

An Evaluation of the Influence of Networking /connection on talent identification in Nigeria's Public and Private sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Talent identification plays a vital role in shaping effective human capital strategies within both public and private sector organizations. This study explores the impact of networking on talent identification practices in these sectors. A descriptive research design was employed, utilizing structured questionnaires administered to staff in two public and two private secondary schools across selected educational districts in Lagos, Nigeria. Stratified sampling techniques guided the selection of districts and schools. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019, with responses evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. Interpretative thresholds for the scale were as follows: 1.0–2.4 (negative influence), 2.5–3.4 (neutral influence), and 3.5–5.0 (positive influence). Results indicate that networking—particularly through political, ethnic, and religious affiliations—exerts a significant positive influence on talent identification in the public sector, often to the detriment of meritocratic selection. In contrast, private sector organizations demonstrate minimal reliance on such networks, instead prioritizing competence and professionalism through the use of accredited recruitment agencies. The study recommends a reduction in informal networking practices in public sector recruitment and advocates for stronger collaboration between recruitment professionals and human resource departments to enhance merit-based talent acquisition.

1.1 Introduction

Human interaction remains fundamental to the survival and progress of individuals and societies. As Ivwurie et al. (2022) argue, interpersonal relationships are essential for exchanging information and accessing opportunities. Interaction—whether through face-to-face communication, phone calls, written correspondence, or electronic media—facilitates connection. According to Baker (2020), such connections often extend across large and diverse networks of individuals, institutions, and systems.

This form of interaction is commonly referred to as networking, which Kusdinar et al. (2021) define as a constellation of heterogeneous individuals engaging to cultivate personal and professional relationships. Networking involves forming new connections, building trust, and leveraging relationships for mutual benefit. It is also a vehicle for learning about career trajectories, advancement opportunities, and role expectations from seasoned professionals.

Networking provides a strategic platform for individuals to develop social capital and sustain symbiotic relationships beneficial to career advancement (Forret & Dougherty, 2021). Through professional associations and organizational ties, individuals can enhance their social capital by establishing relationships with experts and skilled professionals (Higgins & Kram, 2021). These connections can yield innovative ideas, timely information, job leads, influence, and social support (Baker, 2020). By extension, networking enables access to otherwise unavailable opportunities through referrals or information-sharing mechanisms.

Traditionally, job vacancies were advertised via newspapers, trade journals, radio, television, and billboards (Hanoum, 2021). Recruitment was largely manual, involving letter writing, document submission, interviews, and physical interactions (Russell-Rose et al., 2016). In contemporary practice, however, recruitment has become more sophisticated. According to Saranya Devi (2016), reputable organizations now collaborate with recruitment agencies to attract skilled and talented candidates for key roles. These agencies conduct rigorous screening through interviews, assessments, and background checks (Gopal, 2023). Baker (2020) emphasizes that such agencies operate strategically to align talent acquisition with organizational needs.

In Nigeria, recruitment agencies utilize their expansive networks and industry knowledge to identify candidates best suited for specific roles (Fadare, 2015). Talent identification encompasses the accurate recognition of an individual's strengths, practical expertise, relevant experience, and interests—factors that predict success within a given role (Duran et al., 2021). Its objective is to develop a talent pool, nurture expertise, and strategically deploy talent for socio-economic advancement.

This study examines the influence of networking on talent identification within Nigeria's public and private education sectors.

1.2 Research Problem

Talent identification is a critical human resource management function, integral to achieving organizational effectiveness. Managers are tasked with selecting individuals whose competencies align with strategic objectives. However, suboptimal performance often results from recruiting underqualified individuals or mismatching talent with organizational needs.

In many cases, recruitment occurs through informal networks—relatives, friends, social media, or external agencies—without sufficient attention to qualifications or role-specific competencies (Edith et al., 2023). According to Koss-Feder (2020), 70–80% of professional jobs are acquired not through formal advertisements but through sustained networking efforts. This reliance on informal networks raises questions about the transparency, reliability, and inclusivity of talent identification processes.

