

Recruitment and Selection Practices on the Performance of Selected Public Sector Organisations in Nigeria

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Abstract

Political patronage and bureaucratic rigidity have weakened merit-based hiring in Nigeria's public sector. This study therefore investigated the effect of recruitment and selection practices on the performance of selected civil service-regulated public sector organisations in Nigeria, using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 378 valid respondents drawn from federal Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Abuja via stratified random sampling and structured questionnaires. The findings revealed positive relationships between external recruitment practices and productivity, and between background/reference checks and productivity. The study's novelty lies in its focus on the combined effect of these two recruitment and selection mechanisms within civil service-regulated organisations and its theoretical contribution to knowledge by extending Human Capital Theory to the underexplored context of Nigeria's civil service, where regulatory frameworks, political patronage and lack of governance pre-employment verification are distinct constraints that shape talent acquisition outcomes. The practical implication of the study is that public sector organisations are to prioritise merit-based external recruitment practices and institutionalise comprehensive pre-employment background/reference checks into talent acquisition strategy for improved performance.

KEYWORDS

recruitment; selection practices; background checks; performance

Introduction

Recruitment and selection practices in Nigeria's public sector have been associated with systemic challenges that affect organisational performance. Political patronage, nepotism, and the lack of pre-employment verification have compromised the standard of the system of meritocracy in the recruitment and selection of public servants. This has created skill gaps, turnover rates, and low productivity (Fakorede et al., 2025; Odoaba et al., 2025). Also, in civil service-regulated public organisations such as Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), the recruitment practices are hampered by procedural inflexibility and political interference (Onuorah, 2024).

Although various studies have focussed on recruitment and selection functions in private sectors and educational institutions in Nigeria (Godspower, 2024; Jacins & others, 2024), limited attention has been devoted to civil service organisations operating under civil service regulations. A review of extant literature revealed that most studies on the public sectors in Nigeria have examined recruitment and selection as undifferentiated constructs or within non-civil-service contexts (Adaoma & Onuoha, 2022; Mebom, 2025), without isolating the specific effects of external recruitment practices and background/reference checks on productivity within the

highly regulated civil service environment.

It is pertinent to state that external recruitment practices can be described as the process of recruiting human resources from outside the organisation using a competitive recruitment process of public advertisement, employment agencies, and professional networking sites (Berthon et al., 2005). Background/reference checks refer to the pre-employment verification of the educational qualifications, work experience, and professional references of the potential employees (Hausknecht et al., 2004) while productivity, in this study, is a perception of the organisational performance outcomes, which include task performance, work quality, and goal achievement as reported by the employees in the organisations (Koopmans et al., 2013).

Consequently, the implementation of external recruitment practices and background/reference checks mechanisms has been identified as one of the ways of addressing the challenges facing talent acquisition, quality assurance, and increasing the level of productivity of the organisation (Ajiteru et al., 2025; Gogogwute et al., 2025; Olanipekun et al., 2024). According to the research findings (Fasusi & Adedokun, 2025; Francis et al., 2024), introducing new employees from outside the organisation is one of the most important factors in getting the right people on the job, helping to bring up new ideas, and creating a working atmosphere where competition is based on productivity. Moreover, background/reference checks is also a very important gatekeeping tool that authenticates the qualifications of the candidates and minimises the chances of recruiting unqualified candidates (Attamah et al., 2023; Ilham, 2025). However, limited empirical research has explored the combined and differential effects of external recruitment and background/reference checks on the productivity of employees within the context of Nigeria's civil service. This study therefore seeks to address the following questions:

1. What is the effect of external recruitment practices on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria?
2. To what extent do background/reference checks affect the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria?

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the effect of external recruitment practices on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria
2. Investigate the effect of background/reference checks on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria.

Based on the objectives, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

HO₁: External recruitment practices do not have significant effect on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria.

