

STAFF RECRUITMENT PROCESS AND GHOST WORKERS SYNDROME IN KOGI STATE CIVIL SERVICE 2016-2024: A STUDY OF PRINCE ABUBAKAR AUDU UNIVERSITY, ANYIGBA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the staff recruitment process and the pervasive ghost workers syndrome within the Kogi State Civil Service from 2016 to 2024. The ghost workers syndrome, characterized by the inclusion of fictitious employees on payrolls, has undermined the operational integrity and financial health of the civil service, leading to significant budgetary losses and diminished public trust. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 326 civil servants through structured questionnaires, focusing on the causes, contributing factors, and perceptions of fairness in recruitment processes. The findings reveal that inadequate oversight, lack of transparency, and systemic corruption are primary contributors to the ghost workers phenomenon. Additionally, civil servants expressed moderate confidence in the fairness of recruitment practices, with concerns regarding nepotism and favoritism. Despite the implementation of measures such as biometric verification and regular audits, gaps remain in training for payroll administrators and the effectiveness of verification processes. This study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in recruitment practices, enhanced verification mechanisms, and continuous monitoring to mitigate the ghost workers issue effectively. By addressing these systemic challenges, the Kogi State government can restore public trust and improve the overall efficiency of the civil service.

Keywords: Ghost Workers Syndrome, Staff Recruitment, Civil Service, Corruption

INTRODUCTION

The staff recruitment process within the Kogi State Civil Service has faced considerable scrutiny due to the ongoing challenges posed by the ghost workers syndrome. This phenomenon, characterized by the presence of fictitious employees on the payroll, has severely undermined the efficiency and credibility of the civil service (Abubakar, 2021). Between 2016 and 2024, the implications of this issue have been profound, not only affecting operational effectiveness but also leading to significant financial repercussions for the state. Ghost workers are typically created through fraudulent means, allowing individuals to illegally receive salaries and benefits that should be allocated to legitimate employees (Eze, 2020). This fraudulent practice not only erodes public trust but also hampers the ability of the civil service to function effectively.

Historically, the recruitment process in Kogi State, similar to many other regions in Nigeria, has been marred by inefficiencies and corruption. Afolabi (2019) posits that the lack of a transparent and accountable system has facilitated the emergence of ghost workers, making it difficult for the government to maintain an accurate and reliable workforce. Reports indicate that the Kogi State government conducted a staff verification exercise in 2016, which uncovered over 18,000 ghost workers on its payroll. This alarming discovery highlighted the extent of the problem and underscored the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in the

recruitment and verification processes within the civil service (Zafar, 2023). The presence of these fictitious employees not only detracts from the overall operational integrity of the civil service but also signals deeper systemic issues that must be addressed.

The financial consequences of the ghost workers syndrome are staggering, with estimates suggesting that the state was losing approximately N2 billion monthly due to these fraudulent practices (Dada, 2021). This amount represents a significant drain on Kogi State's financial resources, diverting funds that could otherwise be used for critical public services and development projects. The state's fiscal health has been compromised, limiting its capacity to invest in essential infrastructure, education, and healthcare. As a result, addressing the ghost workers syndrome has become a priority for the Kogi State government, necessitating the implementation of stringent measures to enhance the transparency and integrity of the recruitment process (Bassey, 2022). Without decisive action, the cycle of inefficiency and corruption threatens to persist, undermining the potential for sustainable development in the region.

Literature on public sector employment in Nigeria underscores several systemic issues that facilitate the persistence of ghost workers syndrome, including nepotism, lack of transparency, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. Adebayo (2019) highlights that these factors are not merely isolated incidents but part of a broader culture of corruption that permeates the recruitment and payroll management systems. In particular, ghost workers often emerge as a product of manipulated employment records, where some public officials exploit weak oversight to create fictitious positions (Uche, 2020). This manipulation is compounded by a lack of rigorous checks and balances, allowing these corrupt practices to flourish unchecked. Consequently, the prevalence of ghost workers is not just an administrative challenge but a reflection of deeper institutional failings within the public sector (Adebayo, 2019).

This includes regular training programs for personnel involved in payroll management, as well as the establishment of independent oversight bodies to monitor compliance and effectiveness (Ibrahim, 2021). Ensuring that these initiatives are not merely reactive but part of a long-term strategy will be crucial for restoring public trust and enhancing the overall efficiency of the civil service. A comprehensive and sustained effort will not only mitigate the financial losses associated with ghost workers but also contribute to a more effective and accountable governance structure in Kogi State.

