



## Scope of Employment, Nepotism, and Productivity in Nigeria's Public Sector

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**Annotation.** Nepotism is a widespread phenomenon in the Nigerian public sector that compromises merit in recruitment and organizational effectiveness of governmental institutions. This paper examines the implications of nepotism on employment practices and productivity in the public sector of Nigeria, specifically political patronage systems and their effect on service delivery. Although the government has made significant contributions to the governance process, socio-economic growth, and the provision of services to the populace yet the inability to eliminate nepotism cripples the performance of the public sector. The paper discussed the issues of recruitment, the prevalence of nepotism, and its relationship with the morale of the employees, the effectiveness of organizations and their responsibilities. The theoretical perspectives of the Bureaucracy Theory, Patronage Systems and the Principal- Agent Theory were utilized to illuminate the correlation between nepotism and productivity in the public sector. Some of the most vital findings indicate that political affiliations, nepotism, and clientelism result in inefficiency, lack motivation among employees, and eventually diminish service delivery, especially in critical areas like education, health, and infrastructure. To reduce the adverse effects of nepotism and to improve governance and productivity, the paper concludes by providing policy recommendations aimed at improving merit-based recruitment, reinforce anti-corruption efforts, employee satisfaction and decentralization of decision-making in the public sector.

**Keywords:** Nepotism, Public Sector Governance, Merit-Based Recruitment, Organizational Productivity, Political Patronage Systems.



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### 1. Introduction

The Nigerian public sector is an important part of the governance, economic development and administration of the country and the delivery of services. According to the latest reports, the Nigerian public sector takes up a significant share of the labour market and public spending, and millions of its citizens depend on governmental employment as their means of living (World Bank, 2020). One of the roles of public sector institutions in Nigeria, including ministries,

departments, and agencies, is the delivery of necessary services, the application of government policies, and the socio-economic development (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021). Nonetheless, irrespective of its significance, the Nigerian public sector has a number of challenges, which compromise its productivity and effectiveness.

The extent of employment, including recruitment practices, job distribution and the general management of human resources is one of the major issues that impact the public sector in Nigeria. Employment in the public sector has developed throughout history, yet it has become one of the most important aspects of the public administration system in the country. Political factors tend to affect the dynamics of employment in the public sector of Nigeria and the effect of nepotism and favouritism is a big issue of concern.

Nepotism refers to the act of preferring family members or close associates when hiring employees, promoting them, and making other employment-related choices, and it has become a common phenomenon in most institutions in Nigeria (Akinwale & Olatunde, 2019). This is mainly associated with patronage systems because it compromises the concept of meritocracy and results in the hiring of people who might not have the necessary skills or qualifications to perform the task (Iheriohanma, 2018). Corruption is also fostered by nepotism, and it encourages inefficiency and loss of trust in the institutions of the state, thereby affecting overall output of the public sector (Akindele & Adeyemi, 2020).

A major issue of concern is the correlation between nepotism and productivity in the Nigerian government. In this regard, productivity may be taken to refer to the capacity of the public institutions to deliver services to the people in an efficient and effective way. When nepotism is a common phenomenon, the efficiency of the public sector usually tends to slow down, employee morale declines, and accountability is absent within the organization, all of which negatively affect the work of the public institutions (Omotola, 2019). Also, nepotism establishes a culture in which family loyalty or political affiliations are more important than professional integrity, and it further reduces productivity in such vital sectors as education, health, and infrastructure development (Adebayo & Tukur, 2018).

Nevertheless, nepotism has not deterred the Nigerian government, which has put in place many reforms that have been intended to enhance employment issues and increase productivity in the government. These reforms involve the establishment of merit-based recruitment schemes, anti-corruption programs, and transparency and accountability improvement schemes (Omisore & Adewunmi, 2017). Nonetheless, the nepotistic tendencies have continued to be one of the big challenges to sustainable productivity gains in the public sector.