Concerns over fairness in recruitment—especially in public sector hiring—have prompted increased scrutiny from policymakers and stakeholders. As Peterson et al. (2022) and Bolckmans et al. (2022) argue, selection practices must ensure equitable representation of historically marginalized groups. However, the diverse forms of networking employed in talent identification often produce inequitable outcomes, particularly when informal mechanisms override formal recruitment protocols.

Moreover, challenges related to the reliability and validity of assessment tools, selection procedures, and recruitment methods persist. Although scholars have extensively examined recruitment and selection in relation to organizational performance (Adeyemi et al., 2015), and explored social media's role in HRM (Hanoun et al., 2021) as well as agency recruitment strategies (Zirra et al., 2017; Edith, 2023), limited attention has been given to networking as a specific mechanism for talent identification across sectors.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing the influence of networking on talent identification within Nigeria's public and private education sectors.

1.3 Research Questions

What types of networking schemes are employed in talent identification within Nigeria's public and private education sectors?

How reliable are these networking schemes in identifying suitable talent in both sectors?

Are the talents identified through networking competent and relevant to the organizational needs of the public and private sectors?

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on the influence of networking on talent identification in Nigeria's public and private education sectors. Specifically, it investigates the types of networking schemes used, the reliability of these methods, and the competency of the talents identified. A descriptive survey research design will be employed to examine the phenomena and provide evidence-based insights into the variables under investigation.

Additionally, the study explores the underlying motivations for using networking in talent identification and evaluates the outcomes in terms of talent competence and organizational fit across sectors.

2.1 Literature Review

This chapter critically reviews existing literature on talent identification and the role of networking in the process. It presents the conceptual, empirical, and theoretical foundations relevant to this study.

2.2 Concept of Talent

Definitions of talent vary across disciplines. In a human resource context, talent is broadly defined as a set of abilities, skills, and potential that current or prospective employees possess, which can enhance organizational performance (Ford et al., 2010). In the field of gifted education, Gagné (1999) conceptualizes talent as the outcome of systematically developed skills derived from high intellectual ability. When nurtured in a supportive environment, this intellectual ability manifests in a range of physical, psychological, and social attributes that facilitate personal success (Dohme et al., 2019; Faber et al., 2021).

Talent is inherently multidimensional, encompassing various domains such as the arts, sciences, athletics, and interpersonal relations. Parra-Martinez et al. (2023) argue that a

multidimensional assessment framework—integrating cognitive, physical, and socioemotional measures—is essential for accurately identifying talent.

Psychological theories emphasize that talent is not solely determined by innate ability. Motivation and sustained effort are equally important. Bloom (1985) highlighted the importance of structured practice and training, stating that high achievers combine natural predispositions with dedicated effort. Similarly, Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences suggests that individuals possess diverse talents, ranging from linguistic and logical-mathematical to musical and interpersonal.

In sum, talent should be understood as a dynamic interaction between genetic potential and deliberate cultivation through education and practice.

2.3 Talent Identification

Talent identification (TI) is crucial for fostering excellence and ensuring sustainable organizational growth (Simonton, 2009; Makel et al., 2016). It refers to the process of recognizing individuals who demonstrate high performance and future potential (Williams & Reilly, 2000; Mäkelä et al., 2010). Effective TI practices are based on rigorous assessment methods to evaluate not only current capabilities but also potential for future development (Wiblen et al., 2012; Meyers et al., 2014).

Kusdinar et al. (2021) highlight the role of environmental support and developmental opportunities in transforming potential into realized talent. According to Hsieh et al. (2019), TI involves strategically allocating individuals to roles that align with their strengths in the fields of innovation, science, and economics. The reliability of TI depends on assessment validity and the extent to which present indicators predict long-term success (Dobbin et al., 2019; Johnston et al., 2018).

