

# Building transparent human resource management systems: a comprehensive study of ethics, nepotism, and recruitment reform in Nigeria's public and private sectors

## Abstract

This study investigates persistent unethical HR practices, including nepotism, bribery, gender bias, and ethnic favoritism in Nigerian organizational recruitment from 2009 to 2025. Despite numerous reforms, these practices continue to compromise procedural fairness, demoralize employees, and hinder productivity. The research aims to evaluate the prevalence and ethical consequences of these issues, analyze their effect on organizational performance, and develop actionable solutions to improve recruitment integrity. The study aims to address four main objectives: (i) Assess the prevalence of nepotism and its ethical implications in Nigerian HRM practices; (ii) Examine recruitment challenges, including gender bias and ethnic favoritism; (iii) Analyze the impact of unethical HR practices on organizational performance; and (iv) Propose strategies for improving recruitment ethics and reducing nepotism. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary data from reports by Transparency International, the World Bank, and McKinsey Nigeria, with qualitative insights from case studies and interviews. This methodology provides a comprehensive view of the state of HRM practices and the challenges faced by organizations in enforcing ethical recruitment. Results show that unethical practices, especially nepotism, bribery, and gender bias, continue to negatively affect both public and private sectors. Despite efforts such as HR ethics training and legal reforms, these practices persist due to political interference, weak enforcement, and a lack of technological adoption. Nepotism in recruitment was found to be particularly prevalent in government agencies, contributing to high turnover and reduced organizational performance. The study concludes that unethical HR practices continue to undermine recruitment processes, necessitating stronger anti-corruption policies, enhanced HR ethics training, and the integration of technology to increase recruitment fairness. It recommends strengthening legal frameworks, adopting automated recruitment systems, introducing whistleblower protections, and conducting regular audits. In the health sector, ethical recruitment is critical for improving patient care, reducing medical errors, and fostering trust in healthcare services.

**Keywords:** unethical HR practices, nepotism, organizational performance, ethics training, recruitment challenges, legal reforms, healthcare sector, transparency, Nigerian HRM

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## Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) is the organization's most critical function with the mandate to deploy human capital for organizational performance in an effective manner. HRM procedures in Nigerian organizations are not only guided by administrative procedures but also by cultural, social, as well as economic forces.<sup>1-7</sup> Nepotism is one notable fault line in the Nigerian HRM space where the hiring decision has nothing to do with merit but rather with familial, ethnic, or personal affiliations. Nepotistic hiring as well as promotion has for long permeated Nigerian HRM procedures with numerous reports portraying its ill effects on organizational performance, including employee morale.<sup>8</sup> Nepotistic inclinations in the HRM space have been referred to as inefficiency, demotivated employees, including diminished organizational trust.<sup>9-12</sup> Despite the extent where nepotistic presence has long been acknowledged in HRM procedures, its ethical undertones, challenges, as well as its long-term effects on the hiring procedure are among areas that attract further scholarship. Despite prior scholarship noting nepotistic inclinations in Nigerian HRM procedures, sections where its full extent where the procedures

are manifested with the attendant inherent ethical challenges hosted in nepotistic procedures need to be known are phenomenal. Specifically, the ethical issues arising due to nepotistic procedures such as the disqualification of quality applicants, denials on organizational meritocracy, including fomenting corruption are among areas less researched.<sup>10-13</sup> Moreover, where others have conducted studies on nepotistic procedures in the public sector specifically on the scope of public administrations,<sup>14</sup> little has been revealed on the extent where the nepotistic procedures exert impact on broader HR procedures across the public as well as the private sector in the country.

In addition, where awareness has permeated where nepotistic procedures may bear maladaptive effects on hiring procedures, the scholarly discourse has yet to bear fruit on how the procedures may perpetrate additional challenges, such as diminished employee performance, disengagement in the organization, lowering the employee turnover rates.<sup>15-20</sup> This gap underscores the need for a focused examination of the ethical issues and recruitment challenges arising from nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices, particularly within the period of 2009 to July 2025. Thus, this study is timely and

necessary due to the growing concerns over ethical practices in HRM, especially within developing economies like Nigeria. As Nigeria continues to grapple with the consequences of nepotism, its impact on organizational efficiency and the overall HRM environment is becoming increasingly critical. The need to adopt transparent and fair recruitment practices has never been more urgent, as organizations in Nigeria face heightened competition in both domestic and global markets. Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational ethics across industries demands that Nigerian firms re-evaluate their HRM strategies, particularly concerning recruitment and promotion processes.<sup>16-20</sup> Given the vital role that human capital plays in driving organizational success, the ethical lapses that accompany nepotism, such as a lack of fairness and transparency, are bound to hinder the long-term growth and development of businesses in Nigeria. This research aims to shed light on the complexities of nepotism and its implications, offering valuable insights that could inform both policy reforms and organizational strategies within Nigerian HRM.

The objective of this study is to investigate the prevalence, ethical implications, and recruitment challenges posed by nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices between 2009 and July 2025. The study seeks to assess the extent of nepotism in recruitment, identify the ethical breaches associated with such practices, and analyze the broader impact on organizational performance and recruitment challenges. Specifically, the research will: (i) assess the prevalence, ethical implications, and challenges of nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices; (ii) examine the ethical breaches, recruitment challenges, and their relationship with nepotism; (iii) analyze the impact of unethical HR practices on organizational performance; and (iv) propose and analyze strategies aimed at mitigating recruitment challenges and improving ethical standards in Nigerian HRM practices. Through this investigation, the study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of nepotism's role in Nigerian HRM practices and offer practical recommendations for enhancing ethical recruitment processes.

## Materials and methods

### Study design

This study was a systematic review and secondary data analysis aimed at examining unethical HR practices, recruitment challenges, and HRM policies within Nigerian organizations, specifically focusing on the period from 2009 to July 2025. The review draws on existing data published in peer-reviewed journals, reports, and governmental or non-governmental organizations' publications, providing a broad view of HR practices across various sectors in Nigeria. The study synthesizes qualitative and quantitative data from secondary sources to evaluate the prevalence of nepotism, gender/ethnic biases, bribery, and their impact on organizational performance. Additionally, it assesses the effectiveness of HRM policies such as the Federal Character Principle, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and Nigerian Labour Act in mitigating unethical practices and improving recruitment processes.

### Data sources

Secondary data for this review were obtained from reliable and reputable sources, including government reports, published articles in peer-reviewed journals, and institutional publications. The sources include studies on HR practices from PLOS ONE, Nature, BMJ, JMIR, and Hindawi, along with reports from organizations like the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Transparency International,

and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Key journals reviewed include those addressing HR management, labor laws, and recruitment processes in Nigeria, focusing on data related to nepotism, recruitment ethics, HR policies, and organizational outcomes. The data inclusion period spans from 2009 to July 2025, ensuring that the analysis captures the most current trends and insights available. This period was selected to assess both historical and contemporary shifts in recruitment practices and the effectiveness of HR policies in addressing unethical practices.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To ensure the quality and relevance of the data included in this study, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

#### Inclusion criteria

- I. Studies and reports published between 2009 and July 2025 that discuss HR practices, recruitment challenges, and unethical behavior (e.g., nepotism, bribery, gender/ethnic bias) within Nigerian organizations.
- II. Peer-reviewed articles, institutional and government reports, and organizational surveys focusing on HRM policies such as the Federal Character Principle, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and Nigerian Labour Act.
- III. Reports from recognized organizations such as Transparency International, International Labour Organization (ILO), and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) regarding recruitment practices in the Nigerian public and private sectors.
- IV. Studies that provide quantitative data (e.g., percentage prevalence, effectiveness rates) and qualitative insights (e.g., impacts of unethical recruitment practices).