The prevalence of ghost workers within the Kogi State Civil Service has posed a significant challenge to the effective administration and financial health of the state. Despite various attempts to reform the recruitment process, the civil service continues to grapple with systemic issues that enable the existence of fictitious employees on the payroll. Between 2016 and 2024, the discovery of over 18,000 ghost workers highlighted the extent of this problem, which has been costing the state billions of naira in wasted resources. This fraudulent practice not only diverts funds away from critical development projects but also undermines public trust in the civil service, exacerbating inefficiencies and reducing the quality of public service delivery. Moreover, the measures implemented by the state government, such as the introduction of biometric data capture systems, have shown some success in reducing the number of ghost workers. However, these interventions have not completely eradicated the problem. Persistent issues such as the manipulation of

employment records, lack of transparency in the recruitment process, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms continue to hinder the effectiveness of these reforms. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive and sustained approach to address these deep-rooted issues, ensuring that the recruitment process is transparent, efficient, and free from corruption. This study seeks to examine the underlying factors contributing to the ghost workers syndrome, evaluate the effectiveness of the measures implemented so far, and propose strategies for a more robust and transparent recruitment system in the Kogi State Civil Service.

- i. To what extent does job description clarity reduces ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service?
- ii. How does candidate experience reduce ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service?

The general objective of the study is to examine staff recruitment process and ghost workers syndrome in Kogi State Civil Service 2016-2024. The specific objectives are to;

- i. identify the effect of job description clarity on ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service.
- ii. analyze the effect of candidate experience on ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service.

The study formulated two hypotheses:

H₀₁: Job description clarity has no effect on ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service.

H₀₂: Candidate experience has no significant effect on ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Staff Recruitment Process

The staff recruitment process is a systematic approach that organizations use to attract, evaluate, and select qualified candidates for job openings (Dada, 2021). This process is critical for ensuring that organizations can effectively meet their operational needs and achieve their strategic goals. By following a structured approach, organizations can streamline their hiring efforts and minimize the risks associated with poor hiring decisions. The recruitment process typically begins with identifying staffing needs, which involves analyzing current workforce gaps and anticipating future requirements based on organizational objectives. This initial step sets the foundation for the entire recruitment strategy, ensuring that the organization targets the right candidates to fulfill its specific needs (Usman, 2019).

Once staffing needs are identified, the next stage involves creating and posting job descriptions that clearly outline the responsibilities, qualifications, and expectations for the role. This step is essential for attracting suitable candidates and provides a clear framework for evaluating applicants. By using precise language and focusing on the skills and experiences that are most relevant to the position, organizations can enhance their chances of attracting high-quality applicants (Uche, 2020). Job postings can be disseminated through various channels, including job boards, social media, and professional networking platforms, allowing organizations to reach a diverse pool of candidates (Eze, 2020). The effectiveness of this outreach can significantly

influence the overall quality of applicants received. Sourcing candidates is a crucial step in the recruitment process, as it involves actively seeking out individuals who may be a good fit for the organization. This can include using traditional methods such as job advertisements, as well as more proactive approaches like employee referrals, recruitment agencies, and networking events. By leveraging multiple sourcing channels, organizations can increase the likelihood of finding qualified candidates who may not be actively searching for new opportunities. This broad approach not only enhances the talent pool but also fosters a more diverse and inclusive workplace, which can lead to improved creativity and problem-solving within teams (Zubair, 2021).

Ghost Workers Syndrome

Ghost workers syndrome is a pervasive issue affecting many public and private sector organizations, particularly in regions where governance and administrative oversight are weak (Thomas, 2022). This phenomenon creates significant challenges to both the integrity and efficiency of organizations, especially in the public sector, where transparency and accountability are paramount. The inclusion of ghost workers in payroll systems not only distorts the actual workforce but also diverts crucial resources away from legitimate operational needs. This practice is indicative of broader systemic issues, such as corruption and inadequate oversight, which can severely hinder an organization's ability to fulfill its mission. Ghost workers are essentially fictitious employees who do not exist but are nonetheless included on payrolls (Ahsan, 2021). This can manifest in two primary scenarios: the creation of entirely fictitious entities by corrupt officials or the retention of real individuals who have left the organization but remain on the payroll (Zubair, 2021). In the first scenario, corrupt officials may fabricate employee records to siphon off funds for personal gain, creating a façade of a larger workforce than actually exists. In the second scenario, organizations may fail to update their payroll systems promptly, leading to the continued payment of salaries to individuals who are no longer part of the organization. Both situations illustrate a lack of effective payroll management and oversight, which can exacerbate the financial strain on organizations.

