practiced by politically connected individuals in Nigeria. With regard to the application of meritocracy in recruitment, Otu notes that it is a principle that requires jobs to be given to the most qualified individuals based on the relevant job descriptions.

The implications of nepotism in the Nigerian civil service recruitment have been widely discussed by various scholars on public administration. According to Adeyemi and Obasanjo (2022), nepotism in government recruitment has significantly compromised institutional performance in Nigeria. In addition, the scholars note that the practice has created a dual recruitment system that has adversely affected the productivity of Nigeria's civil service. According to the report, nepotism in recruitment has led to the appointment of unqualified individuals to government jobs, which has resulted in poor performance in public administration. Furthermore, Peters (2022) observes that nepotism in public administration has led to increased levels of corruption in Nigeria's civil service. Another implication of nepotism in the Nigerian civil service recruitment is its impact on the productivity of the country's youth. In Nigeria, many young people are denied employment opportunities due to nepotism in recruitment, which forces them to engage in private sector activities or other informal ventures. According to Ejumodo (2021), this situation has significantly reduced the rate at which young people contribute to Nigeria's economic growth. The scholar notes that the adverse effects of nepotism in recruitment could be eliminated by promoting merit-based recruitment in public administration.

Political Interference and Recruitment Outcomes in State Civil Services

Political interference in recruitment refers to the anti-meritocratic practice of appointing staff based on an individual's political affiliation rather than on professional qualifications or competence. Most scholars agree that political interference in recruitment significantly affects the performance of the civil service because it promotes the employment of unqualified individuals. Political interference in recruitment usually takes place in countries with weak institutions, where the ruling political parties develop and implement anti-meritocratic recruitment policies. According to Dosunmu and Lamidi (2021), political interference in recruitment is a form of the spoils system that is commonly practiced in Nigeria. The following section discusses the various aspects of political interference in the civil service recruitment processes of Nigeria.

Political interference in recruitment has been widely reported in Nigeria's public administration system. According to the NBS and UNODC (2024) report on nepotism, bribery, and corruption in Nigeria, about 60% of public servants in Nigeria acknowledge having been recruited based on nepotism, bribery, and other forms of corruption. In addition, the report highlights the extent of political interference in the public administration recruitment system in Nigeria, arguing that it has had adverse effects on the productivity of the country's civil service. Similar observations have been made by Peters (2022), who notes that political interference in recruitment has significantly compromised institutional integrity in public administration.

The scholar indicates that this practice has become a significant impediment to sustainable development through enhanced corruption and challenges in the rule of law implementation in various countries.

Political Involvement and Recruitment Practices in Civil Service in Nigeria

In Nigeria's civil service, the issue of recruitment has always been a politically charged one. Dosunmu and Lamidi (2021) indicate that the nature of one's political affiliation could influence their chances of being hired or recruited in the civil service. The authors explain that individuals who share similar ideologies with the ruling political party have greater chances of being recruited than their counterparts. Adebayo (2022) made similar observations regarding the influence of political affiliation and contacts on recruitment in Nigeria's public institutions.

Political Involvement and Institutional Performance in Civil Service

According to the World Bank (2023), the issue of political interference in public appointments has compromised institutional performance in Nigeria. The phenomenon has created a situation whereby unqualified personnel hold key positions, ultimately affecting operational effectiveness and productivity. Peters (2022) explains that political involvement in appointments has further weakened the rule of law in Nigeria's civil service. The researcher argues that the practice has created opportunities for corruption, especially in the institutions with weak institutional frameworks.

Political Involvement and Youth Employment in Nigeria

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2023) reports that political interference has compromised the employment rates of graduates and youths in general. The researcher explains that the union of politics and recruitment in Nigeria has created a culture where appointments are based on one's political affiliation rather than merit. The UNDP (2023) report further indicates that the lack of appropriate employment opportunities for Nigeria's youths has resulted in increased poverty and urbanization, especially in the urban centers.

Institutional Weakness and Its Role in Recruitment Bias (Nepotism in Public Service)

Institutional weakness is a condition that emerges when the policies and regulations governing a particular entity or system are not enforced. In most cases, institutional weakness is the primary reason why nepotism and recruitment bias prevail in public institutions. The situation arises because of the weaknesses entailed in the system, which makes it easy to manipulate the processes and practices involved.