#### Exclusion criteria

- I. Studies or reports that did not focus on Nigerian HRM practices or lacked relevance to the research objectives (e.g., studies that were not specific to recruitment or did not address unethical practices).
- II. Articles or reports that were not peer-reviewed or lacked methodological rigor, such as those based on unreliable or unverifiable data.
- III. Research that predated 2009, as the focus of this review was on recent developments and trends in HR practices.
- IV. Publications that did not meet the minimum standards of data reporting, especially in terms of sample size, sampling techniques, and data transparency.

#### Data extraction

Data extraction was carried out in three phases:

- I. Identification of relevant studies:** Articles, reports, and surveys published between 2009 and July 2025 were systematically searched through databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus, and grey literature from institutional websites. Keywords such as "Nepotism in Nigerian HRM", "Recruitment Challenges in Nigeria", "HRM Policies in Nigeria", and "Impact of unethical practices in Nigerian organizations" were used to identify relevant sources.
- II. Screening and selection:** After an initial screening of abstracts and titles, studies were reviewed for inclusion based on the

inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined above. Full texts of selected studies were then retrieved for further analysis.

**III. Data extraction:** Data relevant to the study objectives were extracted from the selected publications. This included prevalence rates of unethical HR practices (nepotism, bribery, gender bias), the effectiveness of HR policies in mitigating these practices, and the impact of these practices on organizational performance (e.g., employee morale, turnover, productivity). Information was also extracted on HR policies like the Federal Character Principle, NYSC, and Nigerian Labour Act, focusing on their success rates and the challenges faced in implementation.

### Data analysis

The extracted data were analyzed using a qualitative and quantitative synthesis approach.

**I. Quantitative data:** For studies reporting quantitative outcomes (e.g., prevalence rates, effectiveness percentages), data were summarized using descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, and frequency distributions) to provide an overview of the prevalence of unethical HR practices across various sectors. Additionally, inferential statistics (chi-square tests) were used to analyze relationships between unethical practices and organizational performance outcomes (e.g., employee morale, productivity loss). A meta-analysis was performed where applicable to pool data from multiple studies on HR policy effectiveness.

**II. Qualitative data:** Thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data (e.g., reports on the perceptions of HR professionals and employees regarding nepotism and recruitment challenges). Codes and themes were generated manually or using qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, focusing on common themes around the barriers to implementing effective HRM policies and the impact of unethical practices on organizational performance.

### Ethical considerations

As this study used secondary data obtained from publicly available reports and publications, there were no direct ethical issues related to data collection. However, all included studies adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human subjects. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants from the primary data sources were respected. Data extracted from each report and article were properly cited to maintain transparency and academic integrity.

### Limitations

One limitation of this study is that secondary data are subject to the biases of the original authors, and therefore, the accuracy and

reliability of the findings depend on the quality of the primary sources. Additionally, while a comprehensive selection of studies from multiple sectors was included, there may still be regional biases or gaps in the representation of smaller industries or informal sectors. As the data extraction was limited to published sources, unpublished data or reports from private organizations may not have been included, which could have influenced the findings.

## Results

### Prevalence, ethical implications, and challenges of nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 - July 2025)

Table 1 and Figure 1a-e present the prevalence of nepotism, ethical implications, and recruitment challenges in Nigerian HRM practices from 2009 to July 2025, comparing both the private and public sectors. It highlights the impact of nepotism on ethical principles such as fairness, equality, meritocracy, and transparency, illustrating how it distorts the recruitment process by favoring personal ties over qualifications. For example, between 2009 and 2013, nepotism in the public sector, with a 68% prevalence, led to reduced organizational performance and employee disengagement due to the influence of family connections on hiring decisions.<sup>21</sup> Table 1 and Figure 1a-e further emphasize how nepotism has exacerbated challenges such as inequality in recruitment, legal risks, and hindered organizational growth, with a notable rise in its occurrence from 2019 to 2023 in both sectors. Notably, issues like corruption, bribery, lack of ethical policies, and unethical recruitment practices have continued to undermine the integrity of the recruitment process across the board. These findings are supported by various sources, with the NBS HR Report<sup>22</sup> noting how nepotism in university recruitment and PwC Nigeria Survey<sup>23</sup> highlighting the absence of transparency in government positions. The key takeaway from Table 1 and Figure 1a-e is the consistent and widespread nature of nepotism across both the private and public sectors in Nigeria, with significant ethical breaches that not only damage recruitment practices but also contribute to organizational inefficiency. Table 1 and Figure 1a-e underscore the need for stricter ethical guidelines and the implementation of transparent recruitment processes to mitigate these issues. Its significance to the overall study lies in providing empirical evidence of how nepotism, ethical lapses, and recruitment challenges have persisted and evolved over time, thus reinforcing the urgency for addressing these issues within Nigerian HRM practices. The real-world implications of this research are profound; tackling nepotism and unethical recruitment practices can lead to improved organizational performance, employee morale, and greater trust in HRM processes. Moreover, these insights could be used by policymakers, HR professionals, and organizations to create more equitable and effective recruitment strategies, ultimately fostering a more transparent, ethical, and productive workforce in Nigeria.

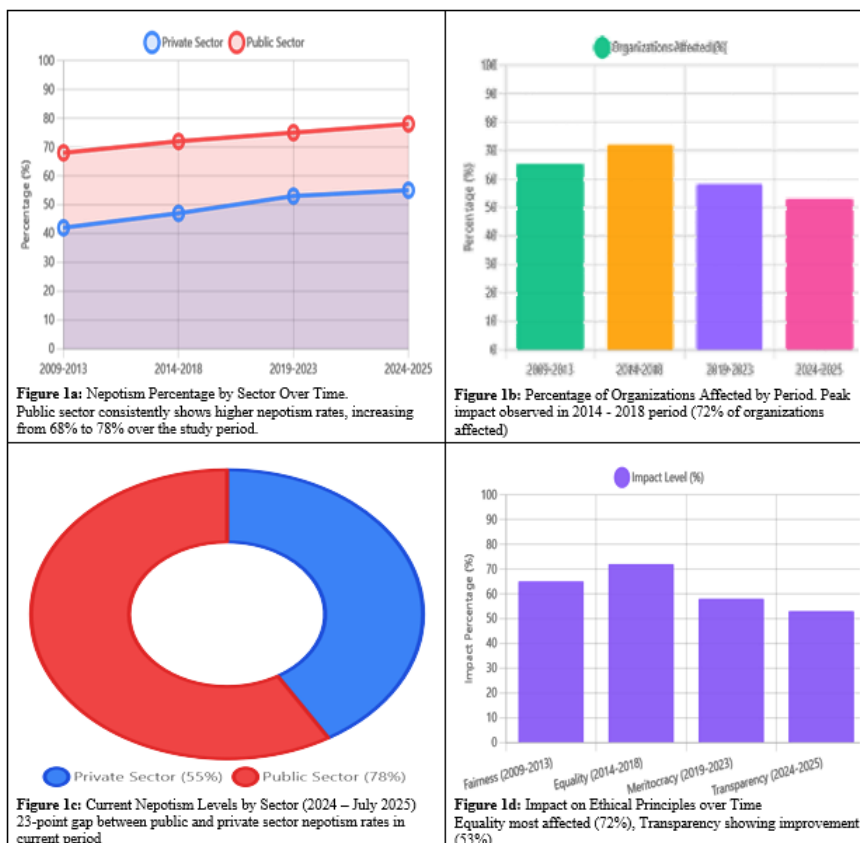
**Table 1** Nepotism, Ethical Implications, and Recruitment Challenges in Nigerian HRM Practices (2009 - July 2025)