Researchers across education, healthcare, and management emphasize the early identification and continuous development of talent (John & Thiel, 2022). Empirical findings suggest that individuals selected through rigorous, evidence-based assessments tend to outperform those chosen through politically influenced methods.

2.4 Organizational Effectiveness

Recruitment and networking strategies significantly influence organizational performance, especially in sectors such as education and healthcare. Organizational effectiveness is a function of several factors: employee competence, training, promotion systems, reward structures, teamwork, job security, work environment, and employee-manager relations (Jonathan et al., 2012; Ekwoaba et al., 2015).

Ezeali and Esiagu (2010) assert that an organization's success largely depends on the quality of its workforce. Ongori et al. (2009) stress the importance of aligning individuals with suitable roles to optimize performance. Effective recruitment and networking strategies are crucial in this alignment process (Sinha et al., 2013; Naveen et al., 2014; Rakib, 2012).

However, in the Nigerian public sector, recruitment is often compromised by nepotism, political patronage, and ethnic favoritism. This undermines national development and organizational efficiency (Shafritz et al., 2011; Aibeye, 2010). Studies indicate that recruitment in many Nigerian parastatals lacks transparency and formal structure (Nwachukwu & Chladkova, 2017), often leading to the appointment of incompetent personnel based on elite recommendations.

Thus, fostering organizational effectiveness requires transparent, competency-based recruitment strategies that nurture and retain high-performing talent.

2.5 Empirical Review

Zirra, Ogbu, and Ojo (2017) examined the impact of recruitment and selection strategies on employee performance in three Nigerian manufacturing firms. Using inferential statistics (one-sample t-test), they found that recruitment through agencies and internal referrals enhanced employee commitment and productivity. In contrast, recruitment influenced by local community pressure led to inefficiencies.

Similarly, Adeyemi, Dumade, and Fadare (2015) explored recruitment practices in the Nigerian banking sector. Their study revealed structured recruitment processes involving internal promotions, public advertising, and agency-assisted hiring. These multi-phased approaches contributed positively to organizational performance.

2.6 Conceptual Review

Rauf (2007) emphasized the critical role of robust recruitment strategies in organizational performance. Sarkar and Kumar (2007), along with Ezeali and Esiagu (2010), stressed that effective recruitment directly correlates with employee quality and work efficiency. Adeyemi et al. (2013) argued for equitable recruitment practices, which influence organizational outcomes positively.

Olatunji and Ugoji (2013) found that recruitment strategies impact employee behavior, while Mustapha et al. (2013) advocated for recruitment policies aligned with organizational goals. Ekwoaba, Ikeije, and Ufoma (2015) highlighted the link between structured recruitment practices and enhanced organizational performance. Gamage (2014) reiterated that effective hiring systems are crucial in selecting competent personnel.

This review highlights a gap in existing literature—most studies focus on public sector recruitment, with minimal attention given to the private sector. This research seeks to address this gap by comparing networking-based talent identification practices in Nigeria's public and private education sectors. It explores how networking influences the reliability and effectiveness of recruitment in both contexts.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by three interrelated theoretical perspectives: institutional theory, social capital theory, and equity and fairness theories. These frameworks provide a robust foundation for analyzing how networking influences talent identification practices in Nigeria's public and private education sectors.

Institutional theory (Scott, 2008) posits that organizational actions are shaped by formal rules, cultural norms, and regulatory systems. In the context of recruitment, public sector institutions in Nigeria may operate under deeply embedded informal norms, such as ethnic or political favoritism, which become institutionalized over time. These informal practices, although often misaligned with meritocratic principles, persist due to cultural acceptance and systemic reinforcement. In contrast, private institutions are typically more responsive to market demands and performance metrics, which pressure them to prioritize competence in hiring.