The purpose of this paper is to review the extent of employment, nepotism, and productivity in the Nigerian public sector. It will examine the available literature on the above issues, the major challenges and discuss how nepotism affects productivity. The paper will also focus on the wider theoretical frameworks concerning nepotism and public administration and provide policy recommendations on how to resolve these problems.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Scope of Employment in Nigeria's Public Sector**

The Nigerian government is a massive employer with the public sector being in the centre of the governance process in the country, giving employment to millions and delivering essential services. Many factors determine the structure of the public sector employment such as government policies, recruitment practices, and political considerations. This segment examines the extent of job opportunities in the Nigerian public sector, including the system of recruitment, the challenges, and the repercussions on the workforce.

The level of employment in the field of the public sector in Nigeria is also prevalent, as there are several governmental organizations where people may get job opportunities in ministries, agencies, and commissions. The World Bank (2020) states that the public sector holds a significant percentage of the labour force in Nigeria, approximately 10 percent of the working-age population works in public service positions. This employment is necessary to make government initiatives work and provide the government with important services like healthcare, education, and others. Nevertheless, due to the significance, the Nigerian public sector has experienced a lot of problems such as overstaffing and inefficiencies.

### 2.1.2 Challenges in Public Sector Recruitment

Recruitment in the Nigerian public sector is generally criticized in terms of an inefficient system and political patronage. According to Lawal and Olaniyi (2020), political affiliations are one of the most significant factors in the recruitment process, and in many cases, job placements are made on the basis of political affiliations instead of merit. This compromises the integrity of the system and results in the appointment of people who do not have the desired skills and qualifications in critical positions. The absence of a system built on merit in the recruitment process does not only aid inefficiency, it also scares away qualified professionals in the public service.

## 2.2 Nepotism and Patronage in Nigeria's Public Sector

Nepotism has been described as the preference of family members or close associates during hiring and promotion decisions; it is a serious challenge that has been embedded in the Nigerian public sector. It has turned into a type of political favouritism where political leaders will give their family members or even supporters' key jobs without any concern about their qualifications. This part explores the degree of pervasiveness of nepotism and its adverse effects on the operations in the public sector.

### 2.2.1 Defining Nepotism

Nepotism in the Nigerian context of the public sector is a well-known fact that is considered an undermining factor of the merit-based system. According to Egonmwan (2019), it is referred to as nepotism when people use their families or ethnic backgrounds to appoint or promote their relatives or associates without considering their professional qualifications. This is not a new practice in Nigerian politics where political leaders have over the decades have engrained been appointed to serve as a reward for loyalty and stay in political power through their position in the public sector.

### 2.2.2 Impact of Nepotism on Public Institutions

Nepotism within the Nigerian public sector has a major effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutions. Research indicates that nepotism causes the hiring of people who do not have the required skills in their job, which impedes organizational performance (Olaopa, 2020). Okon and Ekanem (2019) also note the lack of accountability in the institutions of the state, as anyone who holds an office through nepotism is more interested in loyalty than in serving the people. These dynamics lead to the wastage of resources, inefficiency in the delivery of services, and distrust towards the institutions of the government.

## 2.3 The Impact of Nepotism on Public Sector Productivity

The issue of nepotism and its correlation with the productivity of the public sector is an exigent point of concern. The level of productivity within the public sector can be determined by how well institutions are able to provide services and meet the objectives of government policies. The productivity of the public institutions is usually affected in a system where nepotism is practiced.

### 2.3.1 Nepotism and Employee Morale and Motivation

Among the effects of nepotism, a negative impact on employees' morale can be listed as one of

the most important. Those employees who do not get promotions despite being superior to less competent individuals may get disillusioned, and this translates to low motivation and poor performance at work. According to Afolabi and Aladejana (2019), nepotism may lead to a toxic work environment, as staff members will feel underestimated and unacknowledged; hence, they will be less committed to the organization in the end.

### 2.3.2 Impact on Organizational Efficiency and Service Delivery

In cases where people are placed in office through nepotism and not through competence, the delivery of services is greatly compromised. According to Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2018), inefficiency is a common characteristic of the public sector institutions in Nigeria because people who lack the qualifications or experience required are assigned to important positions. This inefficiency is in many forms, such as delays in the implementation of projects, poor performance of the public service, and financial mismanagement. The impact of nepotism is quite high in areas like education and healthcare, where it is important that the staff is experienced; therefore, low-quality services are offered and, thus, adversely impact the population.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The problems of nepotism, the employment sector range, and productivity in the public sphere of Nigeria can be explained more efficiently with different theoretical points of view. The frameworks inform us about the dynamics of the administration of people, recruitment processes, and service delivery. In this section, three theories are examined, namely: the Bureaucracy Theory, Patronage Systems and Clientelism, and the Principal-Agent Theory, which are useful in explaining the relationship that nepotism has with productivity in the Nigerian public sector.