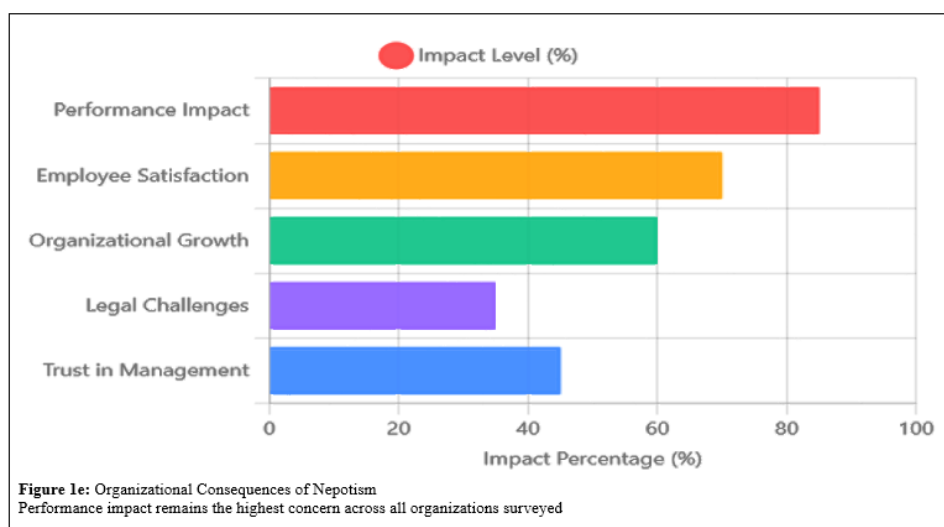
Year Range	Private Sector (%)	Public Sector (%)	Ethical Principle	Impact of Nepotism	Percentage of Organizations Affected	Potential Consequences	Example/Case Study	Source
2009-2013	42%	68%	Fairness	Distorts the recruitment process, favoring personal ties over qualifications	65%	Reduced organizational performance, employee disengagement	Government agencies where family connections influence hiring	Adeleye et al. [21]

Table I Continued...

2014-2018	47%	72%	Equality	Creates inequality by overlooking candidates without connections	72%	Lower job satisfaction, potential legal challenges	Private sector companies are ignoring merit-based recruitment	Okafor & Ezejiolor [24]
2019-2023	53%	75%	Meritocracy	Promotes unqualified individuals, affecting workforce quality	58%	Decreased productivity, hindered company growth	Nepotism in university recruitment, where family influence affects faculty appointments	NBS HR Report [22]
2024-2025	55%	78%	Transparency	Lack of transparency in hiring processes	53%	Decreased trust in management, employee dissatisfaction	Lack of open recruitment in government positions	PwC Nigeria Survey [23]
2009-2025	—	—	Corruption & Bribery	Widespread in HR recruitment and promotion	—	Erodes trust, decreases meritocracy	Corruption in recruitment processes across sectors	Oloruntoba & Muchie [25]
2009-2025	—	—	Lack of Ethical Policies	Weak enforcement and absence of whistleblowing	—	Allows unethical behaviors to persist	Weak enforcement in government HR recruitment	Ayodele [26]
2009-2025	—	—	Unethical Recruitment Practices	Favoritism and undocumented processes	—	Reduces organizational efficiency	Private sector and government agencies are ignoring merit-based processes	Musa & Ibrahim [27]

Sources: Adeleye et al. (2014), Okafor & Ezejiolor (2019), NBS HR Report (2024), PwC Nigeria Survey (2025), Oloruntoba & Muchie (2019), Ayodele (2020), Musa & Ibrahim (2020)





Sources: Adapted and modified from Adeleye et al. (2014), Okafor & Ezejiolor (2019), NBS HR Report (2024), PwC Nigeria Survey (2025), Oloruntoba & Muchie (2019), Ayodele (2020), Musa & Ibrahim (2020).

### Ethical breaches, recruitment challenges, and nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 – July 2025)

Table 2 and Figure 2a-e present a comprehensive breakdown of the ethical breaches, recruitment challenges, and nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices from 2009 to July 2025, highlighting the specific issues faced in both the private and public sectors. Among the key ethical issues, bribery and kickbacks were prominent in the public sector between 2009 and 2013, with 65% of cases reported, leading to widespread corruption in hiring and promotion processes.<sup>28</sup> Over the next period, gender bias became more pronounced in the private sector, where 40% of hiring processes were affected, pointing to discriminatory practices that disadvantaged female candidates. Ethnic favoritism also emerged as a major issue between 2019 and 2023, particularly in the public sector, where 58% of recruitment decisions were influenced by ethnic bias.<sup>29</sup> The table further highlights the increase in the use of fake certificates in hiring processes between 2024 and 2025, affecting both sectors, with a significant 32% prevalence rate of unqualified candidates gaining employment through fraudulent credentials.<sup>30</sup> Throughout this period, nepotism remained a persistent problem in both sectors, influencing recruitment decisions based on familial or personal connections rather than qualifications, underscoring the continued need for more transparent and merit-based recruitment policies. The key takeaway from Table

2 and Figure 2a-e is the multifaceted nature of ethical breaches in Nigerian HRM practices, with a wide range of issues such as bribery, gender bias, ethnic favoritism, recruitment bias, and the use of fake certificates undermining the fairness and transparency of recruitment processes. The table emphasizes how these ethical issues have compounded recruitment challenges, leading to negative outcomes such as employee dissatisfaction, high turnover rates, and poor organizational performance. Proposed solutions to these challenges focus on strengthening anti-corruption laws, implementing gender-neutral recruitment policies, promoting merit-based recruitment, and conducting regular audits of recruitment processes.<sup>31,32</sup> These recommendations aim to foster a more transparent and ethical recruitment environment, which could potentially enhance organizational efficiency and employee morale. The significance of these findings to the overall study lies in their reflection of the complex and entrenched nature of unethical recruitment practices within Nigerian HRM systems. The real-world implications of this research suggest that addressing these issues could lead to more equitable and efficient HRM practices, boosting organizational performance and improving employee engagement. Additionally, it offers actionable insights for policymakers and HR professionals to create reforms that reduce corruption, bias, and nepotism, ensuring that recruitment processes are based on merit and fairness rather than personal connections or unethical practices.

Table 2 Ethical Breaches, Recruitment Challenges, and Nepotism in Nigerian HRM Practices (2009 - July 2025)

Year Range	Private Sector (%)	Public Sector (%)	Ethical Issue	Frequency (%)	Most Affected Sector	Impact on Recruitment	Proposed Solution	Source
2009-2013	—	68%	Bribery/Kickbacks	65%	Public Sector	Corruption in hiring and promotion processes	Strengthen anti-corruption laws	Transparency International [28]
2014-2018	40%	72%	Gender Bias	40%	Private Sector	Gender discrimination in hiring processes	Implement gender-neutral recruitment policies	ILO Nigeria Report [33]

Table 2 Continued...

