

Nepotism and Recruitment in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission, 2015-2025

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Abstract

Recruitment serves as the cornerstone of human resource management in any institution, particularly within the public sector, where the quality and integrity of personnel significantly determine the efficiency of service delivery and governance outcomes. This study investigated the impact of nepotism on the recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses, which examined the relationship between nepotism and recruitment fairness, transparency, merit-based selection, and recruitment efficiency. The study was anchored on Public Choice Theory. The study adopted a survey research design. The population comprised 40,667 civil servants and job applicants drawn from the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. The sample size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula (1967) at a 0.05 level of significance. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents with relevant knowledge of recruitment processes, while proportional allocation ensured representation across senior staff (80), middle-level staff (180), junior staff (80), and job applicants (60). Data were collected using structured questionnaires and supplemented with secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, policy documents, and official reports. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) and inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis, with hypotheses tested at 0.05 significance level using SPSS. Findings revealed that nepotism significantly and negatively influenced recruitment fairness, transparency, merit-based selection, and recruitment efficiency. The results showed strong positive correlations between nepotistic practices and recruitment dysfunction, leading to rejection of all four null hypotheses. The study concluded that nepotism undermines meritocracy and institutional credibility in the Rivers State Civil Service. It recommended strict enforcement of merit-based recruitment policies, improved transparency mechanisms, and stronger accountability frameworks. The study contributed to knowledge by providing an integrated empirical model of recruitment dysfunction and by extending organizational justice and Weberian bureaucratic theories within the Nigerian public sector context.

Keywords: *Nepotism, Recruitment, Rivers State Civil Service Commission.*

Introduction

Nepotism remains a persistent concern in Nigeria's public service, where recruitment may be influenced by patronage, personal relationships, political connections, and ethno-regional loyalties. Musa, Muhammad, and Lawal (2022) argue that nepotistic practices may be normalized through cultural obligations and expectations of assisting relatives and loyalists. Such practices can undermine merit, institutional integrity, and administrative effectiveness.

Recruitment is central to effective public administration because the quality of personnel influences organizational performance and service delivery. Ideally, recruitment into the civil service should be guided by merit, transparency, equity, and competitive selection, as reflected in Nigeria's public service regulations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). However, studies have identified favouritism, political interference, patronage, and nepotism as challenges to merit-based recruitment in Nigeria (Adewumi & Egberongbe, 2019; Lawal et al., 2022). Nepotism, particularly the preferential treatment of relatives or associates irrespective of merit, may weaken employee morale, institutional performance, and public confidence in government institutions (Okonkwo & Dike, 2020). These concerns are relevant to Rivers State, where the Civil Service Commission is responsible for key personnel functions, including recruitment. Existing research has identified favouritism, ethnicity, political influence, and related informal practices as challenges to recruitment in the Rivers State public service. However, limited attention has been devoted specifically to nepotism and its implications for recruitment within the Civil Service Commission over an extended period. The 2015–2025 period provides an important basis for examining this issue because it encompasses changes in political leadership, administrative practices, and increasing demands for public services. Examining nepotism during this period can provide evidence on how informal relationships may have influenced recruitment and the extent to which such practices affect merit, transparency, and institutional effectiveness.

This study therefore examines the nature, extent, and implications of nepotism in recruitment within the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. It seeks to contribute empirical evidence to debates on merit-based recruitment and public-sector governance in Nigeria. Recruitment into the public service is expected to be based on merit, qualifications, competence, transparency, and equal opportunity. However, nepotism, favouritism, and political patronage may undermine these principles by giving preferential access to individuals based on family, personal, or political connections rather than qualifications (Adewumi & Egberongbe, 2019; Lawal et al., 2022). Such practices may affect the quality of personnel recruited, employee morale, institutional effectiveness, and public confidence in the civil service. Although nepotism and related forms of favouritism have been discussed in studies of Nigeria's public sector, there remains limited empirical evidence specifically examining how nepotism operates within the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Existing studies have often considered recruitment problems at the national level or examined broader issues such as ethnicity, political interference, and personnel management. Consequently, insufficient attention has been given to the specific mechanisms through which nepotism may influence recruitment, its implications for merit-based selection, and its persistence or changes during the 2015–2025 period.

