

## **The Challenges of Employee Resourcing: The Perceptions of Managers in Nigeria**

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## **The Challenges of Employee Resourcing: The Perceptions of Managers in Nigeria**

**Purpose** – The existing literature on the recruitment and selection process in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) context has not sufficiently revealed inherent challenges. This article examines managers' perceptions of employee resourcing in Nigeria.

**Methodology** – This article uses qualitative data which was generated from the semi-structured interviews of 61 managers across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria.

**Findings** – The article finds that in addition to the Federal Character Principle and the Quota System Policy, favouritism, ethnicity, age and gender discrimination, as well as corruption significantly inhibit the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Consequently, the ability to hire the best workers to improve competitiveness is also inadvertently hampered.

**Originality/value** – The paper shows that the institutional and cultural variations in SSA require a nuanced approach in the recruitment and selection process in order to enhance organisational competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Recruitment, selection, employee resourcing, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

This article focuses on investigating the challenges of employee resourcing using Nigeria as the contextual platform. The article aims to advance the understanding of employee resourcing issues from a non-western perspective (Nigeria). Generally, the majority of studies on employee resourcing have been undertaken in western countries (Barret et al., 2006; Catano et al., 2009; Piotrowski and Armstrong, 2006). In a recent study, Dainty et al. (2009) pointed out that employee resourcing (ER) is one of the core strategic functions of human resource management (HRM). ER focuses on matching human resource capabilities with the strategic and operational needs of an organisation and ensures that the resources are efficiently utilised (Armstrong and Baron, 2002). This includes core HRM activities such as recruitment and selection, which must be carefully managed in order to support strategic objectives (Taylor, 2008). However, organisations across the world are confronted with the difficulties of recruiting and selecting the right candidates for vacant positions. Population explosions exacerbate those challenges. For instance, the population of Nigeria is projected to surpass that of the US by 2025 (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, poor recruitment and selection processes can have both short-term and long-term productivity consequences for organisations (Kanyemba et al., 2015). Some of the negative effects of poor recruitment include recruitment costs, a loss of goodwill or reputation, increased labour turnover, high training expenses, and loss of profitability (Chidi, 2013; Robbins et al., 2009). Researchers have highlighted the fact that bureaucratic structures of the African work setting including the employee resourcing activities are often influenced by ethno-religious and political contextual issues (Kahn and Ackers, 2004; Nyambegera 2002). This point is supported by Jenkins (1994) who argues that an ethnic-sensitive society often places a great importance on ethnic categorization, which has a powerful influence on the criterion that governs the allocation of jobs to the job seekers – a process that may be ethnically biased. However,

while it is difficult to expunge biases completely from the recruitment and selection process, the system can be designed in ways that will make it harder for biased minds to skew judgment (Bohnet, 2016). Drawing on extant relevant literature to this subject (Chidi, 2013; Gunu et al., 2013; Tiemo and Arubayi, 2012), and in response to the call made by Fajana et al. (2011) in relation to the shortage of academic research on HRM in Nigeria, this article explores the managers' perceptions of the issues and challenges confronting the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. In order to fill the gap in the literature, the African employee resourcing process is explored herein from the point of view of Nigerian managers. Specifically, respondents were asked two broad interrelated questions as it relates to their organisation: first, the issues and challenges associated with the recruitment and selection process; and second, the actual process of employing new employees. Private and public sector organisations in Nigeria have been chosen in order to capture a holistic view of managers' perceptions of the issues and challenges of the employee resourcing process. This article deals with a Sub-Saharan African (SSA) context, wherein Nigeria is the empirical focus. This study improves our understanding of the challenges and processes of recruitment and selection in the context of a developing country and SSA. The research outcomes will be useful for HRM practice in the region. In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, this study begins with relevant and contextual literature review. The methodology is explained and thereafter the findings presented and discussed. Finally, the implications thereof are highlighted and conclusions drawn.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Recruitment and Selection in Context**

Recruitment remains one of the most important functions of HRM because the success or failure of an organisation depends on the quality of its human resources (HR) (Tyson, 2006; Wickramasinghe, 2007). It is specifically crucial for ensuring the performance and

competitiveness of an organisation. This may well be the reason why many organisations spend as much as 31% of their annual budget on recruitment and retention (Leonard, 1999). Recruitment refers to the process of generating qualified applicants for vacant jobs and involves advertising jobs using different media, such as newspapers, websites, etc. (Madia, 2011; Mathis and Jackson, 2004). Taylor (2005) defined recruitment as an activity which generates a large number of applicants who seek jobs in an organisation out of which appropriate candidates are then selected. This article adopts Armstrong's (2012) definition of recruitment as the process of finding and employing the workers that an organisation needs. The recruitment process also involves advertising vacant positions, receiving responses from the pool of applicants, preparing and undertaking tests, and subsequently interviewing and assessing applicants for the relevant positions (Armstrong, 2012). All of these steps are undertaken in order to ensure that the most qualified applicants are employed for the vacant positions (Chidi, 2013). According to Gatewood and Field (2001), recruitment has three distinct purposes: (a) to increase the pool of applicants at minimum cost; (b) to meet the organisation's legal and social obligations associated with the demographic make-up of its workers; and (c) to help with the selection process by eliminating poorly qualified applicants. Recruitment can be undertaken internally or externally, depending on the nature of the vacant position(s) and the organisation's policy (Louw, 2013). Recruitment could also take the form of direct application by mail or application in person, depending on the nature of the job and the type of organisation (Beardwell, 2007). Other types of recruitment include the use of recruitment agencies, university campus recruitment, walk-ins, personal contacts, career fairs, newspaper advertisements, etc. (Madia, 2011; Tucker, 2012). Researchers have labelled these types of recruitment as "traditional" (Galanaki, 2002; Stone et al., 2006), while television, radio and online recruitment (e-recruitment) are regarded as "modern" recruitment (Tucker, 2012). However, the use of online recruitment is increasing among organisations because of

its cost effectiveness (Pollit, 2005; Tong and Sivanand, 2005). Online recruitment is accelerating among global organisations as highlighted by McManus and Ferguson (2003). In their study, 29% of global organisations were found to have used online recruitment in 1998. This figure increased to 91% in 2002.