HO₂: Background/reference checks have no significant effect on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

At the most fundamental level, scholars have consistently emphasised on the complementary and interdependent nature of recruitment and selection as twin processes that collectively determine organisational workforce quality. Mebom (2025) investigated the correlation between merit-based

recruitment and employee effectiveness in public enterprises in southern Nigeria. The study used a bivariate analytical approach to analyse and interpret data collected from eight public enterprises in southern Nigeria. According to the study, merit-based recruitment especially if coupled with the right use of employees' qualifications, experience, and skills is key to unlocking the potentials of employee performance, commitment, engagement and motivation in a very drastic way. The study also revealed that inefficiency, low productivity, staff turnover, and corruption are among the major problems of Nigerian public organisations, and that skills mismatch, workers not having the skills required by the job, is one of the causes of low performance. The author stressed that employee effectiveness and challenges in public enterprises are largely a matter of the recruitment of best-fit meritocracy and the quality of the process of hiring which was found to be major factors major factor determining not only long-term employee performance but also organisational outcomes.

Similarly, Godspower (2024) investigated the impact of recruitment, selection, and employment security on employee performance in the Nigerian insurance sector. The research methodology used in the study was cross-sectional research with a sample of 350 subjects collected from insurance companies. Structured questionnaires were used in data gathering, while the analysis of the gathered data used descriptive and inferential statistics, and simple regression analysis. The results revealed that recruitment and selection were significantly and positively related to employee performance, and that they accounted for 31.7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.317$, $F = 67.43$, $p < 0.001$). Among the various factors, educational verification and skills assessment were found to be the most powerful predictors of performance. Moreover, employment security was found to be the reason for 3.1% of the systematic variance in employee performance ($F = 11.18$, $p = 0.0009$). The researcher inferred that thorough recruitment and selection procedures greatly increase employee performance in Nigerian organisations, thus, endorsing the implementation of merit-based hiring practices.

Furthermore, Jacins and associates (2024) studied the position of meritocracy against nepotism in hiring and selection policies and organisational outcomes in Nigerian public universities (2018–2025), using a survey research method. 240 permanent staff from Imo State University out of 262 through simple random sampling were drawn as respondents. The primary method of data collection was structured questionnaires which were later subjected to analysis through descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. The output of the research indicated that productivity in Nigerian companies were heavily influenced by recruitment and selection policies with a clear advantage of merit practices over those of nepotism in organisational outcomes. It was further emphasised by the study that recruitment and selection in addition to their basic role in staff provision for the organisation also dictate the growth, effectiveness, and performance of the company through the creation of a high-performing workforce and positive organisational outcomes. The researchers concluded that a well-structured recruitment and selection process will result in increased productivity, better employee morale, and less need for supervision, thus creating a more efficient and effective organization. Therefore, they recommended that recruitment and selection must be a strategic process as opposed to an issue of substitution with merit being the major criterion while incorporating

impartiality, fairness, and equality to get the best out of the recruitment and selection strategies.

The seminal study by [Shahzad et al., \(2024\)](#) empirically tested how strategic human resource (HR) practices affect talent retention using job satisfaction and work engagement, and psychological empowerment as a moderator variable. The study employed SmartPLS structural model with the following R-square of talent retention = 0.90, job satisfaction = 0.28, and family binding = 0.34 which all show good model fit. The paper used a quantitative approach and structural equation modeling to investigate the effect of strategic recruitment and selection practices on talent retention outcomes. The study discovered that strategic HR practices such as advanced recruitment and selection processes in the organisations had a much higher rate of retaining talents due to improved job satisfaction and working engagement. In the study, strategic HR practices (such as effectiveness in recruitment and selection) were set as the independent variable, and retention indicators (retention rates, job satisfaction, engagement in work) were set as the dependent variables, which proved the positive correlation of strategic recruitment practices with organisational talent management outcomes.

In their research on investigating the correlation between recruiting strategies and performance of employees working in institutions as managed by Rivers State government, Nigeria, [Adaoma and Onuoha \(2022\)](#) applied a cross-sectional research design. The study targeted managerial employees in four institutions, with the research design involving the use of questionnaire distributed to 106 respondents. The correlation between the variables was also measured using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient and the p-values were used to test the hypothesis. The results showed that there are strong positive correlations between employee performance and the recruitment methods used which are the internal and external recruitment. The research found that the process of recruitment is a very important aspect of the public institutions because the efficiency, operational success, and service delivery of the organisation depend greatly on the quality of the workforce recruited. The authors suggested that the components and processes involved in recruitment should be critically evaluated by the public institutions to make sure that the performance of employees are sustained to attain the best results in compliance with the organisational goals.