Generally, institutional weakness affects the ability of institutions to promote and maintain accountability, the rule of law, and regulatory compliance. Institutional weakness in public administration usually emanates from institutional failure, which could be brought about by factors such as corruption, nepotism, and bribery. According to the World Bank (2023), institutional failure is characterized by the inability of institutions to fulfill their intended functions due to factors such as bribery, nepotism, and corruption.

Most scholars agree that institutional weakness is a major contributor to recruitment bias in public service. According to North (2021), institutional weakness arises when there are no adequate institutional policies and guidelines to promote accountability and transparency. Weak institutions usually have low levels of accountability, which increases the likelihood of corruption and nepotism in the recruitment processes of public administration. Acemoglu and Robinson (2022) agree that institutional weakness promotes corruption, nepotism, and bribery, arguing that it significantly contributes to the failure of many state institutions. The scholars observe that institutional failure is prevalent in most developing countries, including Nigeria, where institutional weakness is primarily manifested in institutional bribery and nepotism.

Empirical studies on institutional weakness and recruitment bias in public service have shown the extent to which the weakness has been a major determinant of recruitment in public administration. According to NBS and UNODC (2024) report on nepotism, bribery, and corruption in Nigeria, institutional weakness has significantly contributed to the prevalence of nepotism and recruitment bias in the country's public administration. The report indicates that about 60% of public servants

in Nigeria acknowledge having been recruited based on nepotism, while close to 40% acknowledge having been recruited based on merit. According to Transparency International (2023), institutional weakness has compromised institutional integrity in public administration, resulting in the widespread bribery and corruption that characterize many aspects of Nigeria's public administration system.

An appraisal of the literature on institutional weakness and recruitment bias reveals the adverse effect that the weakness has on public administration. According to UNDP (2023) reports on institutional governance in Nigeria, institutional weakness has significantly affected the productivity of the country's public administration system. The reports show that Nigeria's public administration system has been unable to deliver optimal governance due to institutional weakness, especially in the form of corruption, nepotism, and bribery. Similar findings have been recorded by Peters (2022), who observes that institutional weakness has compromised the rule of law and accountability in public administration. The scholar argues that institutional weakness has resulted in poor governance across Nigeria's state institutions, which has adversely affected the country's overall development.

Effects of Nepotism on Workforce Productivity in the Public Sector

The nepotism issue during the recruitment process promotes the production of inferior work, decreases the level of skills, and reduces the motivation to perform institutional tasks in public organizations. Therefore, nepotism should be abandoned in the hiring process of employees in the public sector due to its negative impact on the productivity and efficiency of different operations performed in the organization.

Recruitment Reforms and Digitalization in Nigerian Civil Service (2021-2025)

Recruitment reforms in Nigeria continue to emphasize digitalization and e-governance to enhance transparency and combat nepotism. Digital recruitment is expected to reduce the amount of human interaction in the application, screening, and selection processes. According to World Bank (2023), e-governance reduces corruption in appointments by 30-40% compared to traditional methods, provided it is operated independently in relevant institutions. Similarly, Peters (2022) explains that digitalization makes the recruitment process equitable by eliminating personal discretion and introducing standardization. On the other hand, digitalization may not necessarily reduce nepotism depending on the extent to which e-governance tools are independent. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) reports that the digital recruitment platforms popular in Nigeria have improved accessibility to vacancy information. Nevertheless, 45% of respondents identified "connections" as a determining factor in appointments, an indication that nepotism had not been eliminated by the digitalization of the recruitment process.

Transparency International (2023) highlights that corruption in appointments takes new forms when e-governance is adopted.

In other words, although direct bribery may decrease, other corrupt practices such as biased shortlisting and approvals are introduced. Therefore, for digital recruitment to be effective in reducing corruption, there is a need for institutional integrity and accessibility of information, as noted by UNDP (2023). According to Ojo (2022), most recruitment agencies in Nigeria use digital platforms for advertisement and application but conduct appointments manually, thus defeating the purpose of digitalization. However, World Bank (2023) reports that public trust in the recruitment process is increased in states that have digitalized the processes, which improves overall governance quality, including integrity.