On the other hand, selection is the process of choosing the most appropriate candidate(s) for the vacant position(s) from the job applicants (Mondy, 2010). Deciding which applicant receives which particular job through written tests and other criteria is part of the selection process (Baroukh and Kleiner, 2002). The primary aim of the selection process is to identify and hire the most qualified applicant(s) for the vacant position(s) (Louw, 2013). Recruiting a large number of people is easy, but selecting the best out of them is often problematic for employers (Branine, 2008). This is because employing the wrong people can cause long-term negative effects, such as high training costs, a loss of reputation, increased labour turnover, meagre production, and a loss of profitability (Chidi, 2013). Conventionally, “Person-Environment Fit” is the main instrument that is used in the selection process (Ivancevich et al., 2011; Sekiguchi, 2004). Researchers have, however, given support to a multilevel fit selection process, such as “Person-Job Fit” and “Person-Organisation Fit” in order to employ the best applicants (Chuang et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2004; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002). There are several other methods through which the right applicants could be selected (Schmidt and Hunter, 1998); nevertheless, applicant selection procedures differ between organisations (Branine, 2008). On the whole, the recruitment and selection process starts with the need to fill a vacant or new position and then conducting a job analysis to develop the job and person specifications (Ballantine, 2009). The process involves understanding labour shortage or surplus by the evaluation of human resource needs and availability (Noe et al., 2008).

## **Recruitment and Resource-Based Theory**

Resource-based theory (RBT) suggests that human assets can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). This emphasises the importance of human capital for sustainable organisational success. The accomplishment of an organisation's aims and objectives lies in the quality of its workforce (Baroukh and Kleiner, 2002). This is why effective recruitment remains a key factor in the success of an organisation (Williamson, 2000). Bidwell (2011) argued that internal recruitment is the most efficient (in terms of employee performance and firm-specific knowledge and skills) method of recruitment. External recruitment is when people are recruited from outside the organisation to occupy vacant positions (Royal and Althausser, 2003) whilst internal recruitment is when an organisation recruits within its ranks to fill vacant positions (Bidwell, 2011; Anyim et al., 2011). For Bidwell (2011), internal recruits perform better than external hires, even though they cost less and are often paid less. Since it is important to get the HR right, several studies have examined the process that governs internal recruitment and its importance in organisational success (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Althausser and Kalleberg, 1981; Dencker, 2009). On the one hand, Baker et al. (1994) argued that in many cases external hires tend to have more experience and are better educated than internally promoted staff. Devaro (2016), nevertheless, contends that the decision to hire within or from outside of the organisation depends on factors such as the nature and level of the job, the characteristics of the organisation, and the system of the organisation's HRM policies. The choice of methods, however, aims to fill the vacant positions with the best candidates in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Drawing again on RBT, organisations compete against each other on the basis of their resources and capability (Barney, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1984). According to Armstrong (2012, p. 7), "competitive advantage is achieved if an organisation's resources are valuable, rare, and costly to imitate". RBT advances that HR form an essential factor in terms

of assisting an organisation in its goals, mission, and vision and in terms of achieving a competitive advantage (Barney, 2001). The theory maintains that the strategic capability of an organisation depends on the quality and strength of its HR (Armstrong, 2012). RBT, therefore, focuses on the skills, knowledge, and competencies of employees. The theory provides that an organisation can achieve a competitive advantage over its competitors by attracting, employing, developing, and retaining resourceful workers (Bowen et al., 1991). HRM plays a prominent role in ensuring that an organisation's HR are valuable and resourceful (Armstrong, 2012). Therefore, efficient recruitment and selection of employees (whether internal or external) will provide an organisation with a competitive advantage and the necessary strategic capability to achieve success (Hoopes et al., 2003).

### **International Recruitment**

Within the global business environment, strategic international HR capabilities have increased in importance (Osabutey et al., 2015). The intensification of global competition (in terms of skills requirements, innovation, and creativity) has compelled many organisations to adopt sophisticated recruitment and selection strategies in order to recruit the best employees (Tong and Sivanand, 2005). International organisations need to understand how cultural differences can influence the dynamics and challenges of recruitment and selection in different countries (Baik and Park, 2015). Osabutey et al. (2015) emphasised that, in the SSA context, institutional and cultural factors influence the selection process. They noted that cultural values, favouritism, nepotism, corruption and labour market oversupply also present challenges for recruitment processes for multinationals. They also observed that, with respect to recruitment and selection in Africa, there is often a battle between opposing dimensions (e.g. qualification vs nepotism, equal opportunities vs women's roles). This supports the suggestion that some countries provide a more conducive climate for local recruitment, whilst some make it difficult for foreign multinationals to recruit locally for their businesses (Fu and

Kamenou, 2011; Olló-López et al., 2011). In many studies, Kogut and Singh's (1988) cultural index (based on Hofstede's (1980) classifications of culture) is used to address strategic issues, such as how host country differences influence employment in foreign subsidiaries (Boyacigiller, 1990; Gong, 2003; Harzing, 2001). However, whether an organisation is local or international, recruiting the right candidates is often the ultimate goal (Scullion and Collings, 2006), since RBT suggests that HR is essential for organisational performance and competitiveness (Barney, 1991). Host country governments have produced legislation with which organisations must comply in terms of recruiting in developing countries. However, the related nuances are not adequately understood by practitioners and researchers are yet to give the issue the attention it requires (Osabutey et al., 2015). It is essential that the HR functions find ways to balance a host nation's demands (in terms of recruitment and selection) and the organisation's recruitment standards.