The paper by [Salum et al., \(2023\)](#) investigated the influence of internal and external recruitment strategies on employee retention at the Zanzibar Ministry of Health – Unguja. A total of 120 employees from four government health facilities were sampled using a quantitative survey design, and data were collected through structured questionnaires. The study found that external recruitment strategies, such as open advertisements and competitive hiring processes, were positively associated with employee retention, while internal recruitment had a moderate effect. The results indicated that systematically designed recruitment processes, particularly those emphasising transparency and competitiveness, enhanced employee satisfaction and reduced turnover. The authors recommended that public sector organisations in Zanzibar adopt formalised external recruitment policies to strengthen organisational stability and service delivery outcomes.

[Girmachew & Habtamu, \(2022\)](#) evaluated the recruitment and selection frameworks adopted by the financial cooperatives in Ethiopia and how they related

to service delivery. They used a sample size of 140 of cooperative employees in Oromia and Amhara regions and discovered that financial reporting accuracy and client satisfaction were significantly enhanced when recruiting employees based on skill tests and structured interviews. The analysis found a positive impact on the loan recovery rates and compliance by staff. The researchers recommended the communal sector reforms to integrate formal HR criteria and national employment policies.

Based on the above, available literature has given a general association between the recruitment and selection activities and performance within numerous environments in Nigeria. However, the majority of such studies only concentrated on private sector organisations, public enterprises, and educational institutions, leaving attention to the core public sector organisations that operate under civil service regulations. Furthermore, fewer prior research focused on examining the differences in effects of the core public sector organisations regarding recruitment and selection as single variables without necessarily analysing the specific effects that external recruitment practices and background verification mechanisms have on productivity outcomes. This is a major knowledge gap in the human resource practice in terms of understanding the combined and individual contributions of the two separate human resource practices on organisational performance within the peculiar institutional and regulatory environment that characterises the public sector organisations in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Human Capital Theory ([Becker, 1964](#); [Schultz, 1961](#)), which argues that organisational performance is driven by the quality of human capital in terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies. According to the theory, robust talent acquisition approaches such as competitive external recruitment and background/reference checks of potential candidates are essential in helping organisations accumulate high-quality human capital, thereby improving productivity ([Auerbach & Green, 2025](#); [Guan & Dong, 2025](#)).

Human Capital Theory is adequate in supporting this study because it directly addresses the research questions. The theory provides a conceptual framework that explains why external recruitment and background checks improve organisational performance by helping organisations select high-quality human capital. Although agency theories may explain political interference approaches, Human Capital Theory provides the best explanation of the performance drivers of talent acquisition quality, which is the primary focus of the current study.

In the context of the Nigerian civil service system, which is characterised by political patronage, nepotism and bureaucratic rigidity, Human Capital Theory suggests that external recruitment and background/reference checks are essential in improving workforce competence and productivity ([Arteaga-Fonseca et al., 2025](#); [Leoni, 2025](#))

Methods

A quantitative cross-sectional survey research design was employed to investigate the connection between recruitment, selection and employee productivity at one point in time.

Research Type

The research adopted a quantitative approach and employed a cross-sectional survey design. The sample population of 384 respondents was attained through stratified random sampling from selected organisations in the public sector of Nigeria. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data and the data were analysed by the use of multiple regression analysis to establish the relationship between the recruitment and selection practices and productivity.

Population and Sample/Informants

The study's population comprised employees drawn from selected federal Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of the Federal Government of Nigeria situated in Abuja, Nigeria. The sampling frame consisted of the employees' register domiciled at the selected MDAs, which contained comprehensive information about employees' job level, department, and tenure of service. These registers were obtained from the Human Resource Management Department of six purposively selected MDAs: three federal ministries (covering the areas of education, health, and finance) and three federal agencies (covering law enforcement, telecommunications, and oil and gas). The selection of MDAs for this study was based on the following criteria:

First, the MDAs must have a workforce size of more than 500 employees to ensure sufficient representation. Second, the MDAs must have a presence in multiple service areas of public service delivery, such as policy formulation, regulatory enforcement, and service provision. This criterion is important for increasing the external validity of the study's findings. Finally, the MDAs must be compliant with the recruitment guidelines of the Federal Civil Service Commission of Nigeria. This criterion is essential in order to isolate the effect of formal recruitment and selection policies from informal recruitment and selection practices, which are common in semi-autonomous organisations or parastatals.