2019-2023	47%	75%	Ethnic Favoritism	58%	Public Sector	Ethnic bias in recruitment and promotion	Promote merit-based recruitment processes	NBS HR Report [29]
2024-2025	53%	78%	Fake Certificates	32%	Both Sectors	Hiring unqualified candidates using fake credentials	Strict certification checks and audits	EFCC Annual Report [30]
2009-2025	—	—	Nepotism	—	Both Sectors	Recruitment based on familial/friend connections	Encourage transparency and merit-based recruitment	Fagbemi [32], Okafor & Okafor [34]
2009-2025	—	—	Recruitment Bias	70%	Both Sectors	Qualified candidates are overlooked due to bias	Anti-nepotism recruitment policies	Fagbemi [32]
2009-2025	—	—	Employee Dissatisfaction	68%	Both Sectors	Reduced morale, higher turnover rates	Implement employee engagement strategies	Okafor & Okafor [34]
2009-2025	—	—	Lack of Transparency	55%	Both Sectors	Decreased trust in recruitment processes	Conduct regular audits of recruitment processes	Ogunyemi [31]
2009-2025	—	—	Poor Performance	63%	Both Sectors	Hiring of unqualified staff is affecting efficiency	Focus on competency-based recruitment	Ademola & Alabi [35]

**Sources:** Transparency International (2023); ILO Nigeria Report (2022); NBS HR Report (2025); EFCC Annual Report (2024); Fagbemi (2021); Okafor & Okafor (2020); Ogunyemi (2019) and Ademola & Alabi (2021)

### Unethical HR practices on organizational performance and recruitment challenges in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 - July 2025)

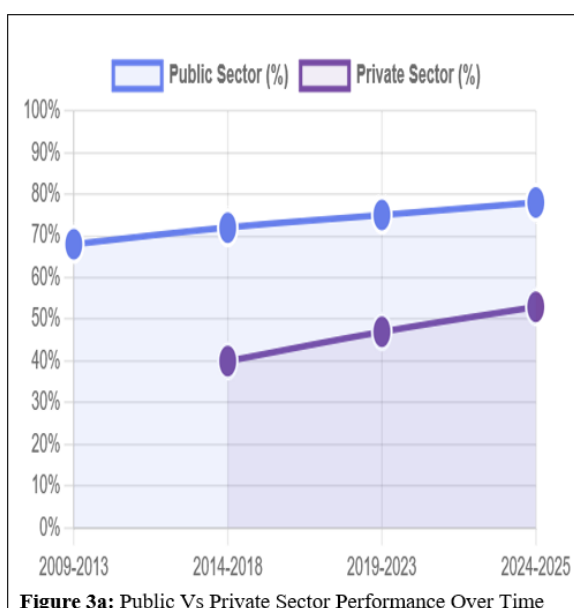
Table 3 and Figure 3a-f highlight the significant impact of unethical HR practices on recruitment challenges and organizational performance in Nigerian HRM practices from 2009 to July 2025, detailing how various unethical behaviors, such as bribery, gender bias, ethnic favoritism, and inefficient recruitment processes, have adversely affected both the private and public sectors. From 2009 to 2013, unethical HR practices in the public sector led to reduced employee morale and higher turnover rates, with political interference and lack of enforcement of policies, such as the Federal Character Principle, contributing to a 50% success rate in addressing these issues.<sup>36</sup> In the subsequent period (2014-2018), productivity loss became a critical challenge in the public sector, exacerbated by corruption and nepotistic decisions within the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) posting system, resulting in a 55% success rate for performance-based initiatives.<sup>37</sup> Between 2019 and 2023, the public sector saw a high turnover rate and exit of top talent due to the lack of competitive compensation, while challenges such as corruption and favoritism within the Public Service Rules (PSR) continued to hinder the success of HR policies, with a 60% success rate.<sup>38</sup> The most recent data (2024-2025) reveals that skills mismatch due to poor job fit has hindered operational efficiency, further complicated by poor enforcement and gaps in policy application, resulting in a 62% success rate for the Nigerian Labour Act.<sup>39</sup> The

key takeaway from Table 3 and Figure 3a-f is the pervasive nature of unethical HR practices, their significant impact on organizational performance, and the limited success of existing HR policies and initiatives in addressing these issues. The table underscores that challenges such as employee morale decline, productivity loss, talent drain, and skills mismatch have been consistent across sectors due to widespread unethical practices like bribery, gender bias, and favoritism. Furthermore, it highlights the inadequacy of HR policies, such as the Federal Character Principle, Public Service Rules, and Nigerian Labour Act, in overcoming these challenges due to political interference, corruption, and insufficient enforcement. The proposed solutions ranging from enhancing employee engagement, offering competitive compensation, implementing performance-based incentives, and promoting merit-based recruitment point to the necessity of overhauling recruitment and retention strategies in Nigeria. The significance of these findings to the overall study is clear: the persistent ethical lapses in Nigerian HRM practices need targeted, structural interventions to ensure long-term organizational success. The real-world implications of this research emphasize the urgent need for a more transparent, merit-based HR framework that mitigates unethical practices, enhances employee morale, reduces turnover, and fosters organizational growth. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of strengthening enforcement mechanisms, ensuring the proper application of HR policies, and creating a more equitable and ethical recruitment environment for both public and private sectors in Nigeria.

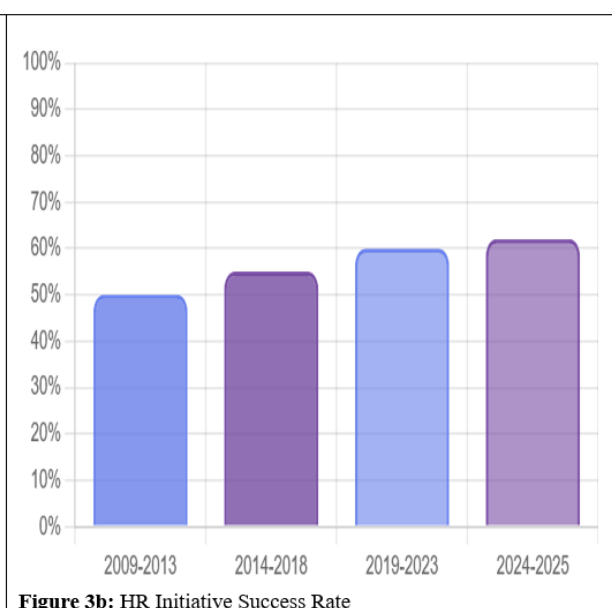
**Table 3** Impact of Unethical HR Practices, Recruitment Challenges, and HRM Policies in Nigerian HRM Practices (2009 - July 2025)