This knowledge gap limits a clear understanding of the relationship between nepotism and recruitment in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. The study therefore investigates the nature and extent of nepotistic practices, the factors that facilitate them, and their implications for recruitment outcomes and institutional effectiveness during 2015–2025. The findings are intended to provide empirical evidence for strengthening transparency, equal opportunity, and merit-based recruitment in the Rivers State public service.

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of nepotism on the recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. The specific objectives are to;

- 1.Examine the effect of nepotism on recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission.
- 2.Determine the effect of nepotism on merit-based employee selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study and provide answers to the objectives of the research:

- 1.How does nepotism influence recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission from?
- 2.How does nepotism interference affect merit-based employee selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission?

The following null hypotheses were formulated to test the relationships between the dimensions of nepotism and recruitment in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission from 2015–2025:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between nepotism and recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between nepotism and merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission.

Theoretical Reviews

Public Choice Theory

Public Choice Theory is a political-economic theory that explains how decisions are made in the public sector by assuming that public officials behave just like individuals in markets guided by self-interest rather than the public good. This theory emerged as a reaction to classical public administration models that assumed that bureaucrats and politicians are benevolent actors whose goal is to serve society objectively and rationally. The intellectual foundations of the theory were laid by Duncan Black (1948) in his early work on voting theory, but it was James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock who formally developed and popularized the theory in their influential book, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (1962).

Their work earned Buchanan the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1986, in recognition of his contributions to understanding how political institutions and processes influence economic policy. At its core, Public Choice Theory assumes that: Politicians seek re-election, influence, and political survival. Bureaucrats and civil servants aim to increase their departmental budgets, job security, power, and personal status. Voters and citizens are often ill-informed or rationally ignorant, especially about complex government decisions. Institutions can be captured by elites or interest groups who manipulate policy and administrative decisions for private benefit. In contrast to traditional views of the public service as neutral and objective, Public Choice Theory portrays government officials as utility maximizers who may distort public processes, including recruitment, for personal or political advantage (Mueller, 2003; Niskanen, 1971). This is particularly relevant in developing countries like Nigeria, where the public sector is often a source of patronage, and where recruitment into civil service positions is highly competitive due to high unemployment and the promise of job security and steady income. According to Tullock (1976), in settings where institutions are weak and where oversight mechanisms are poorly enforced, public officials may act more like private agents, distributing public jobs based on kinship,

ethnicity, or political loyalty rather than merit. This is consistent with the concept of “rent-seeking”, where individuals use their position in government not to create value, but to extract benefits from public resources, including recruitment decisions. Mueller (2003) extends this analysis by showing how public choice behavior leads to systematic inefficiencies in the public sector, such as overstaffing, underperformance, low morale, and erosion of public trust. Bureaucrats may prefer hiring those loyal to them whether family members, political supporters, or ethnic allies to strengthen their internal networks and minimize resistance to their authority. This contributes to a cycle of inefficiency, where positions are filled based on relationships rather than competence. In Nigeria, public sector appointments have historically been used as instruments of political reward and ethno-regional balancing, rather than merit-based employment. For example, studies by Ayoade (1988) and Joseph (1987) have documented how the Nigerian state has been captured by elite networks that use public employment as a mechanism for consolidating power and distributing state resources.

Application to Rivers State Civil Service Recruitment

The relevance of Public Choice Theory to this study is particularly significant in light of ongoing concerns about nepotism and political interference in recruitment processes in Rivers State. Between 2015 and 2025, the Rivers State Civil Service Commission conducted several recruitment drives, including the high-profile exercise to employ 10,000 civil servants announced in 2023. While officially intended to address unemployment and boost public sector performance, this recruitment drive attracted criticism from civil society organisations who alleged that the process was politicized and lacked transparency (PH Spectator, 2023). Public Choice Theory provides a theoretical explanation for this behavior. The governor, political elites, or top bureaucrats may have had incentives to influence recruitment outcomes to reward party loyalists, secure future political support, or place allies in strategic positions within the civil service. Even members of the Civil Service Commission, expected to act independently, may have succumbed to pressures from political patrons, in line with the patron-client relationships described in Public Choice literature (Wantchekon, 2003).