Recruitment and selection processes in countries with groups that have been marginalised historically often develop and implement policies as well as make a conscious effort aimed at redressing labour market imbalances. Terms such as affirmative action or employment equity are often used in the literature to describe this phenomenon. The most notable example is that which started in the 1960s in the United States aimed at addressing racial differences in employment (Days, 1993). In the 1970s, there were similar initiatives in Britain to ensure employment equity for women and minorities (of Asian, Indian, African and Caribbean origin) as well as the disabled (Naidoo, 1997; Thomas, 2002). In the African context, Strachan (1993) observed the attempts to increase representation of black Zimbabweans in employment with particular emphasis on the public sector and not without efforts to achieve a reasonable representation across the parastatals and some private sector organisations. Resolute efforts have been made to address employment equity and affirmative action along racial and gender lines in South Africa as well (Thomas, 2002; Mathur-Helm, 2005). The

main focus of earlier attempts at affirmative action focused on increasing racial balance with some attempts to include gender balance. Even in the African contexts racial balance issues predominate. Although these initiatives have largely improved the racial and gender balance in employment opportunities, perspectives that address similar imbalances across ethnic lines are scarce. Countries in SSA, such as Nigeria, are faced with more complex ethnic diversity which calls for the need for ethnic balance in employment.

Business activities in most developing countries are largely influenced by institutions that, to a large extent, can be described as weak (Khanna and Palepu, 2006) and these inadvertently affect the recruitment and selection processes. Arguably, institutional theory would suggest that organisations operating in a similar environment are likely to adapt or adopt existing practices, processes and structures (Fogarty, 1996; Ituma and Simpson, 2009). Overall, the implication of institutional theory for human resource issues, such as recruitment and career development, are likely to follow established institutional requirements (Ovadge and Ankomah, 2001; Ituma and Simpson, 2009). Therefore, employment practices are expected to be driven by historical, institutional and cultural nuances and their related contextual factors. The Nigerian labour market is expected to be influenced by historical and institutional arrangements.

### **The Nigerian Labour Market**

The outcomes of the labour market play a crucial role in determining the socio-economic status of individuals and households (Ogwumike et al., 2006). The labour market in developing countries such as Nigeria is characterised by high unemployment rates with a high level of informal sector employment. The wages and conditions of employment in the informal sector are inadequate and productivity is considered relatively low (Ogwumike et al., 2006). However, in order to correct the imperfections that characterise labour markets, countries around the world (including Nigeria) have been urged to adopt a complex system of

laws and institutions related to employment issues (Cok et al., 2009). Arguably, the current state of the Nigerian labour market (in which even the gainfully employed are hanging on the precipice of uncertainty) was never imagined by those who witnessed the boom period approximately four decades ago (Asabor, 2012). The volatility in the Nigerian labour market is a result of “skills mismatching” (Petters and Asuquo, 2009), three years of civil war in which millions of lives and properties were lost, and the 28 years of military rule that destroyed the economy. In addition, corruption and mismanagement have now become preeminent among the political élites and public office holders, among others (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2010). Job security in Nigeria is not guaranteed (Ogwumike et al., 2006). Ogwumike et al. (2002) suggested that individuals with no skills or limited skills and even some of those who are in employment are at risk if any drastic changes occur in the highly volatile labour market. According to Ogwumike et al. (2006) and the Nigerian Manpower Board (NMB) (1998), those who are self-employed dominate the Nigerian labour market. The labour force stands at 53.83 million people, out of which 70% work in agriculture, 10% work in manufacturing, while the remaining 20% work in the service sector. The Nigerian unemployment rate stood at 23.9% in 2011 according to the CIA (World Fact Book, 2015).

The Federal Character Principle (FCP), which gave rise to a quota system in Nigeria, was established in order to solve the problems of inequality and marginalisation. It is aimed at avoiding the predominance of persons from certain states, ethnic or other sectional groups in government agencies and other public sector organisations (Fajana et al., 2011). The FCP, as a Nigerian Federal Government Act, was later incorporated into the 1999 Constitution and states that:

*The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby*

*ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional group in that government or in any of its agencies (Section 14(3) Nigerian Constitution, 1999).*

On the other hand, the Quota System Policy (QSP) aims to rationally distribute national wealth and resources in such a way that every ethnic and racial group will be well-represented (Mustapha, 2007; Son-Thierry and Weil, 2010). Recruitment practices in the public and private sectors have similarities and differences. Public organisations are mandated by the FCP of 2003 and the QSP in terms of recruiting employees according to the national diversity legislation (Tiemo and Arubayi, 2012). It is important to consider that FCP and QSP are mandatory for government owned organisations; however, privately owned organisations are not covered within these policies.

## **Research Method**

This study employs a qualitative research method to explore the managers' perceptions of the issues and challenges in terms of recruitment and selection processes in the SSA context using Nigeria as the empirical focus. This study is inductive in nature; thus, semi-structured interviews constituted the primary and the main data source (following Cassell and Symon, 2004; Mason, 2002); and data driven thematic analysis was applied (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## **Sample**

The sampling employed to select participants was purposive and snowballing. The aim was to select participants who would be best able to provide responses that will answer the research questions. Participants were sought from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria in order to ensure a fair representation of managers' views. Considering the large population of Nigeria (181 million people) and the rising rate of unemployment (CIA World Factbook, 2015), the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria has come under academic scrutiny (Chidi, 2013; Gunu et al., 2013). The research sample consisted of 61 managers of public and private

organisations across Nigeria. The interviews were undertaken with either the general manager or the HR managers, depending on who was responsible for the recruitment and selection process of the organisation. These respondents varied in gender, age, marital status, years in service, organisation, and the part of the country where they work (Table 1).

### **Data Collection**

A total of forty-one semi-structured interviews were initially conducted by the first author. In order to improve reliability and to ensure that no important themes were left uncovered, an additional 20 “confirmatory” interviews were conducted; therefore, a total of 61 interviews were undertaken. Responses from an additional 20 interviews corroborated the themes found in the previous 41 interviews and no new themes emerged. This means that this study reached the point that Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 61) described as “theoretical saturation”. A prepared interview guide serves as a guideline for the semi-structured interviews. This was structured following an exhaustive review of the literature and included the following among others: what are the issues and challenges confronting the recruitment and selection process in your organisation? How do you think the problems could be solved?