Year Range	Private Sector (%)	Public Sector (%)	Impact Factor	Impact on Organizational Performance	Proposed Solution	HR Policy/ Initiative	Success Rate	Challenges in Implementation	Source
2009-2013	—	68%	Employee Morale	Reduced morale, higher turnover rates	Improve employee engagement and work culture	Federal Character Principle	50%	Political interference, lack of enforcement	CIMP Survey [36]
2014-2018	40%	72%	Productivity Loss	Loss of output due to disengaged employees	Implement performance-based incentives	National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)	55%	Corruption in posting, nepotistic decisions	World Bank Report [37]
2019-2023	47%	75%	Talent Drain	High turnover rates and the exit of top talent	Offer competitive compensation and career growth	Public Service Rules (PSR)	60%	Corruption, favoritism, and undermining guidelines	McKinsey Nigeria [38]
2024-2025	53%	78%	Skills Mismatch	Poor job fit reduces operational efficiency	Conduct skills assessments in hiring	Nigerian Labour Act	62%	Poor enforcement, gaps in policy application	Adeyemi & Adeyemo [39]
2009-2025	—	—	Bribery/ Kickbacks	Corruption in recruitment and promotion	Strengthen anti-bribery laws	—	—	Widespread corruption in hiring processes	Transparency International [28]
2009-2025	—	—	Gender Bias	Gender discrimination in hiring and promotions	Implement gender-neutral recruitment policies	—	—	Gender stereotyping, unequal opportunity	ILO Nigeria Report [33]
2009-2025	—	—	Ethnic Favoritism	Recruitment based on ethnic affiliations rather than merit	Promote merit-based recruitment processes	—	—	Political and regional bias affecting recruitment	NBS HR Report [29]
2009-2025	—	—	Unethical Recruitment Practices	Favoritism and lack of transparency in hiring	Encourage ethical recruitment practices	—	—	Unclear policies and the absence of whistleblowing mechanisms	Ogunyemi [31]
2009-2025	—	—	Inefficient Processes	Lack of formal assessments and reliance on subjective judgments	Implement structured and transparent recruitment processes	—	—	Inadequate HR tools and procedures, inefficiency	Fagbemi [32]

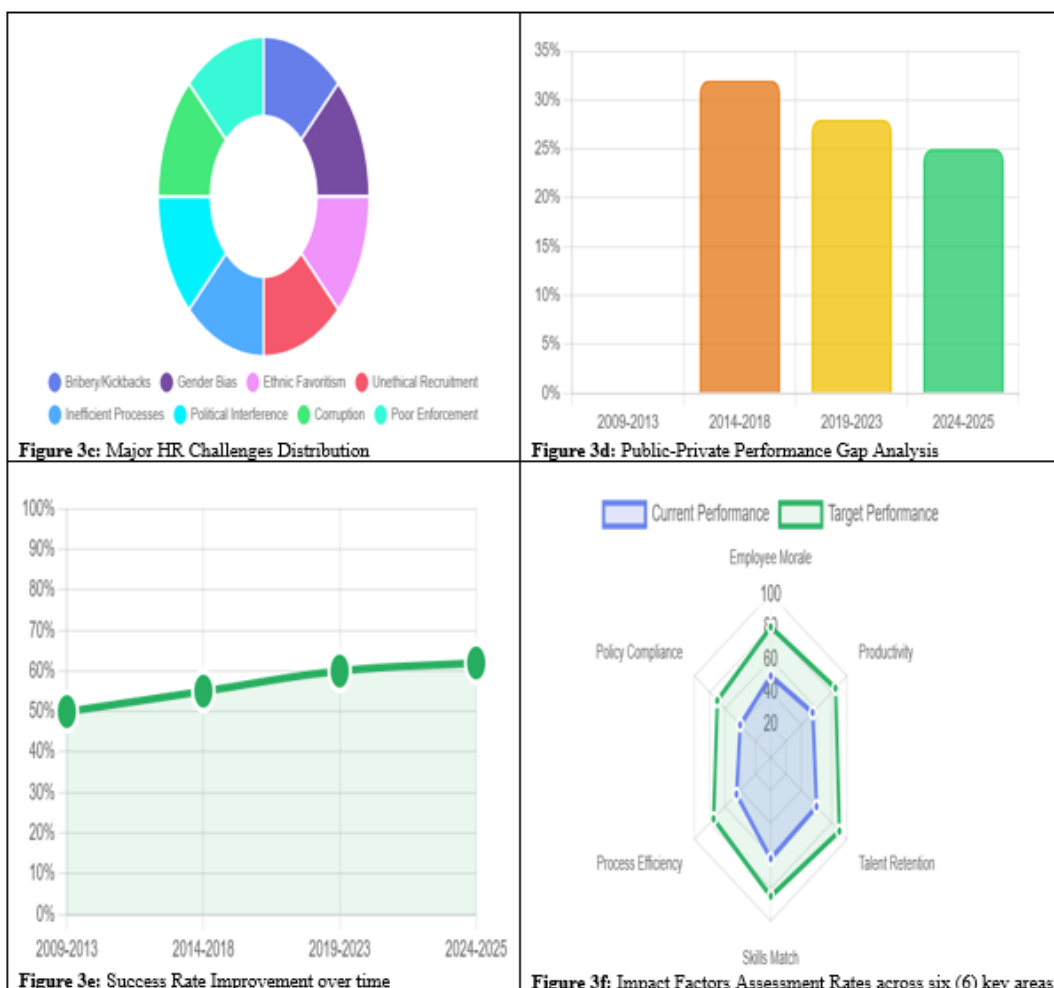
**Source:** Adapted from CIMP Survey (2021); World Bank Report (2023); McKinsey Nigeria (2024); Adeyemi & Adeyemo (2022); Transparency International (2023); ILO Nigeria Report (2022); NBS HR Report (2025); Ogunyemi (2019) and Fagbemi (2021)



**Figure 3a:** Public Vs Private Sector Performance Over Time



**Figure 3b:** HR Initiative Success Rate



Source: Adapted from CIMP Survey (2021); World Bank Report (2023); McKinsey Nigeria (2024); Adeyemi & Adeyemo (2022); Transparency International (2023); ILO Nigeria Report (2022); NBS HR Report (2025); Ogunyemi (2019) and Fagbemi (2021)

### Strategies to mitigate recruitment challenges and improve ethical standards in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 - July 2025)

Table 4 and Figure 4 outlines various proposed solutions and strategies aimed at improving recruitment practices and enhancing ethical standards in Nigerian HRM practices from 2009 to 2025. The solutions presented include HR ethics training, stronger legal enforcement, transparent recruitment processes, regular audits, automated recruitment systems, whistleblower policies, and strengthened labor laws. Each solution is described with its expected outcome, adoption rate, effectiveness, challenges in implementation, and organizational impact. HR ethics training, with a 67% adoption rate, is expected to lead to better-informed HR professionals, resulting in more fair and transparent recruitment decisions, although regular updates and commitment from HR departments are needed to maintain its high effectiveness.<sup>40</sup> Stronger legal enforcement, aimed at reducing nepotism and corruption, has a medium adoption rate (54%) and effectiveness (medium), with challenges such as the need for stricter monitoring and robust legal infrastructure. This strategy, however, is expected to increase trust in recruitment processes.<sup>31</sup> Transparent recruitment processes, with a 61% adoption rate and high effectiveness, could reduce corruption and nepotism, thereby improving employee morale and trust in the system, despite resistance to change and a lack of

transparency tools.<sup>32</sup> The key takeaway from Table 4 & Figure 4 is the variety of strategies proposed to address unethical HR practices, with a clear emphasis on increasing transparency, fairness, and efficiency in recruitment. While solutions such as automated recruitment systems and whistleblower policies show promise, their adoption rates and challenges in implementation such as high initial costs, resistance to AI adoption, and lack of protection for whistleblowers, highlight the complexities of effecting change in Nigerian HRM practices. Automated recruitment systems, for instance, are expected to improve efficiency and reduce bias with a 75% effectiveness rate, though the high initial costs and resistance to change present significant barriers to implementation.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, whistleblower policies are expected to enhance organizational transparency but face low adoption (15%) due to insufficient protections for whistleblowers.<sup>42</sup> These findings underscore the critical need for a multifaceted approach to reforming HR practices in Nigeria, with an emphasis on creating a legal and ethical framework that supports both transparency and accountability. The significance of these solutions lies in their potential to foster a more ethical, transparent, and efficient HRM environment, leading to reduced nepotism, enhanced organizational trust, and ultimately, improved recruitment outcomes. The real-world implications of this research suggest that by addressing the barriers to these proposed solutions, Nigerian organizations can cultivate a more equitable and productive workforce.