Furthermore, in a state like Rivers, where ethnic politics and political godfatherism are entrenched, the theory helps to explain why formal procedures (e.g. job advertisements, interviews, and testing) are often bypassed or manipulated. The political cost of adhering strictly to merit may be perceived as too high by officeholders, especially when recruitment is seen as a way to maintain political stability and reward supporters.

Implications for Recruitment, Governance, and Public Trust

The implications of Public Choice Theory for public service recruitment are profound:

1. Recruitment is seen as a resource to be captured, rather than a process to enhance efficiency.
2. Meritocracy is undermined, leading to lower service delivery quality, lack of innovation, and poor public sector performance.
3. Public trust erodes when citizens perceive that employment is based on nepotism rather than competence.
4. Reforms are difficult, because those in power benefit from the existing system and may resist change.

This study, by investigating the recruitment processes of the Rivers State Civil Service Commission, seeks to determine whether and how such public choice dynamics have played out over the ten-year period under review. It will also explore the extent to which institutional

safeguards such as recruitment guidelines, interview panels, or verification systems have been effective or undermined by self-interested behavior.

Public Choice Theory is thus not only appropriate but essential for understanding the structural and behavioral dimensions of nepotism in public sector recruitment. It moves the analysis beyond surface-level explanations and situates nepotism within broader institutional failures and incentive structures. In the context of Rivers State, it enables a critical examination of how political and bureaucratic actors may exploit recruitment processes, and what institutional reforms are needed to restore merit and integrity in public service employment.

Conceptual Review

The conceptual reviews of this study will focus on nepotism, recruitment and civil service.

Nepotism

Nepotism is broadly defined as favouritism granted to relatives or close associates in appointments, promotions, or other advantages, especially in employment contexts, without regard to merit or competence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). The Latin root *nepos*, meaning nephew, reflects historical practice of Popes granting positions to nephews; over time the concept has expanded to encompass any familial or kinship-based favoritism. Encyclopædia Britannica (2024) emphasises that nepotism opposes meritocratic ideals and is particularly criticised when it leads to exclusion of qualified individuals.

Scholarly inquiry into nepotism explores both its antecedents and consequences. In a doctoral thesis, Rajpaul-Baptiste (2018) argues that nepotism is not limited to “collectivistic” or less developed cultures but is a global phenomenon affecting both private- and public-sector organizations. Rajpaul-Baptiste notes that despite its prevalence, psychological research has tended to neglect why some people accept nepotism while others strongly oppose it, and how it affects organizational dynamics. The work urges more attention to the social-psychological dimensions of nepotism. Nepotism tends to have largely negative effects on organizational performance, employee morale, and ethical standards. For instance, in Northern Cyprus, Araslı, Bavik, and Ekiz (2006) find that nepotism in star-rated hotels undermines human resource management, lowers job satisfaction, increases intention to quit, and generates negative word-of-mouth. Similarly, Hussein and Jaaffar (2023) in Jordan report that nepotism negatively affects the performance of academic staff, mediated by trust; the more nepotism, the lower the trust, and hence poorer performance and knowledge sharing in universities.

Uche, Akaighe, Oni, and Asekun (2020) examine public institutions in Nigeria and find that nepotism erodes ethical competence and reduces institutional performance, including service delivery in sectors such as health and infrastructure. In Pakistan, Yasin, Tahir, Aslam, Khaliq, and co-authors (2019) show that for fresh graduates, nepotism significantly influences chances of employment in public sector institutions favoring those with political or family connections over those whose merits may be equal or greater. However, some scholarship has nuanced the negative portrayal by testing whether “nepo-relations” always imply inferiority of performance. A study in Italy by Abramo, D’Angelo, and Rosati (2018) comparing “children” (relatives of existing faculty) with “non-children” (non-relatives) found that while there is evidence of favoritism, relatives do not always perform worse; in fact, among those who advanced, performance of “children” was often comparable or even superior to that of matched non-relatives in similar ranks and fields. This suggests that while nepotistic processes may allow entry advantages, the performance gap may not always be large, or may be mitigated in certain fields (Abramo, D’Angelo, & Rosati, 2018). Nepotism is a multifaceted phenomenon with roots in history and culture, manifesting in many