Comparative Analysis of Recruitment Practices in Nigerian States

It is common knowledge that every state in Nigeria has different recruitment practices, considering that the country operates as a federation with a decentralized system. Consequently, each state designs its own recruitment policy with varying degrees of integrity and deploys different e-governance mechanisms.

World Bank (2023) argues that the type of government in a state determines the extent to which appointments are based on merit.

This is mainly determined by the type and strength of institutions, as well as their ability to enforce the rule of law in appointments.

The differences are evident in the results of NBS (2023-2024) national survey on public perception of integrity in recruitment, which indicate varying levels of satisfaction among respondents in different states.

For instance, in the analysis of the perception of the extent to which political figures influence appointments, Figure 1 below indicates that, on average, the influence is strongest in Ebonyi at 42% and weakest in Kaduna at 35%.

This illustrates the level of inequality in recruitment practices among the states.

Otu (2023) reports that states with effective and efficient institutional frameworks in civil service recruitment have lower levels of nepotism than those without. Similarly, Adebayo (2022) indicates that the differences in the levels of nepotism in the states are attributed to the extent to which political leadership interferes with appointments. For instance, Delta State faces extreme challenges with nepotism in appointments, an illustration of the overall challenges with appointments in the country as a whole. Transparency International (2023) highlights the fact that the lack of standardized regulations across the states contributes to the unfairness associated with the recruitment processes in these states. This implies that while some states may allow open and competitive applications, others can be characterized by total secrecy and opacity in the selection of new staff members. From this discussion, it is evident that the differences in the approaches and procedures used by Nigerian states in recruiting their civil servants affect the overall level of fairness associated with the processes.

Legal and Policy Framework Governing Civil Service Recruitment in Nigeria

Several legal frameworks and policies guide recruitment in the civil service in Nigeria to ensure transparency and fairness in the processes. The rules and regulations emphasize the need for meritocracy in appointments while promoting equal opportunity. Ekeh (2022) explains that although Nigeria has a comprehensive legal framework for appointments, its effectiveness is undermined by the weaknesses in policy implementation and institutional mechanisms.

For instance, World Bank (2023) reports that despite the existence of policies and procedures for recruitment, about 60% of appointments across Nigeria's state civil services are made through unfair and non-transparent means. The Civil Service Rules require the use of competitive examinations as the primary method for recruitment. However, as noted by Peters (22), political interference often overrides the implementation of these rules, obstructing the goals of meritocracy in appointments. Transparency International (2023) reveals that the legal frameworks and policies governing recruitment are not explicitly anti-corruption provisions but are concerned with the prevention and control of malpractices. For instance, the ICPC and EFCC Anti-Corruption Laws provide the necessary legal basis for investigating and prosecuting individuals involved in corrupt activities in the recruitment process. UNDP (2023) adds that the effectiveness of laws and policies to reduce

corruption in appointments depends on institutional integrity and the extent to which they are enforced. In other words, unless the legal frameworks are backed by strong and independent institutions and are strictly enforced, they will not significantly improve the situation. As illustrated by the reports above, the legal and policy frameworks governing recruitment in Nigeria's civil service have had limited effect in reducing nepotism, which is discussed further in the following section.

Socio-Economic Implications of Nepotism in State Civil Service Recruitment

Nepotism in state recruitment has several adverse social and economic implications, as evidenced by the reports reviewed for this study. According to World Bank (2023), inappropriate and unfair recruitment practices in the public sector affect overall performance, hindering sustainable development at the local level. Rose-Ackerman (2021) adds that nepotism in appointments promotes the misallocation of resources, affecting the delivery of essential services and the overall performance of public institutions. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2024) report that the inappropriate allocation of resources to unqualified personnel increases public spending, which is detrimental to economic development in several ways. Transparency International (2023) asserts that favoring relatives and friends in recruitment lowers public trust in government institutions because people perceive the system as being designed to benefit specific individuals. Transparency International (2023) notes that when jobs are given to relatives and friends, people lose trust in government institutions. This is because many citizens feel the system is set up to benefit only a few people.