**Table 4** Proposed Solutions, Strategies, and Their Impact on Recruitment and Ethical Standards in Nigerian HRM (2009 – July 2025)

Year Range	Solution	Description	Expected Outcome	Adoption Rate	Effectiveness (%)	Challenges in Implementation	Organizational Impact	Source
2009-2025	HR Ethics Training	Regular training on ethics and merit-based recruitment for HR professionals.	Better-informed HR professionals are implementing fair recruitment.	67%	High	Requires regular updates, commitment from HR departments	Better recruitment decisions, increased transparency	Ayodele [40]
2009-2025	Stronger Legal Enforcement	Stricter enforcement of anti-nepotism policies and laws.	Reduced nepotism and corruption in recruitment.	54%	Medium	Needs stricter monitoring, legal infrastructure	Increased trust in recruitment processes	Ogunyemi [31]
2009-2025	Transparent Recruitment Processes	Standardized and transparent recruitment procedures, with public access to hiring information.	Increased employee trust and morale.	61%	High	Resistance to change, lack of transparency tools	Reduced corruption and nepotism, improved employee morale	Fagbemi [32]
2009-2025	Regular Audits and Monitoring	Conduct regular audits of recruitment processes and HR practices.	Detection and reduction of unethical practices.	59%	Medium	Requires dedicated auditing bodies, continuous oversight	Identification of unethical practices and prompt corrective actions	Oloruntoba & Muchie [25]
2009-2025	Automated Recruitment Systems	Use of AI-driven recruitment tools to remove human bias and streamline hiring.	More efficient, bias-free recruitment process.	30%	75%	High initial costs, resistance to AI adoption	Improved efficiency, reduced bias in hiring	Deloitte HR Tech Report [41]
2009-2025	Whistleblower Policies	Introduction of whistleblower mechanisms for reporting unethical practices.	Increased transparency, reduced corruption.	15%	60%	Lack of protection for whistleblowers, low adoption	Greater organizational transparency, enhanced ethical standards	ICPC [42]
2009-2025	Strengthened Labour Laws	Strengthening labor laws to ensure fair recruitment practices.	More ethical recruitment practices in both sectors.	20%	50%	Political resistance, slow legal reforms	Reduced nepotism, improved fairness in recruitment	NLC Policy Brief [43]

**Source:** Adapted from Ayodele (2020); Ogunyemi (2019); Fagbemi (2021); Oloruntoba & Muchie (2019); Deloitte. (2025); ICPC (2024); NLC Policy Brief (2025)



**Figure 4** HR Recruitment Solution: Adoption Rate Vs Effectiveness (2009 - 2025).

## Discussion

### Prevalence, ethical implications, and challenges of nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 - July 2025)

Nepotism has been a pervasive issue in Nigerian Human Resource Management (HRM), particularly in the public sector, where it distorts recruitment processes by prioritizing familial or personal relationships over qualifications. According to Table 1, between 2009 and 2013, nepotism in the public sector reached a 68% prevalence, significantly impacting organizational performance and employee morale.<sup>21</sup> Nepotism undermines key ethical principles such as fairness, equality, and transparency, which are vital for creating merit-based recruitment systems. This finding aligns with Okpara and Wynn,<sup>44</sup> who also identified nepotism as a central ethical challenge in Nigerian firms, particularly in the public sector, where it leads to the hiring of unqualified individuals for key roles, resulting in inefficiency and poor service delivery. The persistent nature of nepotism, as seen through the years, emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of its ethical consequences and its long-term impact on organizational success. Ethically, nepotism challenges the fundamental principles of meritocracy and fairness in recruitment, with significant repercussions for organizational integrity. As highlighted in the NBS HR Report,<sup>22</sup> nepotism in university recruitment and public sector hiring processes leads to inequality, where candidates without familial connections are often overlooked in favor of those with personal ties to decision-makers. This fosters a culture of favoritism and exclusion, reducing the overall quality of the workforce and compromising the ethical standards of organizations. Alabi and Sakariyau<sup>45</sup> also underscore how nepotism undermines the professionalism of the public sector, resulting in a lack of trust among employees and the general public. These findings correlate with the study of Akinbode and Adeyemi,<sup>46</sup> who argued that nepotism not only distorts the recruitment process but also leads to a decline in employee satisfaction and engagement, making it a barrier to long-term organizational growth. Furthermore, the persistent challenges posed by nepotism in Nigerian HRM are exacerbated by weak enforcement mechanisms and a lack of effective ethical policies. As illustrated in Table 1, the absence of robust policies to combat nepotism, coupled with corruption and political interference, continues to hinder the effectiveness of HRM practices in both the private and public sectors.<sup>23</sup> The difficulty in enforcing anti-nepotism laws and policies is a major obstacle to improving HR practices, as noted by the work of Okonkwo,<sup>47</sup> who highlighted that political interference often overrides merit-based hiring processes. This lack of policy enforcement not only perpetuates unethical recruitment practices but also diminishes public confidence in HRM systems. This study's findings align with those of Raimi et al.,<sup>10</sup> who argued that the persistence of nepotism in Nigerian organizations is due to weak governance structures that fail to ensure accountability in recruitment practices. Therefore, addressing the prevalence of nepotism requires both stronger legal frameworks and a commitment to enforcing ethical standards in recruitment across all sectors.

### Ethical breaches, recruitment challenges, and nepotism in Nigerian HRM practices (2009- July 2025)

The ethical breaches and recruitment challenges within Nigerian HRM practices have continued to evolve from 2009 to July 2025, with significant consequences for both public and private sector organizations. Table 2 highlights that bribery and kickbacks were particularly prevalent in the public sector between 2009 and 2013, with 65% of cases reported. This practice led to widespread corruption in hiring and promotion processes, undermining the