sectors. While it may sometimes co-exist with merit (especially when relatives happen also to be qualified), its most consistent effects are harmful: reducing fairness, trust, morale, and ultimately organizational efficiency. To counter these effects, research suggests that institutions adopt transparent policies, strengthen merit-based evaluation, and foster cultures of trust and accountability. Nepotism in employment process is a situation where those in positions of authority single handedly hijack recruitment in organizations (public and private) thereby using their power to bring in (recruit) employees who are family members, friends, relatives, loyalist etc without meritoriously conducting proper recruitment exercise, which is against the laid down standard recruitment policies and rules in the organisation. This singular recruitment style of those in management echelon (employers) has ripple effects on the entire organisation since the success and the failure of any organisation is dependent on the caliber/quality of the human resource at its disposal, not on the volume of material and financial resources available in the organisation. However, nepotism does not occur in vacuum. What brought about it is vacant position(s) in organisation which must be filled with employee(s) to keep the organisation a going-concern in pursuit of its objectives, thereby, triggering recruitment and selection exercise.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between nepotism and recruitment practices in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. The study was conducted in Rivers State, Nigeria, with particular focus on civil servants and individuals who had participated in the Commission's recruitment processes during 2015–2025.

The study population comprised civil servants in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission and individuals who had applied for civil service positions during the study period. The staff population was estimated at 40,667 (Ejo-Orusa & Egobueze, 2024). Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of approximately 396 was obtained and rounded to 400 respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents with relevant knowledge or experience of recruitment practices. The sample comprised 80 senior-level staff, 180 middle-level staff, 80 junior-level staff, and 60 job applicants.

The study employed both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire covering nepotism, favouritism, political influence, personal connections, transparency, merit-based recruitment, and recruitment outcomes. Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, official documents, policy reports, and other relevant scholarly sources.

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by the research supervisor and relevant experts to ensure that the items adequately reflected the study objectives and variables. The instrument produced a reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with IBM SPSS. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and questionnaire responses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between nepotism and recruitment outcomes, while multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the extent to which nepotism-related factors, including favouritism, political influence, and personal connections, predicted recruitment outcomes. Hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question 1: How does hiring nepotism influence recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission from 2015–2025?

Influence of Nepotism on Recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission

S/N	Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Respondents	Weighted Score ($\bar{x}$)	Mean ($\bar{x} \div 395$)	Remarks
1	Nepotism reduces equal opportunities for qualified applicants during recruitment.	160 (640)	125 (375)	70 (140)	40 (40)	395	1,195	3.03	Accepted
2	Recruitment decisions are often influenced by personal or family relationships rather than merit.	150 (600)	135 (405)	75 (150)	35 (35)	395	1,190	3.01	Accepted
3	Qualified candidates are sometimes overlooked because of favoritism in the recruitment process.	155 (620)	130 (390)	70 (140)	40 (40)	395	1,190	3.01	Accepted
4	Hiring nepotism creates unfair advantages for individuals with influential connections.	145 (580)	140 (420)	80 (160)	30 (30)	395	1,190	3.01	Accepted
5	The presence of nepotism undermines transparency and fairness in civil service recruitment.	150 (600)	135 (405)	75 (150)	35 (35)	395	1,190	3.01	Accepted
Grand Mean						395	5,955	3.01	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data presented above indicate that respondents generally agreed that hiring nepotism significantly influences recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Statement 1 recorded the highest mean score of 3.03, showing strong agreement that nepotism reduces equal opportunities for qualified applicants. Statements 2, 3, 4, and 5 each recorded a mean score of 3.01, indicating that respondents agreed that personal relationships, favoritism, and

influential connections affect recruitment decisions and undermine transparency. The findings suggest that qualified candidates may be disadvantaged when recruitment processes are influenced by non-merit factors. The grand mean of 3.01, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, confirms that respondents perceive nepotism as a major challenge to fair recruitment practices. This implies that hiring nepotism negatively affects the principles of equity, transparency, and meritocracy in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Overall, the results reveal that nepotism remains a significant factor influencing recruitment fairness between 2015 and 2025.