Peters (2022) observes that nepotism in appointments increases social inequality since it prevents highly qualified individuals from competing for jobs based on their skills and competencies, hindering overall social development. Finally, UNDP (2023) reports that states in Nigeria where nepotism in appointments has been rampant record lower levels of performance on various socio-economic indicators due to limited productivity and poor service delivery. As illustrated by these reports, nepotism in the recruitment of civil servants affects numerous aspects of society. The following section discusses the theoretical framework that guides this study.

Appraisal of Literature Review

From the literature, it is clear that most researchers agree: nepotism in public sector recruitment in Nigeria is widespread. Adeleke et al. (2025), Onyeiwu (2025), and Okeke and Eze (2024) conducted studies indicating that appointments and recruitment in the public service are significantly influenced by family relations, political connections, and other non-merit factors. However, each of the studies reviewed has several strengths and weaknesses. For instance, the reviewed articles have various shortcomings that include the following: Firstly, most of the researchers have taken a country's perspective, which is too broad to understand the nuances of political patronage in public service recruitment. Secondly, most of the reviewed literature uses perception surveys to demonstrate the prevalence of nepotism in public sector recruitment. The focus on perception suggests that the researchers have not adequately interrogated the processes and structures through which political patronage occurs in the recruitment of public servants. Thirdly, most of the researchers have generalized their arguments based on the prevalence of nepotism rather than studying the effects of various manifestations of the malpractice. For example, Nnaemeka (2022) and Adegbite (2023) agree that nepotism in public administration causes a lot of tension, dissatisfaction, poor performance, and unemployment. However, little attention has been paid to cases where nepotism occurs alongside formal recruitment processes, which means that the two do not necessarily contradict each other. Lastly, although most of the literature discusses the negative effects of nepotism and its prevalence, little is known about its occurrence in the contemporary era. For example, Ibrahim and Bello (2024) discuss the role of technology in eradicating nepotism and other malpractices in the recruitment process. However, their focus is on the intentions and assumptions

of the policy designers without interrogating how the new approaches have affected the levels of political patronage in subnational governments.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature indicates that there is a general consensus on the prevalence of nepotism in the recruitment of public servants in Nigeria, which has been demonstrated by multiple empirical studies. However, most of the research is of national jurisdiction, which is too wide to provide specific details on the workings of political patronage in public service recruitment. Furthermore, most researchers have focused on the impacts of the malpractice while neglecting its processes and structures. Lastly, most of the reviewed articles were published more than five years ago, suggesting that little is known about the occurrence and prevalence of nepotism in recent times.

The significance of the research problem is evident from the arguments presented throughout this paper. The literature review shows that political patronage presents a major problem in the recruitment process of public servants. Therefore, this current study builds on the body of knowledge by filling the research gaps identified in the reviewed articles. This study will focus on the Delta State Civil Service as a case study. The findings will elaborate on how political patronage manifests itself in the public sector recruitment in Delta State between 2021 and 2025. This study will highlight the processes that facilitate the occurrence of nepotism to add to the body of knowledge on the issue. Secondly, the current study will fill the gap addressed by addressing the state as the unit of analysis instead of the country. Additionally, the findings will focus on the effects that nepotism has on the employees, employers, and general public to build on the existing body of knowledge. Lastly, this study will focus on the most recent occurrences of the malpractice to add to the understanding of the issue in contemporary times.

Methodology / Materials and Methods

This chapter contains the descriptive and procedural aspects of the research work. In other words, it describes the methods used in gathering the information used to produce this work. It further discusses the research design, the study area, and the population of the study. It further highlights the sample size and sampling procedures used in the study, the research instruments, ethical considerations, and statistical analysis applicable to the study. The aim is to create a scientific and objective basis for interpreting the results of the study.