### 3.1 Bureaucracy Theory

The first theory, developed by Max Weber, is the Bureaucracy Theory, which continues to be a stronghold of public administration. Weber believed in rationality, hierarchy, and hiring people based on merit because he believed in the professionalization of the workforce in which people are not hired depending on personal contacts but according to their qualifications (Weber, 1947).

The application of the tenets of bureaucracy in the Nigerian state sector is however facing challenges. Adegoroye (2018) attests to the fact that although formal regulations encourage bureaucratic models, in reality, nepotism and political favouritism continue to prevail over such regulations, particularly when people are appointed on the basis of political or family ties.

Along with inefficiency, the lack of connection between Weberian bureaucracy and the realities of governance in the Nigerian public sector has contributed to inefficiency. According to Ezeani (2019), political interference and corruption have stalled the application of bureaucratic principles, as they hinder the proper operation of the institutions of the public sector. Those concerns are a portrayal of a serious disparity between the theoretical framework of a meritocratic bureaucracy and the established culture of nepotism in the Nigerian state apparatus that eventually destroys productivity (Adegbola & Oyedele, 2020).

### 3.2 Patronage Systems and Clientelism

The Patronage System and Clientelism theories can be used to gain a good understanding of why nepotism in the Nigerian public sector persists. Patronage politics is the exchange of political support and loyalty, that is, the allocation of public sector jobs and resources (van de Walle, 2007). The patronage system is a common practice by political leaders in most developing nations such as Nigeria, where the leaders reward those who are on their side with governmental appointments. This system promotes nepotism as employment is given to people on the basis of political allegiance instead of qualification.

Patronage networks in Nigeria are highly ingrained in politics, where a system of patronage and rewards enables the politician to appoint family members and other loyal supporters into

important positions. According to Akindele & Olaopa (2019), this system not only creates inefficiency but also undermines the institutions in the sector of the population by promoting personal and political networks over qualifications. Gbervbie (2018) also indicates that this discourages qualified professionals from joining or pursuing jobs in the public sector since they are usually sidelined in favour of those with political affiliations.

### 3.3 Principal-Agent Theory

The other theory that is highly insightful in understanding the dynamics of nepotism and productivity in the public sector in Nigeria is the Principal-Agent Theory. The theory describes the connection between the principal (e.g., a government or other public organization) and the agent (e.g., public servants), by which an agent is employed to represent the principal. Nevertheless, the bond is usually complicated through the asymmetry of information and opposing interests (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

The principal-agent problem is even more pronounced in Nigeria, where the political leaders employ agents (public servants) not on professional competence but on loyalty. This results in a scenario in which the interest of the principal (good governance) is not congruent with the actions of the agents (serving their interests or their patron's interest). Recent works, such as Oluwole & Mohammed (2021), suggest that inefficient, unaccountable, and corrupt practices in the public sector ensue when individuals are appointed based on political or family relationships, and an incompatibility is formed between the expectations of the population and the actions of the agent.

The conflict of interest may lead to public servants serving their selfish or political interests at the expense of the people. Adegbami (2018) also indicates that nepotism exacerbates the principal-agent problem, since the person hired on a patronage basis might not have the competence or experience to deliver in the position. This creates inadequate service delivery that leads to reduce the trust of the population in government institutions and low productivity (Oluwole, 2020).

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

This section provides an in-depth discussion of extant literature on nepotism, the scope of employment, and productivity within the public sector. It addresses the intersection of nepotism and the performance of the public sector, drawing from insights gained from the review of literature and the theoretical framework, which examined the effects of nepotism on the complexities of recruitment, job satisfaction, and productivity. Three principal themes are discussed, namely the influence of nepotism on human resource management, the consequences of patronage on good governance, and the long-term consequences of nepotism on productivity in public institutions.