Research Question 2: How does nepotism affect merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission?

Effect of nepotism on Merit-Based Employee Selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission, 2015–2025

S/N	Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Respondents	Weighted Score ($\bar{x}$)	Mean ($\bar{x} \div 395$)	Remarks
6	Recruitment interference undermines merit-based selection of qualified candidates.	150 (600)	135 (405)	70 (140)	40 (40)	395	1,185	3.00	Accepted
7	External influence often affects the implementation of recruitment guidelines and procedures.	145 (580)	140 (420)	75 (150)	35 (35)	395	1,185	3.00	Accepted
8	Political and personal interference contributes to the selection of less qualified applicants.	160 (640)	130 (390)	70 (140)	35 (35)	395	1,205	3.05	Accepted
9	Interference from influential individuals compromises fairness in recruitment decisions.	155 (620)	135 (405)	65 (130)	40 (40)	395	1,195	3.02	Accepted
10	Recruitment interference reduces transparency and objectivity in candidate selection.	165 (660)	125 (375)	60 (120)	45 (45)	395	1,200	3.04	Accepted

S/N	Statement	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total Respondents	Weighted Score ($\bar{x}$)	Mean ($\bar{x} \div 395$)	Remarks
Grand Mean						395	5,970	3.02	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data presented above reveal that respondents agreed that recruitment interference negatively affects merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Statement 8 recorded the highest mean score of 3.05, indicating strong agreement that political and personal interference contributes to the selection of less qualified applicants. Statement 10 followed closely with a mean score of 3.04, suggesting that recruitment interference reduces transparency and objectivity in candidate selection. Statement 9 obtained a mean score of 3.02, showing that influential individuals often compromise fairness in recruitment decisions. Statements 6 and 7 each recorded a mean score of 3.00, indicating agreement that recruitment interference undermines merit-based selection and affects the implementation of recruitment guidelines. The grand mean of 3.02, which exceeds the criterion mean of 2.50, confirms that respondents perceive recruitment interference as a significant obstacle to merit-based selection. The findings imply that external influences weaken fairness, transparency, and objectivity in the recruitment process. Overall, the results demonstrate that recruitment interference has adversely affected merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025.

Data Analysis

Test of Hypothesis 1

H01: There is no significant relationship between hiring favoritism and recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission from 2015–2025.

Correlation between Nepotism and Recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission (2015–2025)

Variables	Ind. V (Nepotism Recruitment)	V (Hiring Dep. in (Recruitment Fairness))
Ind. V (Hiring Nepotism- Nepotism reduces equal opportunities for qualified applicants during recruitment.)	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	–
	N	395
Dep. V (Recruitment Fairness – Qualified candidates are sometimes overlooked because of favoritism in the recruitment process.)	Pearson Correlation	0.721
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	395

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The correlation analysis above shows a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between hiring favoritism (nepotism) and recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service

Commission from 2015 to 2025. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.721 indicates a strong association, while the significance value of 0.000 confirms that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that hiring favoritism is strongly linked with reduced recruitment fairness, implying that as nepotistic practices increase, fairness in recruitment processes declines. The result, based on 395 respondents, reflects a consistent perception among participants regarding the influence of favoritism on recruitment outcomes.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H01), which states that there is no significant relationship between hiring favoritism and recruitment fairness, is rejected.

Decision Statement

Based on the result of the analysis, there is a significant relationship between hiring favoritism and recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Consequently, hiring favoritism (nepotism) has a significant effect on recruitment fairness, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Test of Hypothesis 2

H02: There is no significant relationship between nepotism and merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission.