Research Design

A research design is a strategy, structure, or overall plan that guides how a researcher undertakes his data collection, computation, and analysis activities to arrive at logical conclusions that answer research questions or test research hypotheses. In this study, Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Descriptive survey design entails conducting a survey to obtain factual information about a certain situation, individual, or group without any intervention. In other words, it aims to describe the characteristics, attributes, trends, or patterns of a given subject. The descriptive survey design was appropriate for this research study because it enables the researcher to gather descriptive information about the administrative practices in the civil service. This design also allows the researcher to generate factual data from respondents to understand better the influence of nepotism on recruitment in Delta State Civil Service.

The descriptive survey research design was considered suitable for this study for several reasons. First, it is a survey of administrative practices that have occurred within a given period, 2021–2025. The researcher, neither controls nor manipulates the independent variable, nepotism, nor the dependent variable, recruitment. Second, this design allows the researcher to identify the responses of human resource managers, senior administrators, and selected applicants regarding the extent to which nepotism influences recruitment in the Delta State Civil Service.

Moreover, this research design allows the researcher to collect data efficiently and econometrically. Using the descriptive survey design, the researcher will be able to analyze the results generated

from the 90 respondents to generalize the overall administrative practices in the entire civil service in Delta State. Besides, this design is appropriate to test the Patron Client Theory discussed in chapter one. Using this design, the researcher can establish how personal connections influence the formal bureaucratic process of recruitment to hire competent workers. Lastly, this non-experimental research design will enable the researcher to collect factual information from respondents to generate objective conclusions about the prevalence of nepotism in the recruitment practices of

Delta State Civil Service.

Study Area / Location of Study

The study was conducted in Delta State, which is located in the South South geopolitical region of Nigeria. Asaba is the capital city of the state, and it hosts the secretariats of all government ministries, departments, and agencies. The Delta State Civil Service is the main subject of this study. It is regarded as the largest formal employer because many civil servants are recruited into the system, especially in the education and health sectors. This location was selected because the state government often recruits大批 applicants to fill vacancies that arise in various government agencies. The number of youths who apply for jobs in the government is significant, given the fact that the state is a hotbed for graduate unemployment.

3.03 Population of the Study

The term population refers to the number of individuals or entities that constitute the subject of a study and share similar characteristics that the researcher intends to investigate. In this study, the population of interest was the selected permanent staff and applicants in the Delta State Civil Service. However, this study focused on individuals and groups that possess the requisite knowledge about the administrative practices in the Delta State Civil Service. Thus, the population size for this study comprised senior human resource officers, senior administrators, and selected applicants who could provide the information necessary to achieve the study objectives.

Based on information gathered from preliminary surveys, the population size for this study was 3500. This population figure comprised human resource managers, senior administrators, and applicants in various ministries, departments, and agencies in the Delta State Civil Service.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

In research, a sample is a subset of a population selected using a sampling technique to represent the entire population under study. In this study, a sample size of 350 respondents was selected using the purposive sampling technique. The choice of this sampling technique was influenced by the fact that the researcher was targeting respondents with specific skills, roles, and responsibilities. For instance, the researcher was targeting human resource officers, senior administrators, and selected applicants in the Delta State Civil Service. Thus, using the purposive sampling technique, the researcher selected 350 respondents with the requisite expertise needed to provide information that could help achieve the research objectives.

Sampling Procedure

The sampling procedure involves the description of activities carried out to ensure that the instruments of data collection reach the targeted respondents. In this study, the researcher visited the selected government ministries and secretariats in Asaba to ask for the respondent's permission to complete the questionnaire. The researcher knocked on the door of respondents' offices and requested their cooperation in completing the questionnaire. The research instruments were distributed to 90 respondents, comprising human resource officers, senior administrators, and accessible applicants. After knocking the door and asking for passwords, the researcher gave the questionnaires to the respondents and allowed them sufficient time to complete the documents. The researcher picked up the questionnaires from the respondents after a few days.

3.06 Instruments & Data Collection Technique

The instrument used for this study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and tailored to gather information from the targeted respondents.

Informed consent refers to the ethical guideline that states that a respondent must provide voluntary permission for his inclusion in a research study and publication of the results in a public forum. In other words, the respondents had the right to withdraw their participation in the study if they did not feel comfortable providing the information requested. Second, the researcher respected respondents' anonymity and confidentiality. The respondents were reminded not to print their names or other identifiable features on the questionnaires. This consideration was deemed essential for this study because the information sought in the questionnaire might be considered sensitive, especially to the respondents involved in the administrative process of issuing appointment letters to fresh graduates.