### 4.1 Effects of Nepotism on Human Resource Management

Human resource management has been affected by nepotism, which is one of the biggest challenges of the Nigerian public sector. Political networks, ethnicities, and family affiliations tend to influence recruitment, promotion, and allocation of resources, against the principles of merit-based appointments in human resources that ought to be the focal point of human resource operations (Akinwale & Olatunde, 2019; Gbervbie, 2018).

Constant adoption of nepotism as a way of hiring employees results in the hiring of people who might not be the best to occupy the position. This, in turn, has an adverse impact on job performance and employee productivity. Indicatively, Afolabi & Aladejana (2019) discovered that most employees in the public sector appointed in a nepotistic manner do not have the required skills or qualifications to perform their jobs, resulting in poor service delivery and inefficiency. In addition, Lawal & Olaniyi (2020) mention that a meritocratic approach to hiring is often avoided in favour of patronage, where the job is offered depending on individual loyalty and not professional competence.

This is especially rampant at the local and state government levels, as the role of political

patronage in influencing human resource policies is overly pronounced. According to Adegbamigbo & Uche (2019), this causes overstaffing in some institutions operating within the public sector, leading them to allocate resources inefficiently and bringing down the efficiency of their activities.

#### 4.2 Effect of Political Patronage on Governance

The patronage structures with the appointment of loyalists to important positions have far-reaching consequences for governance in Nigeria. Patronage politics can result in a scenario in which people are employed not based on their credentials but due to their political fidelity, which hugely affects accountability and transparency in public institutions (Akinyemi & Bello, 2020).

Hutchcroft (2018) explains that patronage systems are part of a clientelism cycle, in which political leaders access public resources to reward their followers. This leaves a scenario whereby public servants are more preoccupied with satisfying their political masters at the expense of serving the people well. This contributes to corruption and mismanagement of finances, whereby the available resources of the government for its citizens are misplaced or misused to serve other interests.

A sense of accountability is also not created by the nepotistic culture in the Nigerian public sector. Ezeani (2019) proposes that when individuals are appointed based on political allegiance rather than performance, such individuals may not be held accountable. Such irresponsibility is especially harmful in sensitive areas like health and education, where lack of efficiency and mismanagement can result in the loss of lives. Gberevbie (2018) highlights that this corruption of accountability further weakens trust in government institutions by the people, which reduces the performance of the government and hampers national development.

#### 4.3 Long-Term Impact of Nepotism on Productivity

Nepotism has far-reaching long-term impacts on output in the Nigerian government. The concept of productivity in this context is how well institutions in the public sector perform their functions by providing quality services and addressing the needs of the people. In cases where jobs are assigned based on nepotism as opposed to merit, the deficiency in skills and experience of public servants has a direct impact on service delivery. According to Olaopa (2020), in such areas of life as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development, the effects of nepotism can lead to low-quality services and a lack of developmental opportunities.

Nepotism also has a great influence on employee morale. When public servants are not promoted based on merit and are deprived of advancement in favour of less qualified individuals, they often get frustrated and experience low job satisfaction (Afolabi & Aladejana, 2019). The result of this discontent is low workplace motivation, decreased performance, and a poor working environment, with employees feeling undervalued and disillusioned with the system. According to Adegbamigbo (2018), when loyalty to political leaders prevails over proficiency and professionalism in the workforce, inefficiency and malfunction become the order of the day in public sector organizations.

The economic and developmental impacts of nepotism, in a broader sense, are also apparent. According to Okon & Ekanem (2019), the continued existence of nepotism in the recruitment processes of the public sector causes a brain drain, as talents seek prospects in the private sector or in other countries where their competencies are better appreciated and compensated. This wastage of talent narrows down the pool of qualified candidates to work in government further increasing this circle of inefficiency and poor service delivery.

#### Effect on Policy and Governance

The identified problem of nepotism in the Nigerian public sector implies a lot for policy change and governance. The areas of reform should be centered on recruitment based on merit and better accountability infrastructure to eliminate the cycle of inefficiency and promote the sustainability of productivity. The reinforcement of anti-corruption efforts and the selection of public servants based on their professional skills and not political affiliation are the first steps toward the overall

enhancement of the Nigerian public sector. Moreover, the negative outcomes of nepotism can be reduced by reforming the political patronage system and making election processes more transparent to prevent government appointments that are not based on merit.