The ramifications of ghost workers syndrome extend beyond mere financial loss; they also undermine public trust in government institutions and erode the overall effectiveness of service delivery. When taxpayers become aware that their funds are being mismanaged or wasted on fictitious employees, their confidence in governmental systems diminishes (Owolabi, 2022). This erosion of trust can have far-reaching implications, including decreased public cooperation and support for government initiatives. Furthermore, the presence of ghost workers can lead to inadequate staffing levels for essential services, resulting in poorer service delivery and reduced quality of life for citizens who rely on public services. Addressing ghost workers syndrome requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening internal controls, enhancing payroll management systems, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability (Okafor, 2022). Organizations must implement robust auditing practices to regularly review payroll records and identify discrepancies. Additionally, leveraging modern technology, such as biometric systems and automated payroll software, can significantly reduce the likelihood of errors and fraudulent entries. By prioritizing these measures, organizations can not only curb the prevalence of ghost workers but also restore public trust and improve overall operational efficiency. In doing so, they can ensure that resources are allocated effectively

to support genuine employees who contribute to the organization's objectives and the betterment of society (Sulaimon, 2021).

Job Description Clarity

The phenomenon of ghost workers syndrome poses a significant challenge for organizations, particularly within the public sector. As highlighted by Williams (2020), this issue arises from a confluence of factors that expose systemic vulnerabilities, allowing fraudulent practices to flourish. Understanding these underlying causes is essential for developing effective strategies to combat ghost workers and enhance organizational integrity. Central to this discussion is the concept of job description clarity, which plays a crucial role in ensuring accountability and transparency within the recruitment and payroll processes.

Job descriptions serve as foundational documents that outline the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications required for specific positions. When job descriptions are clear and well-defined, they provide a framework for both employees and employers to understand expectations and accountability (Owolabi, 2022). This clarity helps to delineate the boundaries of each role within the organization, minimizing the potential for ambiguity that can be exploited by dishonest individuals. In contrast, vague or poorly constructed job descriptions can lead to misunderstandings and create opportunities for manipulation, including the inclusion of ghost workers on payrolls.

Moreover, clarity in job descriptions fosters a culture of accountability. When employees are aware of their specific duties and the ramifications of their actions, they are less likely to engage in unethical behavior. As Okeke (2019) points out, the normalization of unethical practices is often a result of lax oversight and unclear expectations. By implementing robust job descriptions, organizations can establish a baseline for performance and ethical conduct that discourages fraudulent activities, such as the creation of fictitious employees.

In addition, job description clarity aids in the recruitment process by ensuring that candidates possess the necessary qualifications and experience to fulfill their roles. With well-defined criteria, organizations can more effectively screen applicants, reducing the likelihood of hiring individuals who may exploit weaknesses in the system. As noted by Thomas (2022), outdated and inefficient payroll systems exacerbate the problem of ghost workers, but the foundation for effective recruitment lies in the clarity of job descriptions. This clarity not only enhances the hiring process but also contributes to a more transparent and accountable organizational culture.

Candidate Experience

The issue of ghost workers syndrome presents significant challenges for organizations, particularly in how they manage their payroll and recruitment processes. As highlighted by Nelson (2019), the causes of this phenomenon are deeply rooted in systemic weaknesses that create opportunities for fraud within administrative operations. One critical aspect that can impact the effectiveness of recruitment and payroll management is the candidate experience. A positive candidate experience not only enhances the

organization's reputation but also plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining qualified employees, thereby reducing the likelihood of ghost workers infiltrating the system.

Candidate experience refers to the overall perception and interactions that individuals have with an organization throughout the recruitment process. This encompasses every touchpoint, from job postings and application submissions to interviews and onboarding. When candidates perceive the recruitment process as transparent, respectful, and efficient, they are more likely to engage genuinely with the organization. Conversely, a negative candidate experience can lead to disillusionment and may attract individuals who are more prone to unethical behavior, including those who might exploit weaknesses in the system for personal gain (Danjuma, 2022).

Moreover, a well-structured candidate experience can enhance accountability within the recruitment process. As Ibe (2021) notes, organizations that invest in a streamlined and user-friendly application process are better positioned to attract high-quality candidates. When applicants are treated with respect and their experiences are valued, they are more likely to understand and adhere to the organizational values, including integrity and accountability. This alignment can deter potential misconduct, such as the creation of ghost workers, and foster a culture of ethical behavior among employees.