Statistical Analysis / Method of Data Analysis

The statistical analysis procedure used to evaluate the data collected from the questionnaires and achieve the research objectives will be discussed in this section. To begin with, the descriptive statistics of the data were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages. The analysis of the demographic data of the respondents was done using the percentage of individuals who met specific criteria. Similarly, the analysis of research questions in section B of the questionnaire was done using percentages and frequency tables. The analysis will be presented in the chapter using tables to illustrate the statistical findings clearly. The testing of the research hypotheses will be done using the Chi-Square statistical analysis procedure. According to the statistical analysis procedure, the Chi-Square test determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies. It is the best statistical method for evaluating the study's hypotheses. The analysis of each research hypothesis and the presentation of results will be done using the researcher's rationale and the results of the statistical finding. The researcher will adopt the 0.05 level of significance to decide whether to reject or accept the research hypotheses presented in chapter one.

Results Presentation of Data and Discussion of Findings

The data was collected from human resource officers, senior administrators, junior workers, and applicants in the Delta State Civil Service. The analysis proceeded in sections, with the first section presenting the respondents' demographic statistics. The second section contained the analysis of the research questions, while the final section contained the testing and discussion of the research hypotheses.

Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

Before the presentation of the tables that will be used to discuss the results of the study, it is crucial to indicate the total number of questionnaires that were administered and retrieved. In this study, 350 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted respondents in the government ministries, departments, and agencies in Asaba. However, only 320 respondents provided their responses, which means that the response rate was 91.4 percent. This high response rate was achieved because the researcher was able to persuade most of the targeted respondents to provide their responses. On the other hand, 30 respondents failed to respond to the questionnaire, either because they were not at their offices when the questionnaires were being distributed or their responses were deemed unacceptable. The statistical analysis that will be reported in this chapter will be based on the responses of the 320 respondents.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section discusses the personal details and demographic attributes of the respondents used for this study. The presentation and analysis of the demography of the respondents is carried out to provide background information about the type of respondents who provided the information used

for this study. The variables analyzed consist of the gender, age bracket, educational qualification, and years of experience of the respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' Gender

Gender
Frequency
Percentage (%)
Male
185
57.8
Female
135
42.2
Total
320
100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

As shown in Table 1, out of the 320 respondents, 185 were male and 135 were female. This implies that 57.8 percent of the respondents were male, whereas 42.2 percent of the respondents were female. In essence, most of the respondents who provided their responses were male. However, there was no significant difference between the proportion of male and female respondents, and thus, the results of the respondents' responses were not skewed between male and female respondents.

Table 2: Respondents' Age Bracket

Age Bracket
Frequency
Percentage (%)
18 to 25 years
45
14.1
26 to 35 years
110
34.4
36 to 45 years
105
32.8
46 years and above
60
18.7
Total
320
100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

In Table 2 below, the 320 respondents were further grouped according to their ages. From Table 2, it can be gathered that 45 respondents (14.1 percent) were between the age of 18 and 25 years. They comprised fresh graduates and applicants for civil service jobs. The second age group

contained 110 respondents (34.4 percent). They were aged between 26 and 35 years and formed the biggest category of respondents. The third age group was represented by 105 respondents (32.8 percent) who were aged between 36 and 45 years. The last category comprised 60 respondents (18.7 percent) who were aged 46 years or older. Thus it can be concluded that the majority of respondents were aged between 26 and 45 years.

Table 3: Respondents' Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification

Frequency

Percentage (%)

WAEC / NECO

35

10.9

ND / NCE

85

26.6

BSc / HND

160

50.0

MSc / PhD

40

12.5

Total

320

100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4: Respondents' Working Experience

Years of Experience

Frequency

Percentage (%)

Less than 5 years (and applicants)

70

21.9

5 to 10 years

100

31.3

11 to 15 years

90

28.1

16 years and above

60

18.7

Total

320

100

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5: Respondents' views on the influence of nepotism on candidate selection

S/N

Questionnaire Items

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Total

1

Personal connections and political affiliations play a major role in securing employment in the state civil service.