The selection criteria for this study are justified on methodological grounds: a large workforce size minimises errors in sampling, diverse service mandates increase the external validity of this study, and MDAs' compliance with the Federal Civil Service Commission regulations guarantee exposure to the recruitment and selection practices under investigation.

The sample size of the study's population was calculated using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$ where $N = 9,847$, and $e = 0.05$, the minimum sample size required was calculated as follows:

$$n = 9,847 / (1 + 9,847 * (0.05)^2) = 9,847 / (1 + 24.6175) = 9,847 / 25.6175 \approx 384$$

To account for anticipated non-responses, incomplete responses, and possible dropouts which are common in large-sample survey research — the sample size was increased by 16.9% (i.e., 65 additional respondents), resulting in a total distribution of 449 questionnaires. This oversampling procedure follows standard practice (Bartlett et al., 2001) and was achieved by multiplying the calculated sample size of 384 by 1.169, which resulted in 449. A total of 378 valid questionnaires were retrieved from the 449 distributed, giving a response rate of 84% ($378/449 \times 100$). Non-response analysis was conducted by comparing the responses of early and late respondents on demographic characteristics (age, gender, tenure, job level) and study variables (external recruitment practices, background/reference checks, productivity) using independent samples t-tests. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$), indicating no non-response bias.

Stratified random sampling was employed for the selection of employees. The target population was stratified into junior, middle, and senior management strata to ensure proportionate representation across job levels.

Research Location

The setting for this study was the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of the Nigerian civil service, located in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory..

Instrumentation or Tools

The study adopted validated scales that were adapted to the Nigerian public sector setting. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

1. External Recruitment Practices Scale (10 items, adapted from Berthon et al., 2005): This scale was designed to evaluate the extent to which organisations rely on external sources for talent pooling. Sample items include the following: "Our organisation advertises job vacancies through multiple public channels," "We actively recruit candidates from professional associations and networks," and so on. The original scale was found reliable, with $\alpha = 0.88$, in the western corporate sector. For the adaptation of this scale into the Nigerian civil service sector, the items were modified to include public sector sources. Expert opinions were solicited from three HR practitioners and two public administration academicians on the relevance of the items. A few modifications were made to the items to suit the civil service sector. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.876$.
2. Background/Reference Checks (8 items, adapted from Hausknecht et al., 2004): The scale is intended to measure how thorough checks on a background/reference are carried out by an organisation. Sample items include the following: "Our organisation verifies educational qualifications from the institutions," and "We conduct thorough reference checks with previous employers." The original scale had been validated in the North American context ($\alpha = 0.84$). The Nigerian adaptation requires additional items to demonstrate the Nigerian employee verification challenges through the following statement "We confirm certificates through the National Youth Service Corps database". Expert review confirmed content validity and contextual appropriateness. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.851$.
3. Productivity (11 items, adapted from Koopmans et al., (2013): This scale measures individual and unit-level task performance, quality of work, and goal attainment. Sample items include the following: "I am able to perform my work efficiently" and "My work unit consistently meets its performance targets." The original Individual Work Performance Questionnaire has been validated in several countries ($\alpha = 0.85-0.91$). Items were reviewed for contextual fit with Nigeria's public sector performance indicators. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.887$.

Measurement Validity

Content validity: Content validity of the scales was established using a two-step expert review process. Five experts (three HR practitioners from federal MDAs and two academics from public administration and organisational behavior backgrounds) rated each item's content validity on a 4-point scale (1 = not relevant, 4 = highly relevant). Items rated below 0.80 on the Content Validity Index (CVI) were revised. All items had $CVI \geq 0.85$.