Correlation between nepotism and Merit-Based Employee Selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission (2015–2025)

Variables	Ind. V (Recruitment Interference)	Dep. V (Merit-Based Selection)
Ind. V (Recruitment Interference – Recruitment interference undermines merit-based selection of qualified candidates.)	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	–
	N	395
Dep. V (Merit-Based Selection – Political and personal interference contributes to the selection of less qualified applicants.)	0.748	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	395

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The correlation analysis in Table 4.8 shows a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between recruitment interference and merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission from 2015 to 2025. The Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.748 indicates a strong relationship, while the significance value of 0.000 confirms that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

This finding implies that recruitment interference such as political influence, personal connections, and external pressure has a strong impact on merit-based selection processes. As interference increases, merit-based selection is significantly undermined, leading to the appointment of less qualified candidates and weakening objective recruitment standards. The result, based on 395 respondents, reflects a consistent perception of the negative influence of interference on recruitment meritocracy.

Decision Statement

Based on the result of the analysis, there is a significant relationship between recruitment interference and merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission from 2015–2025. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H02) is rejected, indicating that recruitment interference significantly affects merit-based selection outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

How does nepotism affect recruitment process in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission? (Research Question 1 & Test of Hypothesis 1)

Findings indicate a clear and consistent perception among respondents that hiring nepotism significantly undermines recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. All five questionnaire items recorded mean scores above the benchmark of 2.50, with a grand mean of 3.01, suggesting a general agreement that nepotistic practices distort fairness, transparency, and merit-based recruitment processes. Specifically, Statement 1 recorded the highest mean score (3.03), showing strong agreement that nepotism reduces equal opportunities for qualified applicants. This implies that recruitment processes are perceived to be skewed in favour of individuals with personal or family connections, thereby marginalising equally or more qualified candidates. This finding aligns with Adams' (1963) Equity Theory, which explains that perceptions of unfairness arise when individuals believe that outcomes are distributed based on bias rather than merit. When applied to public recruitment, unequal treatment weakens trust in institutional processes and reduces perceived legitimacy of employment decisions.

Statements 2 and 3 (mean = 3.01 each) further revealed that recruitment decisions are often influenced by personal relationships rather than merit, and that qualified candidates are overlooked due to favoritism. This finding reflects long-standing concerns in public administration literature that nepotism distorts rational bureaucratic systems. Weber's (1947) bureaucratic theory emphasizes meritocracy, impersonality, and rule-based recruitment as the foundation of efficient administration. However, the findings suggest that these principles are weakened in practice within the Rivers State Civil Service Commission, where informal relationships appear to override formal recruitment guidelines. Statement 4 (mean = 3.01) shows that nepotism creates unfair advantages for individuals with influential connections. This is consistent with Ayoade (1988) and Joseph (1987), who describe Nigerian public administration as being shaped by patronage networks where access to public employment is often mediated by influence rather than competence. Such practices distort institutional neutrality and contribute to inefficiency in human resource management. Similarly, Statement 5 (mean = 3.01) indicates that nepotism undermines transparency and fairness in recruitment. Transparency is a core principle of modern public administration, as emphasized by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), who argue that civil service should prioritize accountability and fairness in service delivery processes.

The erosion of transparency due to nepotism leads to public distrust, reduced organizational legitimacy, and declining confidence in government institutions. The grand mean of 3.01 confirms that respondents strongly perceive nepotism as a major determinant of unfair recruitment practices. This aligns with empirical studies such as Adewumi and Egberongbe (2019), who found that nepotism significantly reduces public sector performance in Nigeria, and Eze and Nkwede (2022), who observed that favoritism remains a persistent challenge in recruitment processes across Nigerian public institutions. Similarly, Adeoye and Adedoyin (2021) emphasized that political and personal interference in employment decisions weakens fairness and institutional credibility in Nigeria's civil service. From a broader theoretical perspective, the findings also align with

organizational justice theory (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990), which argues that fairness perceptions are central to employee trust and institutional effectiveness. When recruitment processes are perceived as unfair, it reduces organizational legitimacy and discourages qualified applicants from engaging with the civil service system. In addition, Chukwuma et al. (2019) and Chatterjee and Ray (2021) emphasize that nepotism negatively affects human capital development by limiting access to competent individuals, thereby weakening organizational productivity and long-term development outcomes. This is particularly important in civil service institutions where efficiency and competence directly influence governance quality and service delivery. The correlation analysis in Table 4.7 reveals a strong and statistically significant relationship between hiring nepotism and recruitment fairness, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.721 and a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$).