Ethical considerations guided the study as participants were provided with an overview of the study and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, consent forms were provided prior to beginning the interviews, stating the purpose of the study and participants were informed of their voluntary involvement in the study and their unreserved right to withdraw from the study at any time. All interviews were recorded, with the exception of four respondents who declined to give permission for voice recording. In these cases, meticulous notes were taken and handed back to these four respondents in order to confirm that the notes were an accurate reflection of the interview. On average each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All of the interviews took place in the participants’ offices at their convenient time.

**Table 1 Respondents' Profile**

| Respondents          | Age     | Gender |   | Private Org. | Public Org | Organisational Tenure |
|----------------------|---------|--------|---|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
|                      |         | M      | F |              |            |                       |
| South - West (15)    | 39 - 51 | 9      | 6 | 5            | 10         | 7 - 12                |
| South - East (10)    | 42 - 53 | 6      | 4 | 5            | 5          | 6 - 14                |
| South - South (9)    | 46 - 57 | 5      | 4 | 4            | 5          | 8 - 16                |
| North - East (8)     | 48 - 59 | 6      | 2 | 4            | 4          | 7 - 11                |
| North - West (9)     | 51 - 57 | 8      | 1 | 4            | 5          | 8 - 12                |
| North - Central (10) | 48 - 58 | 7      | 3 | 4            | 6          | 8 - 14                |

The demographic profile of respondents is presented in table 1. A total number of 61 managers, who are responsible for the recruitment procedures in their respective organisations, participated in this study. Fifteen respondents from the South-West, ten respondents from South-East, and nine respondents from South-South, eight respondents from North-East, nine respondents from North-West, and ten respondents from the North-Central. The respondents' age ranged between 39-59 years old. Thirty-five of the respondents work in public organisations, while 26 of them work in private organisations with organisational tenure (time with employers as managers) ranging between 7 and 16 years. It is essential to note that the disproportionate number of the interviewees for each geo-political zone was due to access and availability issues with respondents. Furthermore, the respondents attest that the standard recruitment procedures in their organisations include variations and combinations of: advertising the vacant positions, a selection process, an aptitude test, and then one-to-one interview. It is important to note that FCP and QS are only applicable to public organisations.

### **Data Analysis and Procedure**

Data-driven thematic analysis, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006); Corbin and Strauss (2008), was applied for this study. The recorded interviews were transcribed

immediately after the exercise and analysed interpretively. Transcripts were analysed through careful reading and re-reading and recurring themes were highlighted. After a narrative summary of the interviews had been drafted, open coding (the identification of key points and objectives) was applied (Boeije, 2005). The researchers then grouped the first set of codes into categories according to common codes. The researchers did not impose coding categories a priori; rather, the researchers remained open to insights by allowing the categories to emerge from the data in order to avoid missing important themes. The categories were then marked with different colours in order to facilitate analysis of the data and a thematic map was drawn. The main categories were further fine-tuned by frequent comparisons until a representative overview was achieved. Emergent themes from the data became the categories for analysis (prearranged enigmas were verified twice in order to ensure reliability) and investigator triangulation (Polit and Beck, 2004) was applied.

## Findings

Responses to questions about what issues and challenges influence the employee resourcing process according to Nigerian managers resulted in emergence of six major themes: (1) discrimination, favouritism, and nepotism; (2) corruption; (3) the FCP and the QSP; (4) resource constraints; and (5) the unemployment rate. In addition, the respondents commented specifically on the recruitment process which was analysed separately.

**Table 2 Emergent themes with illustrative extracts**

| Emerging Themes   | Illustrative Extracts  |
|---|--|
| Discrimination, favouritism, and nepotism                       | Most organisations prefer to employ male workers over female workers...<br>The recruitment and selection process in Nigeria is characterised by nepotism and favouritism.          |
| Corruption  | Vacant positions are often corrupted either through payment of bribes or exchange of favours.  |
| Federal Character Principle (FCP) and Quota System Policy (QSP) | The FCP prevents us from hiring the best employees because the distribution of government jobs is based on a quota system... the problem is that it puts equality over excellence. |

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Resource constraints     | Good recruitment and selection mechanisms require resources that not all organisations have.  |
| Unemployment rate        | There are too many people unemployed, too many people looking for jobs. There is a higher number of responses than expected and more work in terms of the selection process.  |
| The recruitment process. | The process and practice for most organisations are different. They do not advertise vacant positions – they just employ whoever they want. The few that do advertise vacant positions will ask whoever they actually want to apply like everyone else, and the jobs will eventually be offered to them, even if there are other better candidates. |

### Researchers' Findings 2017

#### (1) Discrimination, Favouritism, and Nepotism

The majority of respondents commented that employment is influenced considerably by ethnicity, age, gender, and religious affiliation. For example, a respondent who is the personnel manager of the company where he works commented:

*Most companies (including this one) employ workers based on some traditional beliefs that women, especially in this part of the world, cannot stay longer at work beyond closing hour; and staying away from work for the period of maternity leave is also an issue for most private companies. As a result, most private companies prefer to employ male workers over female workers. For example, the chairman's directive to employ more male workers in our last recruitment exercise resulted in the employment of 18 male workers and only seven female workers who are unmarried (Respondent J).*

This is a serious issue which confronts the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Other respondents gave detailed views of the issue:

*It happens everywhere in Nigeria. Most organisations prefer to employ male workers over female workers. But, it is different in public organisations because of the Federal Government Law that says no one must be discriminated against due to their age, gender, religion, or ethnic background. That is why we employ both male and female workers in public organisations; not on the same ratio, but better than what is obtainable in private organisations (Respondent K).*

*The issue is not just about employing few female employees. Some employers, depending on the nature of their business, only employ female workers who are between ages 18 and 30 and who are not married. I have previously worked in a company where they made*