Factor structure: The researchers employed an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to check the construct validity, in which they used the principal axis factoring and the promax rotation. The data revealed 0.891 Kaiser-Meyer-

Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity showed that the statistics were significant ($\chi^2 = 5,247.32$, $df = 406$, $p < 0.001$) thus verifying that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. The EFA analysis identified three separate factors which displayed eigenvalues exceeding 1 (Factor 1: External Recruitment Practices = 8.42; Factor 2: Background/Reference Checks = 3.91; Factor 3: Productivity = 2.84) which together explained 68.4% of total variance. The study showed that all items achieved 0.50 or higher factor loading while maintaining their factor structure according to theoretical constructs without any significant cross-loadings (< 0.30). The researchers evaluated discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Discriminant validity: The construct Average Variance Extracted (AVE) showed external recruitment at 0.58 background checks at 0.54 and productivity at 0.61 which exceeded the squared correlations between constructs thus proving adequate discriminant validity. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs which further established discriminant validity.

It is worthy of note to state that productivity as a measure in this research mainly deals with employee perceptions of organisational performance outcomes rather than actual performance figures. Such a perception-based, self-report method is suitable for capturing subjective judgments of one's work quality and efficiency especially when the data is collected through a one-time survey but it is far from sufficient to lend strong empirical support for causal effects of the studied constructs on actual organisational performance.

Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires based on a structured format were given to a sample of respondents from various public sector organisations over a period of one month (September, 2025). Contact persons arranged for individual respondents to be given consent forms along with the questionnaires. Thereafter, they received clear instructions regarding the completion of the questionnaires. Questionnaires were handed out in both printed forms and electronic forms in order to achieve a wider distribution and the convenience of respondents.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done using the software package SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to report the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distributions of the variables. Multiple regression analysis was carried out to determine the effect of external recruitment practices and background/reference checks on productivity.

Before running the regression analysis, the researchers checked the main assumptions thoroughly. Multicollinearity was checked by means of variance inflation factors, and all the VIF values were less than 3.0, which means that there was no multicollinearity problem. The normality of data was first assessed by looking at the Q-Q plot and then by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which confirmed that all variables were normally distributed. The linearity assumption was checked by looking at the scatterplots of residuals versus predicted values, and no pattern was detected. The heteroscedasticity assumption was tested by using the Breusch-Pagan test where the p-value was greater than 0.05, indicating that there was no heteroscedasticity. Therefore, the researchers did not have to carry out any remedial measures for assumption violations.

In order to deal with the issue of common-method bias

that could arise from using single-source, self-reported data, the researcher utilised Harman's single-factor test. By employing exploratory factor analysis where all the items were forced to load on a single factor, the percentage of variance explained was 34.2% which is far from the 50% cutoff recommended by e.g., Podsakoff et al., (2003), thus there is very little common method variance in the data. Furthermore, a marker variable technique was used by selecting an unrelated variable (workplace aesthetics preference) which had very low correlations ($r < 0.10$) with the variables of the study, which confirmed a limited method bias further.

Ethical Approval (Optional)

Strict ethical principles were adhered to in the conduct of this research. The study was carried out on a voluntary basis, and hence, the participants were clearly informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without being penalised. To avoid any perception of coercion particularly in the public sector hierarchical environment, independent research assistants who were not employees of respondents' organizations carried out the data collection and supervisors were not involved in the survey process. All participants gave their written informed consent. Participants' anonymity was ensured by the fact that no personal identification details were obtained and the questionnaires were identified only by numbers. The data were kept in a highly secure manner on password-protected electronic files to which only the researchers had access.

Result and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The sample ($N = 378$) was predominantly male (61.4%), with the largest age group being 35–44 years (41.8%). Most respondents held Bachelor's (43.7%) or Master's degrees (47.9%). Organisational tenure was distributed relatively evenly: 31.2% had less than 5 years, 34.4% had 5–10 years, and 34.4% had 11 or more years. Job levels included junior staff (25.9%), middle management (52.1%), and senior management (22.0%). Full demographic details are presented in [Table 1](#).

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

[Table 2](#) presents means and standard deviations. All variables showed moderate mean scores on the 5-point scale. [Table 3](#) presents the correlation matrix. All variables were positively and significantly intercorrelated.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: External recruitment practices do not have significant effect on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria. Multiple regression analysis revealed that external recruitment practices were positively associated with organisational productivity ($\beta = 0.437$, $t = 8.94$, $p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis Two: Background/reference checks have no significant effect on the productivity of selected public sector organisations in Nigeria. Background/reference checks were also positively associated with organisational productivity ($\beta = 0.328$, $t = 6.71$, $p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 87.23$, $p < 0.001$), with both predictors jointly accounting for 41.7% of variance in productivity ($R^2 = 0.417$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.413$). (See [Table 4](#)).