integrity of recruitment systems. Transparency International<sup>28</sup> similarly identifies bribery and corruption as major ethical issues in Nigerian recruitment practices, particularly in public institutions. These corrupt practices, driven by political influence and a lack of transparency, contributed to the exclusion of qualified candidates, highlighting a significant challenge to achieving fair and merit-based recruitment. The findings align with those of Ogbonna and Harris,<sup>48</sup> who argue that bribery and nepotism in Nigerian public institutions hinder organizational performance by promoting individuals based on connections rather than competence. As the study progresses through the years, gender bias emerges as a prominent ethical issue in the private sector, particularly between 2014 and 2018. Table 2 indicates that 40% of private sector hiring decisions during this period were affected by gender bias, leading to the marginalization of female candidates in favor of their male counterparts. This issue is consistent with the findings of Okpara and Wynn,<sup>44</sup> who highlighted how gender discrimination affects hiring and promotions in Nigerian organizations. The gender disparity in recruitment processes perpetuates inequality in the workforce, reducing organizational diversity and innovation. Similarly, Nwogu and Nnamani<sup>49</sup> underscore the negative impact of gender bias on employee satisfaction and organizational performance, with women often excluded from leadership and high-impact roles due to discriminatory practices. Addressing gender bias is, therefore, a critical component of ethical reform in Nigerian HRM practices. Ethnic favoritism also becomes a significant ethical breach between 2019 and 2023, particularly in the public sector, where 58% of recruitment decisions were influenced by ethnic bias, as shown in Table 2. This finding mirrors the work of Ezeani and Uzochukwu,<sup>50</sup> who noted that ethnic favoritism in the public sector further compounds recruitment challenges by excluding qualified candidates from underrepresented groups. Such practices lead to a lack of meritocracy and undermine the credibility of the recruitment process, contributing to widespread dissatisfaction among employees and the public. Furthermore, the study also identifies the rising use of fake certificates in hiring processes, particularly in 2024-2025, with 32% of candidates securing employment using fraudulent credentials.<sup>30</sup> This trend not only affects the integrity of the recruitment process but also threatens the overall competency of the workforce. These unethical practices reinforce the need for transparent, merit-based recruitment policies and stronger mechanisms to detect and prevent fraudulent activities in the hiring process. As noted by Adewale,<sup>51</sup> improving policy enforcement and enhancing transparency in recruitment are essential steps toward addressing these systemic challenges in Nigerian HRM practices.

### Unethical HR practices on organizational performance and recruitment challenges in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 - July 2025)

The results from Table 3 highlight the significant impact of unethical HR practices on organizational performance in Nigeria, particularly in relation to employee morale, turnover rates, and productivity. Between 2009 and 2013, unethical practices in the public sector, such as bribery, nepotism, and political interference, led to reduced employee morale and high turnover rates. This finding aligns with the work of Alabi and Sakariyau,<sup>45</sup> who found that nepotism in Nigerian public institutions contributes to disengagement among employees and negatively affects overall organizational performance. Additionally, Okpara and Wynn<sup>44</sup> highlight that nepotism, especially when political ties influence hiring decisions, undermines the morale of employees who feel excluded due to a lack of connections. The CIPM Survey<sup>36</sup> corroborates this by reporting that the lack of effective enforcement of policies, such as the Federal Character Principle,

further exacerbates employee dissatisfaction and disengagement in the public sector. In line with these findings, Ogbonna and Harris<sup>48</sup> argue that such practices breed inefficiencies in organizations by promoting individuals who may not possess the necessary skills or qualifications, ultimately impacting organizational growth. The period between 2014 and 2018 witnessed productivity losses due to unethical practices in the public sector, particularly in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) posting system, where nepotism and corruption led to suboptimal decisions in personnel placements. This period highlights the ongoing challenges in implementing performance-based incentives and meritocratic recruitment systems. The World Bank Report<sup>37</sup> emphasizes how corruption and nepotism within the NYSC system resulted in a 55% success rate for performance-based initiatives, reflecting the difficulties in achieving efficiency when recruitment decisions are influenced by personal ties rather than merit. This is further supported by Raimi et al.,<sup>10</sup> who argue that nepotism negatively impacts organizational performance by allowing unqualified individuals to assume key roles, hindering the overall productivity of organizations. Similarly, Adias and Raimi<sup>2,19,20</sup> argue that corruption in recruitment processes, particularly in government agencies, results in inefficient use of resources and contributes to long-term stagnation in organizational growth. These issues were echoed by Onah<sup>52</sup> who found that nepotism and favoritism in recruitment lead to poor performance outcomes in both public and private sector organizations. The findings from 2019 to 2023, showing high turnover rates and the exit of top talent due to insufficient compensation and continued challenges such as corruption and favoritism within the Public Service Rules (PSR), further underline the negative impact of unethical HR practices. McKinsey Nigeria<sup>38</sup> found that the lack of competitive compensation, coupled with persistent corruption and favoritism within the PSR, contributed to a 60% success rate in addressing these issues. This result corroborates the work of Iroanya and Okeke,<sup>53</sup> who argue that favoritism in recruitment leads to the loss of top talent, particularly when skilled individuals are overlooked in favor of less qualified candidates due to personal connections. Similarly, Adewale<sup>51</sup> highlighted that organizations face significant challenges in retaining high-performing employees when merit-based recruitment is not prioritized. Furthermore, Ezeani and Uzochukwu<sup>50</sup> pointed out that a lack of ethical leadership and transparency in recruitment exacerbates employee dissatisfaction and promotes turnover. The high turnover rates observed in the public sector due to unethical recruitment practices reflect the urgent need for reforms to create fairer, more transparent recruitment systems. These findings reinforce the conclusions drawn by Adias and Raimi,<sup>2,19,20</sup> who emphasize the need for inclusive HRM strategies to mitigate these challenges and improve overall organizational performance.

### **Strategies to mitigate recruitment challenges and improve ethical standards in Nigerian HRM practices (2009 - July 2025)**

The proposed solutions to mitigate recruitment challenges and improve ethical standards in Nigerian HRM practices, as outlined in Table 4, include HR ethics training, legal enforcement, transparent recruitment processes, and automated recruitment systems. HR ethics training, with a 67% adoption rate, is seen as a critical tool for creating better-informed HR professionals who can make fairer and more transparent recruitment decisions. Ayodele<sup>40</sup> emphasizes that regular updates and continuous commitment from HR departments are crucial for maintaining the effectiveness of these training programs. Similarly, Adias and Raimi,<sup>2,19,20</sup> argue that investing in ethics training can foster a more ethical workforce, thus promoting integrity in recruitment decisions. These findings support the work of Alabi and Sakariyau,<sup>45</sup>

who suggest that ethical training in HR practices can help reduce unethical behaviors like nepotism and favoritism. However, as noted by Onah<sup>52</sup> the effectiveness of HR ethics training is contingent on the level of institutional commitment to enforcing the principles taught in such programs. Without consistent implementation and reinforcement, the expected outcomes of these initiatives may not be fully realized. Another proposed strategy is stronger legal enforcement to address nepotism and corruption in recruitment processes. With a medium adoption rate (54%) and effectiveness, this solution faces significant challenges, including the need for stronger monitoring and robust legal frameworks. Ogunyemi<sup>31</sup> highlights that while legal frameworks exist, their enforcement remains weak, and political interference often compromises their effectiveness. This is consistent with findings by Okonkwo<sup>47</sup> who argued that nepotism continues to thrive in Nigerian organizations due to the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms for anti-nepotism laws. Furthermore, Adias et al.<sup>4,18,55</sup> suggest that legal reforms should be accompanied by clear, actionable policies to ensure compliance and reduce corruption in recruitment. These findings align with the work of Ezeani and Iwu,<sup>54</sup> who pointed out that without strong legal backing, even the best-intended reforms can fail to achieve the desired outcomes. Strengthening legal enforcement, however, would likely build greater trust in recruitment processes, as individuals would feel more confident that decisions are being made fairly and transparently. Also, the introduction of transparent recruitment processes, with a 61% adoption rate and high effectiveness, is another key solution highlighted in Table 4. This strategy aims to reduce corruption, nepotism, and bias, ultimately improving employee morale and trust in the system. Fagbemi<sup>32</sup> notes that transparency is crucial for fostering trust between employers and employees, particularly in sectors prone to unethical practices such as the public sector. However, resistance to change and a lack of tools for transparency remain significant barriers to implementing this solution effectively. These barriers are echoed by Raimi et al.,<sup>10</sup> who found that even when organizations adopt transparent practices, a lack of proper systems to track and display recruitment decisions can lead to inefficiencies. Moreover, the challenge of resistance to change, particularly in organizations with deeply ingrained nepotistic practices, was discussed by Oladipo and Adebayo<sup>54</sup> who highlighted that organizations must actively manage the cultural shifts required for transparency to take root. Despite these challenges, transparent recruitment processes are expected to have a profound impact on reducing unethical practices and building a more ethical HR environment. Therefore, the combination of training, legal reforms, and transparency initiatives, while challenging to implement, provides a comprehensive solution to Nigeria's HRM problems.