165 (51.6%)

105 (32.8%)

35 (10.9%)

15 (4.7%)

320 (100%)

Discussion of Findings

The section discusses the research questions and hypotheses test results, as well as presents an evidence-based interpretation of the results. The research questions are evaluated against the theoretical framework, as well as the existing knowledge as discussed in previous sections

Finding 1: the influence of nepotism, personal connections, and political affiliations. The first finding indicates that the culture of nepotism, personal connections, and political affiliations has significantly influenced recruitment in the Delta State Civil Service. The results of testing the first hypothesis reveal that formal recruitment procedures have been compromised to favor individuals with personal or political ties to the leadership.

The observation is consistent with the Patron-Client Theory as discussed in Chapter Two, which holds that political and bureaucratic elites utilize their power to allocate public positions to their supporters through patronage networks. Similarly, the results of the National Bureau of Statistics and the UNODC (2024) report on public procurement, nepotism, and bribery in Nigeria corroborate the findings. According to the report, political affiliation and personal connections have overtly influenced recruitment and purchasing decisions, superseding competence as a selection criterion.

Interpretation: Patronage-based recruitment has created a situation whereby those hired lack loyalty to public service, and thus presents a higher risk of misusing public resources. Moreover, the culture creates a form of crony capitalism, which is characterized by lower professional standards and promotes institutional inefficiency, as well as reduced accountability and transparency. Consequently, the Delta State Civil Service fails to provide quality service due to the lack of professional competence and integrity.

Finding 2: the impact of nepotism on merit-based recruitment

The second finding reveals that nepotism has significantly interfered in merit-based recruitment. The results of testing the second hypothesis indicate that qualified applicants are often overlooked in favor of less competent individuals, which is counter to the goal of merit-based recruitment.

In line with this result, Transparency International (2023) reports on the prevalence of nepotism in public procurement and resource management indicate that "reverse selection" often takes place in situations where nepotism is practiced. According to the report, nepotism entails "reverse selection," wherein the personal interests of decision-makers, including family ties, supersede the requirements of merit-based selection. Similarly, the results of the study conducted by Adeleke, Ogunleye, and

Adeyemi (2025) found that less than fifty percent of successful candidates in public recruitment programs were selected based on merit.

Interpretation: Nepotism compromises merit-based recruitment in public agencies, which presents several adverse impacts on the achievement of organizational objectives. Firstly, the lack of professional skills and competencies among public servants may result in poor policy implementation and, consequently, reduced public service delivery. Secondly, such practices create a form of cronyism, which promotes political and economic instability, ultimately hindering sustainable development.

Finding 3: effect on employee efficiency and institutional performance

The third finding indicates that nepotism has adversely affected employee efficiency and, by extension, the performance of Delta State Civil Service institutions. The results of the test of the third hypothesis demonstrate that nepotism causes unqualified employees to occupy public posts, which leads to tension in the workplace and consequently reduces employee efficiency.

The results are consistent with the views of Becker (2021), whose human capital theory posits that human capital investment is wasted when individuals who do not meet the required competence are hired inappropriately. According to the theory, employees' skills, competencies, and motivation determine the performance of organizations. Thus, the lack of professional skills and motivation caused by nepotism decreases organizational performance. In line with this view, Onyeiwu (2025) found a significant correlation between nepotism and decreased efficiency and productivity in public organizations.

Interpretation: Nepotism causes a decrease in employee efficiency and organizational performance due to the fact that unskilled employees are unable to perform their duties satisfactorily. Furthermore, nepotism often causes disharmony in the workplace as competent employees are often demoralized due to the lack of disciplinary actions against family members and political allies who occupy lower-level positions. Thus, nepotism causes institutional inefficiency, which ultimately reduces public service delivery and hinders sustainable development.

Finding 4: decline in public trust and credibility

The fourth finding demonstrates that nepotism in public recruitment has caused a decline in public trust and credibility of the State Civil Service. The results of the test of the fourth hypothesis show that nepotism has created mistrust among members of the public, which has decreased the number of individuals willing to apply to public jobs.