This indicates that nepotism is strongly associated with reduced fairness in recruitment processes. The strength of the correlation suggests that as nepotistic practices increase, recruitment fairness significantly declines. This finding supports the earlier descriptive results and reinforces the argument that merit-based recruitment is being compromised by informal influences. The result also aligns with Fernandez and Rainey (2006), who argue that successful public sector management depends on adherence to fairness, transparency, and merit-based systems, while deviations from these principles reduce institutional effectiveness. Similarly, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) highlight that corruption in recruitment processes undermines governance systems by weakening accountability and encouraging inefficiency. In the same vein, Banerjee, Duflo, and Kremer (2018) explain that corruption and favoritism in public institutions distort resource allocation and reduce developmental outcomes, particularly in developing countries. Given the statistical significance ($p = 0.000$), the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant relationship between hiring nepotism and recruitment fairness, is rejected. This confirms that hiring nepotism has a significant and negative effect on recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. Based on the empirical analysis and statistical evidence, there is a significant relationship between hiring nepotism and recruitment fairness in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Consequently, hiring nepotism significantly influences and undermines recruitment fairness, leading to reduced equal opportunities, weakened transparency, and compromised merit-based selection. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The implication of these findings is that recruitment practices within the Commission are substantially affected by informal influences such as nepotism. This not only weakens fairness but also undermines the broader goals of public administration, including efficiency, accountability, and service delivery. Addressing nepotism is therefore essential for strengthening institutional integrity and improving human resource outcomes in the civil service system.

How does nepotism affect merit-based employee selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission?

(Research Question 2 & Test of Hypothesis 2)

Findings indicate a strong consensus among respondents that recruitment interference significantly undermines merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. All the measured items recorded mean scores above the 2.50 benchmark, with a grand mean of 3.02, showing that respondents consistently agree that external interference weakens objectivity, fairness, and merit-driven recruitment outcomes. Statement 8 recorded the highest mean score (3.05), indicating strong agreement that political and personal interference contributes to the selection of less qualified applicants. This finding suggests that recruitment decisions are not

always based on competence but are often influenced by external actors with personal or political interests. This supports Ayoade's (1988) argument that Nigerian public institutions often operate within a patronage system where political loyalty and personal networks influence administrative decisions rather than merit. Statement 10 (mean = 3.04) shows that recruitment interference reduces transparency and objectivity in candidate selection. This finding is consistent with Armstrong and Taylor (2020), who emphasize that transparency and objectivity are key principles of effective human resource management, particularly in civil service institutions. When these principles are compromised, recruitment outcomes become questionable and less credible, reducing public trust in government institutions. Statement 9 (mean = 3.02) reveals that interference from influential individuals compromises fairness in recruitment decisions. This aligns with Pfeffer (2019), who argues that power dynamics within organizations often determine access to opportunities, especially when influential actors manipulate formal systems for personal or group advantage.

In the context of the Rivers State Civil Service Commission, this suggests that individuals with political or social influence may override established recruitment guidelines, thereby weakening institutional integrity. Statements 6 and 7, both with mean scores of 3.00, further confirm that recruitment interference undermines merit-based selection and affects the implementation of recruitment guidelines and procedures. This indicates that even where formal rules exist, their enforcement is weakened by external pressures.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings strongly align with Weberian bureaucracy, which emphasizes rule-based administration and meritocracy as the foundation of efficient governance. Weber (1947) argues that bureaucratic systems must operate on impersonal rules rather than personal influence. However, the findings suggest that in practice, recruitment processes in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission deviate from these principles due to persistent interference. The results also support organizational justice theory (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1990), which highlights that fairness perceptions in organizational processes directly affect trust and legitimacy. When recruitment processes are influenced by interference, applicants perceive the system as unfair, which can discourage competent individuals from applying for public sector jobs. This ultimately reduces the quality of human capital entering the civil service system. Empirically, the findings are consistent with Adeoye and Adedoyin (2021), who found that political interference significantly affects employment processes in Nigeria's civil service.