Interpretation of key findings

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Characteristic | Category | Frequency (%) |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Gender | Male | 61.4 |
| | Female | 38.6 |
| Age Group | 35–44 years | 41.8 |
| | Other age groups | 58.2 |
| Education Level | Bachelor's degree | 43.7 |
| | Master's degree | 47.9 |
| | Other | 8.4 |
| Organisational Tenure | Less than 5 years | 31.2 |
| | 5–10 years | 34.4 |
| | 11 or more years | 34.4 |
| Job Level | Junior staff | 25.9 |
| | Middle management | 52.1 |
| | Senior management | 22.0 |

Source: Author's computation using survey data (2025)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | Mean | SD |
|--------------------------------|------|------|
| External Recruitment Practices | 3.68 | 0.82 |
| Background/Reference Checks | 3.41 | 0.89 |
| Organisational Productivity | 3.58 | 0.79 |

Source: Author's computation using survey data (2025)

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. External Recruitment Practices | 1 | | |
| 2. Background/Reference Checks | 0.483** | 1 | |
| 3. Organisational Productivity | 0.526** | 0.419** | 1 |

Note: ** p < 0.01 Source: Author's computation using survey data (2025)

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

| Model | Variables | β | t-value | p-value | R ² | Adjusted R ² | F-value |
|-------|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|-------------------------|----------|
| 1 | (Constant) | - | - | - | 0.417 | 0.413 | 87.23*** |
| | External Recruitment Practices | 0.437 | 8.94 | < 0.001 | | | |
| | Background/Reference Checks | 0.328 | 6.71 | < 0.001 | | | |

Note: *** p < 0.001 Source: Author's computation using SPSS (2025)

This study empirically established a positive correlation between external recruitment practices and productivity in Nigerian public sector organisations. However, this finding does not contradict the Human Capital Theory, which suggests that by expanding the pool of talent, the workforce quality is improved. The results of the study go beyond the simple HR knowledge as they show the issues experienced by the civil service governance where politics, patronage and nepotism are justified. External recruitment through merit-based systems can break the existing political system which favours candidates with political ties instead of those who possess actual skills (Fakorede et al., 2025).

Background/reference checks demonstrate effectiveness in enhancing productivity which makes it an important factor for governance protection purposes because it builds trust which institutions need to gain legitimacy. Also background/reference checks establish candidate authenticity through academic qualification verification thereby promoting ethical standards especially in civil service roles that demand accountability.

The findings therefore revealed that external

recruitment practices ($\beta = 0.437$) shows a stronger link to productivity than background/reference checks ($\beta = 0.328$) because its path leads to productivity gains which exceed those brought by gatekeeping functions. Notwithstanding these critical findings the two variables function together because external recruitment practices increases talent access while background/reference checks maintain quality across the system.

Alternative Explanations and Contextual Factors

The hypothesised relationships receive support from the results; however, alternative explanations require investigation of other potential explanations. Recruitment effectiveness depends on three factors which include organisational culture, leadership quality and reform maturity. Organisations with stronger ethical climates or transformational leadership may derive greater benefit from merit-based recruitment than those with entrenched patronage norms. Organisations that have made advancements in civil service reform implementation should have better HR systems which enable them to conduct both recruitment and verification processes. E-recruitment

platform adoption creates technological maturity which helps organisations improve their external sourcing and background check processes through enhanced efficiency and transparency. Future research should examine these contextual contingencies.

Practical Implications

Several practical implications for human resources management in the Nigerian public sector can be deduced from the results of the study. First, the study findings imply that organisations are to have a formalised external recruitment system that has standardised requirements for advertisement, job descriptions, and evaluation to ensure merit principles in recruitment. This could be achieved through an institutionalised National Recruitment Integrity Framework comprising standardised evaluation rubrics, independent recruitment oversight panels, and mandatory public disclosure of recruitment outcomes. This framework should incorporate real-time digital tracking of recruitment decisions from advertisement through final appointment, creating an auditable trail that deters political interference and nepotistic practices thereby minimising the possibility for discretionary actions that may undermine the integrity of the recruitment process.