*newly recruited female workers to sign an undertaking that they will not get pregnant within seven years of their employment...unfortunately, the unemployment rate made all but two female job seekers consent to such an unscrupulous arrangement...yes, the issue is that serious (Respondent L).*

Ethnic division emerged within this theme. Many job seekers were employed based on their ethnic affiliation rather than merit. This issue affects the recruitment process both in private and public organisations. Respondents shared their views and experiences as follows:

*The majority of the managers tend to employ people from their ethnic group. Although this practice is wrong and bad for the image of the company and the recruitment and selection process, it happens everywhere. Four of us were interviewed for this position about six years ago, but I got the job. The manager later told me he gave me the job because we are from the same ethnic group...I have also done the same thing for a couple of guys working here (Respondent Q).*

*Ethnic affiliation plays a crucial role in influencing the recruitment and selection process. Managers and recruitment officers tend to favour people from their ethnic group. It is a bad habit, but it is rampant in the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria (Respondent W).*

A respondent with a wealth of experience (both in public and private organisations) summed up the issue as follows:

*The issue goes beyond that organisations employ more male workers than female workers but (also that) few female workers attain senior positions. Aside from the gender issue, ethnic background, age, social class, and (in some cases) religious affiliation influences the recruitment and selection process. The process in Nigeria lacks equality... For instance, this company will not employ anybody above the age of 40 for positions below office manager, it prefers to employ unmarried women, and it will not appoint women to its board. The practice is unknown to members of the public, but that is what happens here...the same practice is peculiar and pronounced among many Nigerian organisations (Respondent T).*

Favouritism and nepotism is evident in the majority of the managers' views and these issues prevent the progress and success of the recruitment, selection and training process in Nigeria.

The majority of the managers who were interviewed identified favouritism and nepotism as issues which damage the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. They commented on the damage that these issues are causing to Nigerian organisations and the economy. The following quotations show their shared views:

*The recruitment and selection process in Nigeria is characterised by internal and external nepotism and favouritism. “Internal” is when employees are employed not because of their skills, knowledge, academic excellence, or experience, but because of the people they know within the organisation. While “external” is when people are employed due to the influence of people in high positions in society such as politicians, kings, emirs, etc. For example, we had 31 positions to be filled about six months ago and we advertised for them. We received almost one million applications but were able to select only six from the pool of applications we received...the chairman and other senior managers brought 15 candidates who started working without going through the recruitment process, the remaining 10 were applicants who brought letters from “VIPs” in society (Respondent B).*

*Favouritism and nepotism are parts of the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Few people get jobs on merit...it is always through a friend or family relation...aside from the fact that these practices undermine the process, it also prevents organisations from employing the best employees (Respondent A).*

### **Corruption**

Corruption was evident in the respondents’ accounts and this was a big issue in the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. The majority of the respondents commented that corrupt practices are overtly prevalent in their organisations’ recruitment and selections processes. Even some recruitment agencies are involved. For example, applicants pay huge sums of money in order to be employed. A respondent commented:

*Corruption is rampant among recruitment agencies and in many organisations, especially in the personnel departments...They collect money from people who want to be selected for interviews and they get the job eventually (Respondent I).*

The above interviewee described corruption as a common phenomenon in the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Another interviewee commented on the lack of sincerity in the recruitment and selection process:

*Most organisations place job advertisements just to fulfil employment laws. It is almost certain that the vacant positions would be occupied by candidates who offer money or their bodies (in most cases with women), before the advertisements are made public. I have seen it happen, even in this organisation and other places I have worked before, uncountable times...as the HR manager, I always act on the instructions of the Director or sometimes the chairman (Respondent X).*

The preceding statements indicate the lack of candour in the Nigerian recruitment and selection process in which corruption and venality have overtaken the real essence of employee resourcing. These issues have negatively affected the potentially beneficial effects of the recruitment and selection process.

### **The Federal Character Principle (FCP) and the Quota System Policy (QSP)**

Managers believe that the FCP limits the liberty of government organisations to hire the best possible employees for vacant positions. The following quotations express the respondents' shared views:

*The FCP and QSP prevent us from hiring the best employees because the distribution of government jobs is based on a quota system. For instance, during last year's recruitment exercise, we were confronted with a selection issue because 7 out of the 14 applicants shortlisted were from a particular ethnic group and they met every criterion required for the jobs in terms of education and experience. Unfortunately, only two of them could be employed for the eight vacant positions; because the remaining six went to other ethnic groups even though they were less qualified (Respondent C).*

*FCP and QSP are meant to ensure equal distribution of state wealth and positions, objectives which I don't think it is realising...the problem is that it puts equality over excellence. It sometimes prevents HR from hiring credible candidates if they come from the same ethnic group...that is a big flaw in the recruitment process (Respondent U).*

*Yes, FCP and QSP are only applicable in government establishments. For me, the two cause a tussle between equality and merit, whereby equality is judged as superior to merit and quality (Respondent H). An overwhelming majority of the respondents subscribe to this view.*

### **Resource Constraints**

Resource constraints emerged within many accounts. This adversely affects the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. In the managers' view, organisations differ in terms of their available resources. This includes finance, technology, and HR. In Nigeria, most organisations do not have the necessary resources to establish a vibrant recruitment and selection mechanism. The following quotations typify the respondents' shared views:

*To put in place a good recruitment and selection mechanism requires huge capital and not all organisations can afford it. For instance, this organisation manually does its recruitment and selection. The process is marred with all kinds of irregularities among which candidates are often chosen based on referral or 'who you know' in the company (Respondent E).*

*Only big multinationals and few government companies have the financial strength to create vibrant recruitment and selection mechanisms... a lot of small and medium companies struggle in this regard (Respondent B).*

*We simply don't have the resource capacity...and I don't think it will work here because of several issues that are involved in the Nigerian recruitment process (Respondent Y).*

In addition, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents commented on the lack of infrastructural facilities (specifically a stable electricity supply and good Internet facilities). These restrain the recruitment and selection process to an appreciable extent. For instance, stable electricity supply and good Internet facilities are required for e-recruitment and other online recruitment activities. Without reliable electricity and Internet facilities international recruitment quality standards would not be met. Respondents commented:

*Infrastructure facilities such as electricity and Internet are not stable and effective...online recruitment activities are, as a result, hampered (Respondent D).*

*The lack of good electricity supply and Internet facilities often make us stage classroom employment tests, which sometimes ends in chaos (Respondent V).*

*We do more than 90% of our recruitment and selection exercise manually. Aside from some logistical problems responsible for this, a lack of stable electricity and good Internet facilities are major problems and challenges (Respondent G).*

An overwhelming majority of the respondents shared similar views.