Social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) explains how individuals derive value from their social networks. These networks facilitate access to job opportunities,

particularly in the public sector, where formal recruitment mechanisms may be perceived as opaque or inaccessible. Individuals with strong ties to influential actors (e.g., political leaders, community gatekeepers) often gain preferential access to employment. In the private sector, however, the utility of such social capital is often diminished in favor of professional qualifications and formal recruitment protocols.

Theories of equity and fairness (Adams, 1965; Greenberg, 1987) are essential for understanding perceptions of justice in recruitment. These theories distinguish between procedural fairness (fairness in the processes used to make decisions) and distributive fairness (fairness in the outcomes of those decisions). In settings where recruitment is heavily influenced by personal connections, perceptions of fairness may decline, leading to dissatisfaction, reduced morale, and inefficiencies. The public sector, in particular, may face challenges in maintaining legitimacy if network-based recruitment is perceived as unjust.

By combining these theoretical lenses, this study offers a comprehensive framework to interpret how and why networking practices differ across sectors, and what implications they hold for talent competence, organizational performance, and policy reform.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and interpretive research design to explore the influence of networking on talent identification in Nigeria's public and private education sectors. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive research design was selected to enable a detailed assessment of participants' perspectives and experiences regarding networking practices in talent identification. This design is appropriate for studies aiming to describe patterns and relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment. The interpretive component allows for deeper exploration of contextual factors, supporting a more nuanced understanding of how networking schemes operate within different institutional settings.

3.2 Study Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises teaching staff within the Lagos State education sector, which is divided into six educational districts. Two districts—Districts 2 and 6—were purposively selected due to their diverse representation of both public and private educational institutions.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across key demographic variables. The sampling frame was divided into strata based on gender, age, and educational qualification, in line with Hayes et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of stratification for improving representativeness in heterogeneous populations. From each selected district, two private and two public secondary schools were randomly selected, resulting in a total of eight schools. Participants were drawn from teaching staff across these schools.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered in person to respondents. The questionnaire was designed based on the study's research questions and consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-scale items. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing for the measurement of respondents' agreement levels with key statements.

Secondary data was obtained from academic journal articles, government policy documents, employment legislation, and prior empirical studies related to recruitment practices, talent identification, and networking strategies. These materials were used to contextualize findings and strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel, employing descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, means, and standard deviations) to summarize the data. The use of Excel enabled efficient coding and aggregation of responses across the Likert-scale questions. The analysis provided insights into patterns and trends related to the use and perceived effectiveness of networking in talent identification.

Qualitative responses (if any open-ended questions were included) were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring themes and patterns relevant to networking practices in the education sector.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The study complied with ethical standards for social science research, ensuring that participants' rights and data integrity were safeguarded throughout the research process

4.0. Data Analysis and Results

A total of 100 questionnaires were administered and retrieved from teachers across both public and private educational institutions in Lagos State (50 respondents from each sector). To facilitate comparative analysis, responses from public and private sectors were analyzed independently. The analysis employed descriptive statistics (mean scores) based on a five-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Interpretation of mean scores was guided by the following thresholds:

- **1.0 – 2.4:** Negative Influence
- **2.5 – 3.4:** Neutral Influence
- **3.5 – 5.0:** Positive Influence

The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- **Part A:** Demographic Information
- **Part B:** Perceptions of networking and talent identification (grouped into three research objectives).

4.1. Analysis of Private Sector Data

Demographics

Out of 50 respondents from private schools: 18 were male and 32 were female. The managerial breakdown showed 21 senior staff and 29 junior staff. In terms of

qualifications, 25 held an MSc, 5 had a BA, and 20 held a BSc/HND. Work experience was distributed as follows: 12 (less than 5 years), 20 (5–10 years), and 8 (11–20 years).