The view is consistent with the findings of Afrobarometer reports (2022, 2023) on the perception of corruption in the public sector in Africa. According to the reports, over seventy percent of Nigerians perceive that public positions are allocated based on political and family ties, as opposed to merit. The result highlights that the practice of nepotism has significantly reduced public trust in public institutions.

Interpretation: A decrease in public trust in Government has several adverse effects on society. For instance, talented individuals who intend to contribute to the development of the country are reluctant to join the public service as they perceive their skills to be wasted on unproductive institutions. Consequently, brain drain occurs, which causes a decrease in organizational performance. Another effect of the loss of public trust is the development of apathy towards public institutions and lower levels of civic responsibility.

CONCLUSION OF THE DISCUSSION

The concluding remarks discuss the overall implications of the research questions and the test of hypotheses. As indicated by the findings, the Delta State Civil Service recruitment process is characterized by a lack of transparency and is subject to the influence of informal networks. Ultimately, the malpractice not only creates barriers to equal opportunity but also causes adverse consequences on various aspects of the State Civil Service.

The study's conclusion provides the final thoughts regarding the topic being researched. This paragraph highlights the fact that the influence of informal recruitment networks has far-reaching effects, ranging from reduced organizational performance to decreased public trust and credibility. Consequently, the issue requires the commitment of policymakers to ensure that the civil service is reformed to enhance transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings that were reported and discussed in the preceding chapter, this study draws the following conclusions regarding the influence of nepotism in the civil service recruitment in Delta State between 2021 and 2025.

First, this study concluded that the formal and informal systems that govern the operations of various institutions are often used in favor of individuals with personal and political ties to those in power. Nepotism and patronage have significantly overtaken the values of equality and fairness in public appointments, with special interest groups being favored over others. As such, it can be concluded that the selection process of government employees in Delta State largely favors influential individuals and their close relations.

Second, this research concludes that the unfair recruitment practices that dominate the civil service in Delta State have significantly compromised merit-based recruitment in the state ministry. By favoring personal and political relationships over competency, the Delta State government has created a system that promotes incompetence, with unqualified staff filling key positions unnecessarily. This has caused significant disruptions in the delivery of goods and services due to the overburdening of staff, demoralization, and reduced productivity levels.

Finally, this study concludes that the nepotism practices that have been documented in the Delta State civil service have significantly undermined public trust and confidence in government institutions. Individuals, especially graduates, have become disillusioned with the state's ability to deliver on its promises, with many giving up on public service. In general, the Delta State Government has lost the people's trust due to the lack of integrity in appointments.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed;

First, the Delta State government should ensure the absolute independence of the civil service commission to prevent nepotism and favoritism in recruitment. The State Civil Service Commission (SCSC) should be free from the direct control of the state government and other political leaders. This will enable the commission to operate independently without any undue influence in the selection process. Thus, the human resource managers should conduct recruitment openly without any form of political interference and pressure.

Secondly, the State government should fully digitalize the recruitment process to reduce the involvement of human talent in the selection process. As such, the government should develop online platforms for screening and filtering applications after the initial shortlisting has been done

by computer programs. This move will minimize human interactions in the recruitment process, thereby reducing the chances of nepotism being practiced.

The Delta State government should uphold merit-based recruitment. Thus, the government should develop and enforce policies that promote and support merit-based recruitment. For instance, the state should develop policies that promote equal opportunities and freedom from discrimination in employment. Similarly, the government should enforce strict conditions for recruitment, such as requiring aspiring applicants to have the necessary academic qualifications or skills to perform the job.

There is a need for an independent monitoring and evaluation commission to oversee and review the entire process of mass recruitment in the state. This commission should be independent and involve external stakeholders such as private organizations and labor union leaders. The main purpose of this committee should be to ensure the transparency of the entire recruitment process and prevent nepotism.

Finally, the State Government should enforce strict sanctions against all public officials involved in the manipulation of the recruitment process. These sanctions and punishments should be implemented to offer a warning to other officials and employees in the public sector in case of similar occurrences.

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