### **Unemployment Rate**

The majority of the respondents commented on Nigeria's rate of unemployment as a major challenge confronting the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. The quotations below typify their shared views:

*There are too many people jostling for few vacant positions. This heaps too much pressure on us, especially in terms of selection. For example, we advertised for 15 vacant positions last month, and we received over a million applications for them. The unemployment rate frustrates the recruitment and selection process (Respondent P).*

*Unemployment exasperates the recruitment and selection process; considering the fact that the process is executed in the moribund traditional way (unlike in an advanced nation where everything is done online). Too many people are vying for few vacant positions. The Personnel Manager is then exposed to huge difficulties in selecting the few from the numerous applicants (Respondent M).*

The preceding statements reflect the myriad of issues and challenges confronting the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Managers believe these issues prevent the achievement of organisational goals because they prevent organisations from hiring the best employees from the labour market.

### **The Process of Recruiting and Selecting New Employees**

Managers described the process of recruiting and selecting new employees in both the public and private organisations in Nigeria. However, the valid process only existed on paper as the

overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that there is variance in the recruitment process in their various organisations in terms of the documented process and the practices.

One respondent succinctly commented:

*The process is the same for public and registered-private organisations in Nigeria. Public advertisement must be made for vacant positions, which will be followed by shortlisting suitable candidates on satisfying the job requirements. Shortlisted candidate will be interviewed, and this will be followed by a due process of selecting the most suitable candidate who best satisfy the job requirement and put up an excellent performance during the interview. However, all of these only existed on paper...I can tell you that 95% of organisations do not follow the process, not even in this organisation (Respondent Z).*

Another respondent commented on how the process is often sabotaged by employers:

*The process is: make public advertisement for vacant positions – shortlist candidates – interview them (this sometimes requires candidate to write tests) – select the best out of them. This is the legal process for all of the public organisations and the registered public companies. But the process and practice for most organisations are different. They do not advertise vacant positions – they just employ whoever they want. The few that do advertise vacant positions will ask whoever they want to apply like everyone else, and the jobs will eventually be offered to them, even if there are other better candidates.*

It is evident in the above commentary that the recruitment and selection process in Nigeria is broken. Organisations document the process only for legal and administrative purposes and an overwhelming majority of them do not follow the process.

## **Discussion**

This article has provided empirical insights into the realities of the employee resourcing process from the points of view of Nigerian managers. Managers expressed concern with regards to the lack of equal opportunities in the Nigerian recruitment and selection process. The current situation is one in which discrimination on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, and religious affiliation is prevalent. Jobseekers' age and gender play a prominent role in the Nigerian recruitment and selection process. Most organisations in Nigeria consider the

demanding familial responsibilities of women, which may often affect their work demands, in the recruitment process. Many organisations (especially private organisations) prefer to employ men for this reason. The discrimination in the Nigerian recruitment and selection process is further exacerbated by ethnic divisions. This could potentially place a job seeker(s) who share the same ethnic group as the interviewer(s) at an advantage. This often results in people getting employed based on their ethnic affiliation rather than merit. Kamoche (2000) acknowledges that ethnicity in African societies has caused a huge damage to the process of recruitment and selection. Furthermore, favouritism and nepotism are inherent in many organisations' recruitment and selection process in Nigeria. Employees are not necessarily employed based on quality and merit, but often based on who they know within and outside a relevant organisation. Managers expressed concerns about the damaging effect of favouritism and nepotism on organisations' development and the nation's image and economy. Keles et al. (2011) argued that nepotism and favouritism may allow for the employment of the wrong people with less knowledge and skills, which negatively affects other employees and productivity. Padgett and Morris (2005) upheld the same assertion, but also argued that nepotism may cause reduced job satisfaction and reduced organisational commitment. All of these discriminatory practices negatively influence the recruitment and selection process. Since the best candidates would most probably not be the candidates who are employed, an organisation's performance would hardly reach its optimum level. These findings support the argument that bad recruiting often affects organisations adversely (Sullivan, 2015).

The sentiments explicated by managers about personnel selection processes being influenced by issues of ethnic favouritism and nepotism in the Nigerian public sectors is not novel or surprising. Cases of ethnic domination and accusations of political interference, favouritism and nepotism in public appointments and the domination of (or marginalisation by) one ethnic group over another have been recurring in Nigeria's national discourse since

independence. In a newspaper editorial opinion piece the Punch Newspapers in 2016 accused the Nigerian President of provincial inclination and called on him to ensure equity in federal appointments. Furthermore, in July 2016, Nigerians drawn from various civil society groups also protested an alleged illegal recruitment and nepotism in some government agencies, questioning the anti-corruption effort of the President. The President's spokesperson responded that, since assuming office, President Buhari has treated all Nigerians without bias for ethnicity or religion – as demonstrated by the composition of his cabinet and the policies and programmes of his administration. In point of fact, almost all of the previous Nigerian leaders have been accused of nepotism and/or favouritism at one point during their reigns.

Mustapha (2007) advances an argument that the FCP should be evaluated on both its intended and unintended effects on Nigerian public life. Accordingly, he suggests that if this wider standard is used, the contribution of the FCP has been more positive than negative in the management of ethnic inequalities in the Nigerian public sector. Conversely, anecdotal evidence shows that the dominant view among Nigerians is that the FCP has not succeeded in achieving its lofty objectives. Nonetheless, Mustapha (2009) argues that FCP has encouraged the non-violent resolution of ethnic grievances. This is a laudable achievement but one that needs to be balanced more carefully in terms of recruitment and selection process and strategies as well as global best practices.