Regular feedback and communication during the recruitment process also contribute to a positive candidate experience. By keeping applicants informed and engaged, organizations can build trust and transparency, which are essential for cultivating an ethical workplace culture. As Obaje (2021) emphasizes, the reliance on outdated payroll systems can complicate record-keeping and verification efforts; however, a strong candidate experience can help ensure that only legitimate employees are onboarded, thus mitigating the risk of ghost workers. In conclusion, improving candidate experience is a vital strategy for organizations aiming to combat ghost workers syndrome. By creating a recruitment process that prioritizes transparency, respect, and accountability, organizations can attract high-quality candidates who are committed to ethical practices. This proactive approach not only strengthens the integrity of the payroll system but also reinforces the overall effectiveness of the organization in fulfilling its mission and serving its stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Theory propounded by Meyer and Rowan in 1977

Institutional theory examines how institutions, such as organizations or societal norms, shape behavior and practices within organizations. This theory emphasizes the role of external pressures—such as regulatory frameworks, cultural expectations, and social norms—in influencing how organizations operate. By analyzing these external factors, institutional theory seeks to explain the dynamics of conformity and adaptation within organizations. It posits that organizations are not solely driven by market forces or internal efficiencies; rather, they are significantly affected by the institutional contexts in which they exist. This perspective broadens the understanding of organizational behavior beyond traditional economic theories, highlighting how social and cultural factors play a pivotal role in shaping practices and structures.

Empirical Review

Thomas (2024) examined the primary causes of ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service using a descriptive survey design. The study targeted civil servants in Kogi State, with a sample of 150 individuals selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation from various departments. Data were collected via structured questionnaires distributed to the participants, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to assess the significance of the identified causes. The findings revealed that the main factors contributing to ghost workers syndrome included a lack of regular audits, collusion among staff, and weak internal controls. To address these issues, the study recommended implementing regular audits, strengthening internal controls, and fostering a culture of accountability within the civil service. Additionally, it suggested modernizing payroll systems, providing training for staff on anti-fraud measures, and establishing an independent audit body. This study provides crucial insights into the root causes of ghost workers syndrome in Kogi State, serving as a foundation for further exploration in the current research aimed at developing comprehensive solutions to this persistent issue.

Zafar (2023) investigated the factors contributing to the persistence of ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service using a descriptive survey research design. The study focused on employees of the Kogi State Civil Service Commission, selecting a purposive sample of 100 employees from various departments. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires, with qualitative data analyzed using thematic analysis and quantitative data processed using SPSS. The findings identified key factors sustaining ghost workers syndrome, including political interference, a lack of punitive measures for offenders, and inadequate technological infrastructure. To effectively combat this issue, the study emphasized the need for political will to enforce anti-corruption laws and to enhance technological infrastructure for transparent payroll systems. Recommendations included adopting biometric verification systems, establishing a task force to oversee payroll integrity, and implementing strict penalties for those involved in payroll fraud. This study underscores the ongoing factors that enable ghost workers to persist within the Kogi State Civil Service. The current research can utilize these findings to propose more effective interventions and policies aimed at mitigating this issue.

Suleiman (2023) examined the perceptions of fairness and transparency among Kogi State civil servants regarding the staff recruitment process using a cross-sectional survey design. The study targeted civil servants across various departments in Kogi State, with a sample of 250 participants selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different departments and levels of seniority. Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed to the chosen sample. The analysis of the quantitative data employed descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that a significant number of civil servants perceived the recruitment process as lacking fairness and transparency, highlighting issues such as nepotism, favoritism, and an absence of clear selection criteria. These perceptions of fairness and transparency were found to impact employee morale and organizational trust. The study recommended the implementation of clearer recruitment guidelines, adherence to merit-based criteria, and increased transparency in decision-making processes. This research

provides valuable insights into civil servants' perceptions, which are essential for understanding organizational dynamics and informing improvements in recruitment practices in the current study.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, a cross sectional survey research design was used in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena. A cross sectional survey research design allowed for the administering of questionnaire to the respondents at a point in time. This design will be used to examine the staff recruitment process and ghost workers syndrome in Kogi State Civil Service 2016-2024. The population of the study are the academic staff of Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba with the total population of 730 in PAAU, Anyigba Also, the population comprises of all non-teaching staff with five hundred and nineteen (519) senior non-academic staff and junior non-non-teaching staff of five hundred and three (503) with the total of 1752 (Deputy Registrar, PAAU, 2024). The assumption is that the sample is a representative of the population. Sample size formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

- Where n = Sample size
- N = Population
- e = Level of significance
- 1 = Constant

The researcher used 10% 'level of significance to determine the sample size.