Secondly, the study findings imply that organisations ought to have a formalised verification system that has clear accountabilities in terms of completion, quality, and accuracy of the verification process. This would enable organisations to track and document each step in the screening of candidates thereby enhancing transparency and providing mechanisms for accountability in cases where irregularities occur. There should be dedicated Background Verification Units staffed by trained professionals with statutory powers to conduct comprehensive credential authentication and ethical history verification on all shortlisted candidates. These Units should operate independently of line ministry HR Departments to eliminate conflicts of interest, and their verification reports should carry mandatory weight in final appointment decisions, transforming background and reference checks from peripheral procedural requirements into decisive gatekeeping mechanisms with enforceable institutional authority.

Thirdly, the study findings imply that organisations ought to have standardised verification infrastructure through partnerships and agreements with verification agencies, data-sharing agreements with relevant agencies in employment history verification, and reference checks from independent sources. This would leverage the capabilities of various agencies in the verification process and minimise the burden that would be required for each organisation to conduct thorough background checks for candidates.

Finally, the study's results demonstrate that organisations need to establish capacity-building programs for their human resources employees to train them in merit-based selection methods, ethical screening methods and verification technology while building a professional and integrity work environment within human resources departments.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings from this study validate the findings from the study by Mebom (2025), which revealed that employees' performance, commitment, engagement, and motivation are realised by the use of merit-based selection in public enterprises. Another study that found similar findings to this study is the study by Godspower (2024), which revealed that the practice of recruitment and selection explained 31.7% of employee performance

intention. However, this study is different from previous studies due to the fact that it separated external recruitment from verification mechanisms and their joint and independent relationship in civil service regulated organisations, which has been underexplored in previous Nigerian studies.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, it is a cross-sectional study and does not allow for causality to be inferred. Secondly, it is based on survey data, which is self-reported and may be subject to social desirability bias. Also, it is based on data from a single country with specific MDAs, thus, it is difficult to generalise to other countries with different civil service systems. Finally, it is measured on the individual level, but inferences are made on the organisational level. This level of analysis concerns may result in spurious relationships.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to establish temporal precedence and examine the sustainability of productivity improvements over time. Studies examining specific moderators — such as organisational culture, leadership quality, reform maturity, and technological support — would clarify the boundary conditions of the model. Comparative research across federal, state, and local government agencies would enhance the applicability and generalizability of findings. Mixed-methods designs would be valuable for examining implementation challenges and political resistance to merit-based HR reforms. Future research should also incorporate objective performance measures such as service delivery efficiency, citizen satisfaction scores, and audit compliance rates to overcome the limitations of perception-based productivity assessment.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between recruitment and selection practices and the performance of selected civil service-regulated public sector organisations in Nigeria. The results demonstrate that both external recruitment practices and background/reference checks are positively and significantly associated with organisational productivity, jointly accounting for 41.7% of variance in productivity outcomes. Theoretically, this study contributes to knowledge by extending Human Capital Theory to the underexplored context of Nigeria's civil service, where regulatory frameworks, political patronage, and governance constraints create distinctive conditions that shape talent acquisition outcomes; conditions that differ materially from those in private sector contexts where the theory is more commonly applied. Practically, the findings imply that public sector organisations should institutionalise merit-based external recruitment and systematic pre-employment verification as governance mechanisms, not merely as routine HR procedures, given their demonstrated positive relationship with organisational productivity in a regulated civil service environment.

However, in view of the aforementioned limitations, future studies should adopt longitudinal designs and a more comprehensive selection of public sector organisations in the country in order to develop highly robust evidence based studies for public sector human resource management.

Author contributions

Okhaiti Anne Ugbodaga: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualisation, Writing – Original draft. Umar Abbas Ibrahim: Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that for the purpose of clarity and integrity, they have no financial or personal relationships with anyone that could influence the study's objectivity and fairness. The study's integrity is thus maintained and the article's authenticity enhanced by the authors' disclosure of any potential bias in the outcome of the study.

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