The problem of ethnic favouritism and nepotism has also been highlighted by several African leading HRM authors. For instance, Kamoche (2000) found that ethnicity in African societies is used to stratify the internal labour market of firms operating in Africa. This is further corroborated by Takyi-Asiedu (1993, p. 95) and Anakwe (2002, p. 1045) who upheld that social sanctions could be meted out to indigenous workers in a position of power who fail to employ their friends and family.

The lack of candour in the Nigerian recruitment and selection process is further aggravated by corruption and the influence of family and friends. Some of the managers indicated that applicants may often pay money to get employed. Consistent with the Independent Commission against Corruption's research (ICAC, 2015); this article questions whether organisations will be able to recruit and retain the best and most capable employees if the effectiveness of the process is questionable and corrupt. The role of HR in providing guidance on good practices for competitive advantage is therefore suspect. Consequently, it is not surprising that most African organisations cannot compete. Most foreign organisations in Africa, in an attempt to navigate these obstacles in order to ensure they hire the best candidates, are therefore faced with a challenging task (Osabutey et al., 2015). Whilst the RBT could be the reason why many successful organisations make an equal opportunity initiative an intrinsic aspect of their recruitment and business management practices (Linton and Kleiner, 1998), organisations in Africa struggle to access the best candidates for positions and this adversely affects their competitiveness. This is because discrimination, favouritism, and nepotism excessively influence the recruitment process. To some extent, such employees who have not been hired on merit may not be motivated to excel in their roles, thereby preventing the improvement of the competitiveness of their organisations. This article also questions the efficacy of the FCP and the QSP in terms of the recruitment of productive employees. Researchers have argued that the FCP and the QSP have been unable to appreciably achieve their intended objectives (Bodunrin, 1989; Mustapha, 2009; Tiemo and Arubayi, 2012). Based on the responses from the managers' experiences, we argue that good prospective employees are possibly missed, particularly if the recruitment and selection process is aligned with the FCP and the QSP. This is because the FCP and the QSP negatively affects managers' ability to hire applicants who come from the same ethnic group or state in a recruitment exercise even if they are the best candidates. Lessons could be learnt

from developed countries such as the US and the UK, where the Equal Opportunity Commissions (US) and the Equality Act 2010 (UK) bind all organisations, whether public or private, in order to give equal opportunities to minority groups. This is particularly pertinent because, whilst it is easy to dichotomise groups in western countries by a simple classification of majority and minority ethnic groups, it is more difficult in the African settings due to the numerous ethnic groups therein. Although this is somewhat akin to affirmative action in the US, it is actually different not only because of the dichotomy of the groups, but also because cultural and institutional elements introduce an excessive form of favouritism and nepotism into the implementation process. Perhaps the FCP and the QSP need to be revised in order to ensure that qualification and competence override ethnic representation. The opposing argument, which has sustained these policies, is that there is a cost to perceived marginalisation which accelerates ethnic tensions and potential breakaways of groups and regions. The cultural and institutional settings mean that a more nuanced approach is required to simultaneously achieve equal opportunity and competitiveness within organisations. Resource constraints, particularly the inability of most organisations and potential employees to use good IT platforms makes the resourcing process even more inefficient. The rising national unemployment rate also affects recruitment efficiency. The above argued factors, therefore, reduce the quality of the pool of employees. Consequently, the potential competitiveness of organisations is undermined. In sum, the process of recruiting and selecting new employees, which is predicated on public advertisement of vacant positions, shortlisting of candidates who satisfy the job requirements, interviewing, and selection of the best candidate only exist as a policy in most Nigerian organisations.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This article has highlighted the paltry nature of the process of recruitment and selection in Nigeria. The process is overwhelmingly characterised by corruption, favouritism, and

nepotism. Many appointments are not based on merit and are not ethical. This study suggests that if the inimitable resources responsible for competitive advantage are to be realised, steps need to be taken to ensure that the right people are employed for the right job. This suggestion agrees with Tyson (2006) and Chidi (2013) who argued that, in Africa, recruiting people who are wrong for the organisation could lead to long-term negative effects (Chidi, 2013; Tyson, 2006). The FCP and the QSP, as presently operated, have been found to hamper managers' ability to hire freely and are responsible for the poor state of the public sector. Since the public sector is a vital component of the labour market, its inability to recruit the best employees could spill over into the entire labour market and could negatively influence national competitiveness. Other factors that have also contributed adversely, directly and indirectly, to the quality and ultimate success of employee resourcing include: poor electricity supply and Internet infrastructure; and the high rate of unemployment. Arguably, with the large pool of potential employable applicants seeking employment, cumbersome recruitment processes can negatively influence the choices that organisations make to identify and recruit the best candidates who would enhance competitiveness.

In order to enhance the Nigerian recruitment and selection process, the following suggestions could also be explored. A broad-based employment legislation that would harmonise the existing ones to reduce discrimination and enhance transparency is urgent and appropriate. The aim would be to ensure a hybrid, inclusive and acceptable way of engaging the most suitable candidates to all positions. This should consider how the recruitment process could be structured, so that the overriding criterion for employment is merit (irrespective of the candidates' age, gender, religious affiliation, social class, and ethnic group). There should be in-built and verifiable processes in order to ensure that the processes involved in recruitment and selection are fair. Whilst an online recruitment process would not necessarily guarantee transparency, it also has the potential to enhance the quality of the recruitment and selection