Objective 1: Networking Schemes Used in Talent Identification (Private Sector)

SN Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1 Recruitment exercises are conducted to identify talents.	4.7	Positive
2 Networking is considered in the identification of talents.	2.5	Neutral
3 Ethnicity and religion influence talent identification.	2.2	Negative
4 The Federal Character Principle guides recruitment.	4.0	Positive
5 Professionalism guides talent identification.	4.6	Positive

Objective 2: Reliability of Networking Schemes (Private Sector)

SN Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1 Good recruitment agencies are used to identify talent.	4.2	Positive
2 Political networks are effective in identifying talent.	2.3	Negative
3 HR personnel are effective in talent identification.	4.4	Positive
4 Internal recommendations are effective.	3.7	Positive
5 On-the-job training aids talent identification.	3.9	Positive

Objective 3: Competence and Relevance of Network-Identified Talents (Private Sector)

SN Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1 Talents identified by recruitment agents are reliable.	4.5	Positive
2 Talents identified through political networks are competent.	2.6	Neutral
3 HR-identified talents are professionals.	4.5	Positive
4 On-the-job trained talents perform well.	4.5	Positive

5	Recommended talents from within are efficient.	4.3	Positive
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4.2. Analysis of Public Sector Data

Demographics

From the 50 public sector respondents, 28 were male and 22 female. The staff distribution was 26 senior and 24 junior. Educational qualifications included: 16 MSc, 1 MBA, 2 BA, and 31 BSc/HND. Work experience: 14 (less than 5 years), 18 (5–10 years), 12 (11–20 years), and 6 (21 years and above).

Objective 1: Networking Schemes Used in Talent Identification (Public Sector)

SN	Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1	Recruitment exercises are conducted to identify talents.	4.8	Positive
2	Networking is considered in the identification of talents.	4.4	Positive
3	Ethnicity and religion influence talent identification.	4.6	Positive
4	The Federal Character Principle guides recruitment.	1.9	Negative
5	Professionalism guides talent identification.	3.9	Positive

Objective 2: Reliability of Networking Schemes (Public Sector)

SN	Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1	Good recruitment agencies are used.	2.5	Neutral
2	Political networks are effective.	2.8	Neutral
3	HR personnel are effective.	4.2	Positive
4	Internal recommendations are effective.	2.7	Neutral
5	On-the-job training aids identification.	2.8	Neutral

Objective 3: Competence and Relevance of Network-Identified Talents (Public Sector)

	SN Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
1	Talents identified by recruitment agents are reliable.	1.5	Negative
2	Talents from political networks are competent.	2.0	Negative
3	HR-identified talents are professionals.	4.1	Positive
4	On-the-job trained talents perform well.	3.0	Neutral
5	Recommended talents from within are efficient.	3.5	Positive

4.3. Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that in the **private sector**, talent identification is largely driven by **formal recruitment methods, HR processes, and internal recommendations**, with minimal influence from political or ethnic networks. Talents sourced through networking schemes were viewed as less competent.

In contrast, in the **public sector**, networking — particularly through **ethnic, religious, and political connections** — appears to play a more significant role in talent identification. However, these network-sourced talents were viewed as less reliable and competent, whereas talents sourced through **human resource departments** were perceived as effective and professional.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the influence of networking on talent identification in Nigeria's public and private education sectors. The findings reveal significant differences between the two sectors in how networking affects talent identification processes.

In the private sector, evidence from the first research question shows that political, ethnic, and religious affiliations have minimal influence on talent identification. This supports the findings of Irejeh et al. (2023), who reported that the private sector in Nigeria tends to adopt formal and structured recruitment processes. Similarly, Falola et al. (2018) emphasized that strategic recruitment methods, rather than informal networks or patronage systems (e.g., godfatherism), sustain effective talent management in private organizations.

In contrast, the public sector relies heavily on networking, particularly political, ethnic, and religious considerations, when identifying talent. This aligns with Hanoum et al. (2021), who argued that public sector organizations often recruit through political affiliations to minimize recruitment costs, albeit at the expense of merit-based selection.