Similarly, Eze and Nkwede (2022) argue that recruitment malpractice remains a persistent challenge in Nigerian public institutions, where external influence often overrides merit-based selection. Lawal, Musa, and Muhammad (2022) also observed that corruption and interference in recruitment processes reduce efficiency and weaken institutional performance. At the international level, studies by Araslı, Bavik, and Ekiz (2006) and Padgett and Morris (2021) show that nepotism and interference in hiring decisions negatively affect human resource management outcomes, particularly in terms of fairness, productivity, and employee morale. These findings reinforce the view that recruitment interference is not only a local issue but a global governance challenge, although it is more pronounced in developing countries. Furthermore, Chatterjee and The correlation analysis in Table 4.10 reveals a strong and statistically significant relationship between recruitment interference and merit-based selection, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.748 and a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that recruitment interference has a strong negative influence on merit-based selection processes.

The strength of the correlation suggests that as recruitment interference increases, the level of merit-based selection significantly decreases. This finding reinforces the descriptive results and

confirms that recruitment decisions are heavily influenced by external forces such as political pressure, personal connections, and influential individuals. This result is consistent with Fernandez and Rainey (2006), who argue that effective public sector performance depends on adherence to merit principles and resistance to political interference. The presence of recruitment interference therefore not only affects internal efficiency but also weakens public confidence in governance systems. Given the statistical significance ($p = 0.000$), the null hypothesis (H_0), which states that there is no significant relationship between recruitment interference and merit-based selection, is rejected. This confirms that recruitment interference significantly undermines merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025.

Based on the empirical evidence and statistical analysis, there is a significant relationship between recruitment interference and merit-based selection in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. Consequently, recruitment interference significantly affects merit-based selection by weakening meritocracy, reducing transparency, and promoting the appointment of less qualified candidates. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. The overall implication of these findings is that recruitment interference remains a major barrier to effective human resource management in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission. It undermines meritocracy, weakens institutional credibility, and reduces the quality of personnel recruited into civil service. Addressing this challenge is essential for strengthening transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public sector recruitment processes.

Conclusion

This study concludes that unethical recruitment practices significantly undermine the effectiveness of human resource management in the Rivers State Civil Service Commission between 2015 and 2025. The findings reveal that hiring nepotism, recruitment interference, reward bias, and preferential treatment all have strong and statistically significant negative effects on recruitment fairness, merit-based selection, transparency, and the quality of recruitment outcomes. The study established that these practices distort due process, weaken institutional accountability, and promote the selection of less qualified candidates, thereby reducing overall workforce competence and civil service efficiency. The rejection of all four null hypotheses confirms that recruitment malpractice is not incidental but systematically embedded within the recruitment system. Consequently, the study concludes that the persistence of these practices poses a serious challenge to effective governance and public sector performance. Strengthening merit-based recruitment, transparency mechanisms, and accountability frameworks is therefore essential for improving civil service integrity and service delivery outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- 1.Strengthening merit-based recruitment policies:** The Rivers State Civil Service Commission should strictly enforce merit-based recruitment policies that eliminate nepotism. Clear and measurable qualification standards should be applied consistently, and all recruitment processes should be transparently documented to ensure equal opportunities for all applicants, regardless of personal or family connections.
- 2.Curbing political and external interference in recruitment processes:** Government authorities should establish stronger institutional safeguards to minimize political and external interference in recruitment decisions. Independent recruitment panels should be constituted, and

legal sanctions should be enforced against any individual or group found influencing recruitment outcomes outside official procedures.

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