process. The FCP and QSP are old policies now seeming out of tune with contemporary realities and best practices. They should also be reviewed and possibly harmonised as a single policy with a broad appeal to enable organisations to recruit the best candidates regardless of their origins. This should cover not only the public sector, for which it is intended, but rather more widely across sectors. Whilst regional and ethnic balances are important, the FCP and QSP should seek to establish “winning” criteria in order to ensure that the search for a balance does not lead to the recruitment and selection of unsuitable candidates. There should be an inbuilt transparent and verifiable process which can show that an attempt to achieve the intended balance failed because a suitable candidate was not found from other regions. The government should introduce a vibrant institutional control mechanism that will either replace FCP and QSP or revamp these policies in order to make them suitable for the purpose of ensuring a fair and unbiased recruitment process in Nigeria. This will also ensure that some level of integrity is transparently evidenced by employers. Whilst this paper has highlighted pertinent challenges and nuances in the employee resourcing processes in a country where institutions and cultures differ from the West, it is also clear that the absence of a strong and transparent institutional framework is contributing to organisations not being able to recruit the best employees to enhance their competitiveness. A poor employee resourcing process, therefore, adversely influences the competitiveness of organisations locally and internationally. Government policy needs to address such failings within national boundaries to enhance national and international competitiveness of the country’s organisations. This would ultimately impact the economic development.

This research has contributed to the employee resourcing literature by highlighting that institutional and cultural influences and the requirement to recruit from diverse ethnic backgrounds adversely influence the ability of organisations to recruit the best people to enhance competitiveness. The study also highlighted that quota systems can hinder

organisational competitiveness, especially where there is a stronger emphasis on achieving a regional balance rather than achieving competitiveness. This study is limited, as it focuses on Nigeria, as opposed to the wider context of Africa. Although similar institutional and cultural attributes are prevalent in Africa; however, a study which expands the empirical focus beyond one nation state could provide an enhanced understanding of the nuances of the recruitment and selection processes in the region. Studies which compare the recruitment process to competitiveness and, indeed, the performance of organisations could also provide an enhanced understanding and causal order of the relationship more clearly. As findings from studies such as this have significant implications for multinational organisations, their non-inclusion in the present effort is limiting. Consequently, future studies comparing a broader range of sectors, beyond the more traditional private-public, to include multinationals and the third sector are likely to be potentially rewarding.

### **Implications for Practice**

The observed trend does not only affect public sector organisations but also private organisations. In particular, international organisations (such as multinationals and non-governmental organisations) aiming to recruit and select the best employees in order to enhance their competitiveness are faced with serious challenges. Such organisations cannot afford to miss potential candidates in the global search for talent. The prevalence of nepotism, favouritism, corruption, etc. is likely to spill over to international organisations, particularly as there are no equal opportunity laws for private organisations. The challenge is how international organisations can ensure that they avoid missing out on potential employees because of flawed recruitment processes. Osabutey et al. (2015) suggested that, for multinational organisations, headquarters' supervision of the recruitment and selection process is crucial if the organisation, following the RBT, wants to employ the best possible candidates who would influence organisational competitiveness. Indeed, our findings suggest

that people who have been employed fairly (on merit) are more likely to give good candidates a fairer chance than those who have themselves been recruited through the “back door”. Whilst local employment agencies could be the answer, such international organisations should ensure that they have access to the entire pool of eligible candidates in order to preserve their reputation. It is important to also note that some of the tendencies related to recruitment could also apply to local employment agencies since they are subject to the same institutional and cultural tendencies. Therefore, in the SSA context, it would be prudent to employ supervision of a foreign organisation or headquarters, as suggested by Osabutey et al. (2015). In addition, there could be aspects of the assessment and selection processes which are not entirely controlled by locals in order to ensure some level of fairness and competitiveness.

Following RBT and the need to attract a quality workforce (Barney 1991, Baroukh and Kleiner, 2002), it is evident that international managers operating in Nigeria must understand that there are formidable challenges in undertaking effective resourcing activities. There is a need to give careful consideration to the socio-cultural distinctiveness of the organisational terrain. HRM is still generally much less developed in most SSA countries and this has implications for the variety of HRM management models being experimented with in the region, especially given the significant cultural and institutional influences, as well as potential challenges that impact its successful implementation. To that extent, MNCs need to pay a lot of attention as they reflect on their recruitment and selection strategies. It is important in the pursuit of global best practices that positive elements within the local context are weaved into the hiring strategy. Moreover, international managers operating in Nigeria specifically, or perhaps in SSA, need to be aware of the channels of socio-segmentation in the wider society, such as religious and ethnic differences, political affiliations, discrimination or favouritism, nepotism and corruption etc. (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). It is important that

managers put in place policies and practices, such as training, coaching and mentoring local managers that will discourage these divisive mechanisms. Part of the training materials must address the impact of using a skewed selection lens and its implications for the organisation. There is also a need to explore an enhanced technology driven employee resourcing strategy in a bid to enhance the overall quality of the process and bring more transparency, including the involvement of independent adjudicators. The justification for selecting a particular person must be valid and visible to all. Lastly, the escalating rate of unemployment is associated with near desperate job searches, encouraging people from the same ethnic and religious configurations to connive to insulate their jobs against others.

Many African scholars in the human resource management field (e.g. Greico 1987, Jenkins 1994, Kahn and Ackers 2004, Nyambegera 2002) argue that multinational companies in Africa, regardless of their developed bureaucratic structures, are not immune from religious, ethnic, political or other discriminatory contextual issues. Kamoche (2000) also acknowledged that ethnicity in Kenyan and other African societies has been used in a discriminatory way to stratify and segment the internal labour market of firms operating in Africa through ‘favouritism in recruitment or in the search for ethnic homogeneity’. It is essential to note that under these circumstances those in positions of authority are usually under intense pressure to either provide jobs for their relatives or at least support them through other contacts in finding jobs. This is further exacerbated by the Africa’s cultural values that promote group bonding and are paternalistic in nature. The foregoing arguments call managers to be aware and vigilant, and attempt to confront these issues with continuous training, coaching and mentorship of staffers involved in making the selection decision. This will mitigate the cost associated with inappropriate employment including the minimisation of organisational negative reputation, potential disruption of the labour and production processes which may ultimately impede the profits of the organisation.

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