Addressing the second research question, the results show that the private sector predominantly utilizes recruitment agencies, internal recommendations, and human resource departments to identify talent. These channels were found to be effective and reliable. This supports Irejeh et al. (2023), who noted that private organizations often benefit from the professional expertise of recruitment agencies, which enhances organizational outcomes. In contrast, the public sector's reliance on informal networks frequently results in the recruitment of less competent individuals, thereby negatively affecting organizational efficiency and development. These findings support prior literature (e.g., Irejeh et al., 2023), which suggests that political interference and nepotism hinder economic development and institutional performance.

Regarding the third research question, the study finds that in the private sector, talents identified through professional recruitment processes (including internal recommendations and HR departments) are generally competent and contribute positively to organizational goals. This aligns with the findings of Jonathan, Moses, and Willis (2012), who observed that formal recruitment and selection practices have a strong positive relationship with employee competence and organizational performance. However, in the public sector, talents selected via political or social networks were generally perceived as less competent. Conversely, employees recruited through the human resource department were found to be more effective and dedicated.

From the lens of institutional theory. Public sector recruitment practices reflect institutional norms that legitimize informal mechanisms such as political patronage and ethnic favoritism. These practices are reinforced by systemic and cultural expectations, contributing to the marginalization of merit-based recruitment. Conversely, the private sector, which is more influenced by competitive market forces, emphasizes competence, professionalism, and performance outcomes, aligning more closely with formal institutional structures.

Social capital theory explains why informal networking remains prevalent in the public sector. In an environment where access to formal opportunities is limited, individuals leverage social ties to secure employment. This form of capital is especially potent in bureaucratic systems where transparency is lacking. However, in the private sector, where hiring is more structured and outcome-driven, social capital plays a lesser role in recruitment decisions.

From an equity and fairness perspective, the reliance on informal networks in the public sector raises concerns about procedural and distributive justice. When recruitment decisions are based on non-meritocratic factors, perceptions of fairness are undermined, potentially leading to reduced motivation and lower organizational performance. In contrast, the private sector's structured recruitment approach fosters a perception of fairness and professionalism, contributing to higher levels of talent competence and alignment with organizational goals.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of networking in talent identification within Nigeria's public and private education sectors. Drawing on institutional theory, the study shows that public sector recruitment is shaped by entrenched informal norms that prioritize political and ethnic affiliations over merit. Meanwhile, the private sector adheres more closely to formal institutional standards, driven by performance expectations and accountability.

Social capital theory helps explain the mechanism by which individuals access opportunities in environments with weak formal structures, particularly in the public sector. However, such mechanisms may inadvertently undermine meritocracy and organizational effectiveness. This dynamic is further illuminated by equity and fairness theories, which highlight how reliance on informal networks compromises procedural and distributive justice.

Overall, while the private sector demonstrates a greater commitment to competence-based recruitment, the public sector's dependence on social ties has notable implications for fairness and efficiency. These findings underscore the need for systemic reform to promote equitable and transparent talent identification across both sectors.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Public sector organizations should actively dismantle institutionalized informal practices—especially those based on political, ethnic, or religious affiliations—in recruitment. These practices reduce transparency and hinder the development of a merit-based workforce.

Human resource departments in public institutions must be empowered and professionalized to lead recruitment processes. Procedural fairness can be enhanced through standardized selection criteria and unbiased evaluation systems.

Greater collaboration with professional recruitment agencies should be encouraged, particularly in the public sector. Such partnerships can align hiring practices with formal institutional norms and reduce over-reliance on social networks.

Policy reforms are essential to institutionalize meritocracy in both sectors. Regulatory oversight should include transparency benchmarks, equity audits, and compliance incentives to ensure fair and effective talent identification practices.

Training and advocacy programs should raise awareness among public sector actors about the long-term benefits of fair and transparent recruitment, contributing to improved institutional trust and workforce performance

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