### **Implications for policy and interventions**

The findings from this study highlight the pervasive and damaging effects of unethical HR practices, such as nepotism, bribery, and ethnic favoritism, on the recruitment processes within both the public and private sectors in Nigeria. The prevalence of these practices calls for urgent policy interventions aimed at fostering more ethical, transparent, and merit-based recruitment systems. Policies focused on strengthening anti-corruption laws, enhancing the enforcement of ethical standards, and establishing clearer, standardized recruitment procedures are essential to reducing nepotism and bias. Furthermore, the integration of automated recruitment systems powered by AI could provide a technological solution to mitigate human biases in the recruitment process, although adoption challenges, such as high initial costs and resistance to change, must be addressed through targeted policy support. Government policies should also focus on ensuring that HR departments are adequately trained in ethics and merit-

based recruitment processes, with regular updates and monitoring to sustain ethical standards over time. Moreover, the introduction of whistleblower policies and the strengthening of labor laws to enforce fair recruitment practices are crucial for enhancing transparency and accountability. While these policies are expected to increase organizational transparency, their effectiveness could be limited by challenges such as lack of protection for whistleblowers and political resistance to labor law reforms. To overcome these barriers, policies should emphasize providing robust protection for whistleblowers and a clear, accessible mechanism for reporting unethical practices. Additionally, regular audits and the use of performance-based incentives should be integrated into the HRM framework to ensure that recruitment practices are continuously monitored and aligned with ethical standards. These interventions, when properly implemented, could significantly reduce unethical recruitment practices and foster an environment of fairness and equity within Nigerian organizations.

## Conclusion

This study has identified the key challenges and ethical dilemmas that pervade HRM practices in Nigeria, particularly in relation to nepotism, bribery, gender bias, and ethnic favoritism in recruitment. The analysis revealed that despite various efforts to improve HR practices, unethical recruitment continues to be a significant issue across both the public and private sectors. The findings also highlight the detrimental effects of these unethical practices, including decreased organizational performance, employee disengagement, high turnover rates, and a lack of trust in the recruitment processes. While several solutions have been proposed, including HR ethics training, legal enforcement, and transparent recruitment processes, their success rates have been hindered by challenges such as political interference, inadequate enforcement, and resistance to change. The study concludes that addressing unethical recruitment practices requires a multi-faceted approach that combines policy reforms, organizational commitment to ethical HR practices, and the use of technology to improve recruitment efficiency and fairness. By focusing on ethical training, strengthening legal frameworks, promoting transparency, and introducing technological innovations like automated recruitment systems, Nigerian organizations can begin to address the root causes of unethical recruitment practices. Furthermore, organizations must implement policies that safeguard against nepotism, gender bias, and favoritism, ensuring that recruitment decisions are based on merit and fairness.

## Summary of the findings

The study's findings provide a comprehensive overview of the prevalence and impact of unethical recruitment practices in Nigerian HRM from 2009 to July 2025. Table 1 demonstrates the ongoing issue of nepotism and its significant ethical implications, with a focus on the negative consequences for organizational performance and employee morale. Table 2 expanded on this by identifying specific ethical breaches, such as bribery, gender bias, and ethnic favoritism, which continue to challenge both private and public sector recruitment. Table 3 provided insight into the impact of these unethical practices on organizational performance, highlighting issues such as low employee morale, productivity loss, and talent drain. Finally, Table 4 outlined various proposed solutions, including HR ethics training, stronger legal enforcement, transparent recruitment processes, and automated recruitment systems, with varying success rates and challenges in implementation. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive policy and organizational reforms to address the root causes of unethical recruitment practices in Nigeria. The evidence suggests that despite the introduction of various solutions, such as

HR ethics training and legal reforms, the implementation challenges, ranging from political interference to resistance to technological adoption, have hindered the full effectiveness of these initiatives. The study also emphasizes the need for regular monitoring, audits, and the introduction of merit-based recruitment systems to counteract nepotism, corruption, and other unethical practices.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to improve recruitment practices and promote ethical standards in Nigerian HRM:

- I. Strengthening anti-corruption laws:** The government should tighten the enforcement of anti-nepotism and anti-corruption laws to reduce unethical recruitment practices, especially within the public sector. This includes ensuring stricter monitoring mechanisms and penalties for violations.
- II. Enhancing HR ethics training:** Regular ethics training for HR professionals in both public and private sectors should be implemented to ensure that recruitment decisions are based on merit, transparency, and fairness. This training should be updated regularly to address emerging ethical issues in HR practices.
- III. Implementing transparent recruitment processes:** Standardized and transparent recruitment processes should be adopted across organizations, with public access to hiring information to increase employee trust and morale.
- IV. Promoting the use of technology in recruitment:** Automated recruitment systems powered by AI should be introduced to streamline the hiring process and reduce human bias. However, this should be accompanied by policies to mitigate resistance to technological change and ensure fair implementation.
- V. Introducing whistleblower protection:** Policies should be established to protect whistleblowers, encouraging reporting of unethical practices within organizations and ensuring greater transparency in HR operations.
- VI. Improving labor laws:** The government should strengthen labor laws to ensure fair recruitment practices, addressing the challenges posed by nepotism, favoritism, and corruption, and ensuring that recruitment is based on competency rather than personal connections.

## Significant statement

The ethical challenges identified in Nigerian HRM practices are crucial not only for organizational success but also for the efficiency and sustainability of businesses across sectors. Nepotism and other unethical recruitment practices can undermine the hiring of qualified personnel, leading to poor service delivery, inefficient management of resources, and diminished organizational performance. In sectors like public administration and private enterprises, where employee competence and ethical standards are directly linked to organizational success, addressing these unethical practices is vital for improving overall productivity. By promoting merit-based recruitment and ensuring that employees are hired based on their skills and qualifications, the quality of services in Nigeria can be significantly enhanced. This would lead to improved organizational outcomes, greater employee morale, and higher public trust in organizations. Ethical recruitment practices would also contribute to the retention of skilled workers, reducing turnover rates and ensuring a stable workforce in critical areas. Therefore, implementing the recommendations in this study would not only strengthen organizational performance but also foster

long-term growth and sustainability across sectors in Nigeria. Thus, graphically it is represented (Figure 5) as:



**Figure 5** Impact of Ethical HRM Practices on Organizational Outcomes.

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