## 5. Conclusion

The Nigerian public sector is a very crucial part of how the country is governed and run economically, as well as how it provides key services to the people. Nonetheless, the culture of nepotism that has prevailed in the recruitment, promotion, and resource distribution procedures has hampered the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector. The paper has addressed the extent of employment, the extent of nepotism, and its effects on productivity in the public sector of Nigeria. The literature review and theoretical framework analysis have indicated that there is a complicated relationship between the politics of patronage, human resource management, and the performance of the state.

### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

In this paper, the following findings were revealed:

#### 1. Nepotism in the Public Sector Employment:

Recruitment and promotion practices in the public sector of Nigeria are largely seen to be based on political favours, family relations, and even ethnic affiliations, as opposed to merit and professionalism. The practice causes individuals who do not have the skills and qualifications for the positions they are appointed to become inefficient and substandard in service delivery (Akinwale & Olatunde, 2019; Gberville, 2018).

#### 2. Influence on Productivity of the Public Sector:

The phenomenon of making appointments to public servants not according to their qualifications but to the level of their loyalty has strong effects on productivity. Employees in the public sector who are hired based on nepotism would be less motivated and efficient and thus have low morale and job satisfaction. This, in turn, influences the quality of the services given to the population in particular, in the fields of education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Afolabi & Aladejana, 2019; Olaopa, 2020).

#### 3. Patronage Systems and Governance:

Patronage systems are strengthening clientelism, where political leaders allocate jobs and resources in the public sector to their followers in return for their loyalty. Such a system is a threat to transparency and accountability, which fosters a climate of corruption and inefficiency (Akindele & Olaopa, 2019; van de Walle, 2007).

#### 4. Theoretical Insights:

The paper used Bureaucracy Theory, Patronage Systems, and Principal-Agent Theory to comprehend the nature of nepotism within the Nigerian public sector. These theories point to the disconnect between the theoretical opportunities of bureaucratic theory and the reality of patronage-based systems that result in agency problems, decreased accountability, and impaired performance in the public sector (Weber, 1947; Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

### 5.2 Policy Recommendations

In line with the solution to the nepotism problem and optimization of productivity in the public sector in Nigeria, the following policy measures can be suggested:

#### 1. Adopt Merit-Based Recruitment and Promotion Systems:

Nigeria is in urgent need of enhancing merit-based recruitment and promotion in the public sector. The reforms must be aimed at getting rid of the influences of political patronage and nepotism; this should be achieved by ensuring that appointments are not made on the basis of favour or experience but rather based on merit and performance. There is a need to have

transparent recruitment procedures, including competitive examinations and publicly published job credentials, at all levels of government.

2. Strengthen Anti-Corruption Clampdown

The main problem of patronage politics should be addressed by enhancing anti-corruption mechanisms. Recruitment and service delivery in the public sector should be strengthened with transparency, accountability, and monitoring by the Nigerian government. This can include the establishment of independent watchdogs, even more vigorous enforcement of the laws of the public service and protection of whistle blowers.

3. Promote Job Satisfaction and Work-Based Learning:

Employees of the public sector who perceive that their jobs are secure and promotions are made on merit tend to be more productive and motivated. The Nigerian government ought to invest in professional development programs and provide training and skill-building opportunities to public servants. Moreover, an effective work environment where performance is rewarded and merit recognized can go a long way in boosting employee morale and quality of service delivery.

4. Promote Accountability in the Greater Public Sector:

The mechanisms of accountability should also be enhanced to make public servants accountable for their actions. This may be accomplished through the establishment of effective avenues through which citizens can give feedback on the services offered by the government, periodic performance reviews, and front-office audits of how the government operates. The participation and involvement of the citizens in governance can also be enhanced to ensure the activities of the government are mainstreamed to the interest of the citizens.

5. Decentralize Employment in the Public Sector:

As nepotism is particularly common in local and state governments, decentralizing decision-making regarding recruitment and the distribution of public sector resources is necessary. Increased local autonomy is capable of minimizing the effect of central political patronage and permitting the appointment of skilled professionals according to local demand and experience.

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