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= \frac{N}{1 + N(0.5)^2} \\
 n &= \frac{1752}{1 + 1752(0.5)^2} \\
 n &= \frac{1752}{1 + 1752(0.0025)} \\
 n &= \frac{1752}{1 + 4.38} \\
 &= \frac{1752}{5.38} = 325.65 = 326
 \end{aligned}$$

Thus, three hundred and twenty six civil servant for the study. The copies of questionnaire will be randomly administered to the respondents with the institution. Data for the study were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered using a questionnaire instrument designed to obtain information relevant to the research questions and hypotheses stated. The study, which was predominantly quantitative in nature, adopted a structured questionnaire for generating primary data. The questionnaire instrument was structured into five major sections namely; Section (a) Demographic Characteristics, that was designed to gather information concerning bio data of the respondents', Section (b) job description clarity and ghost workers; Section (c), candidate experience and ghost workers; Section (d) perception of civil servant regarding the fairness and transparency; Section (e), measures implemented by the government to

combat ghost workers syndrome. Respondents perceptions were gathered using a 5-item Likert-scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to strongly agree'.

Data were presented using tables. The frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to interpret the respondents' responses. Responses to the questionnaire were ranked across a five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided, Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was used to analyze the data, while ANOVA was employed to estimate the model and test all the null hypotheses formulated.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Job Description Clarity and Ghost Workers Syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service

S/N	ITEMS	N	MEAN	STD
1	The lack of clear job descriptions contributes to inadequate staff verification processes in the Kogi State Civil Service.	320	2.61	1.64
2	Ambiguities in job roles among officials contribute to the existence of ghost workers.	320	3.33	.99
3	Unclear job descriptions hinder proper payroll management systems, facilitating ghost workers.	320	4.04	.91
4	There is a lack of transparency in job descriptions during the recruitment process of civil servants.	320	4.12	.72
5	Ghost workers syndrome is prevalent due to unclear job roles and inadequate oversight mechanisms.	320	4.18	.71
6	The absence of clearly defined job descriptions contributes to the persistence of ghost workers.	320	4.15	.65
7	Political influence complicates the clarity of job descriptions in the hiring of civil servants.	320	4.17	.69
8	There is a lack of public awareness regarding job descriptions and reporting systems for ghost workers in Kogi State.	320	4.18	.88
	Grand mean		3.85	.90

Source: Primary Data, SPSS V20, 2025.

The table presents a quantitative analysis of the relationship between job description clarity and the prevalence of ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service. Each item reflects specific areas where deficiencies in job descriptions contribute to systemic vulnerabilities, allowing ghost workers to infiltrate the payroll system. The mean scores indicate the perceived severity of these issues among respondents, with higher scores suggesting a more pronounced concern regarding the lack of clarity in job roles and its implications for accountability and transparency.

One of the key findings is that inadequate staff verification processes (mean 2.61) are significantly impacted by unclear job descriptions. This suggests that when roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, it

becomes challenging to verify staff legitimacy. This ambiguity can lead to an environment where ghost workers can easily be added to payrolls without detection, ultimately undermining the integrity of the civil service. The relatively low mean score highlights the need for immediate attention to enhance verification processes through well-defined job roles.

Furthermore, the data indicates that corruption among officials (mean 3.33) and the lack of proper payroll management systems (mean 4.04) are also interconnected with vague job descriptions. When job expectations are not explicitly outlined, it opens the door for unethical practices, as individuals may exploit these gaps for personal gain. The high mean score for the lack of proper payroll management systems underscores the urgency for organizations to implement robust payroll practices that are informed by clear job descriptions, ensuring that only legitimate employees are compensated.

The implications of these findings are significant for the Kogi State Civil Service. A lack of clarity in job descriptions not only fosters an environment conducive to ghost workers but also erodes public trust in the civil service. The consistently high mean scores for issues related to transparency and oversight indicate that stakeholders recognize these challenges as critical. Addressing these deficiencies through improved job description clarity and enhanced verification mechanisms is essential for restoring integrity and accountability within the civil service, ultimately leading to more effective resource allocation and service delivery to the public.

Candidate experience and Ghost Workers in the Kogi State Civil Service

S/N	ITEMS	N	MEAN	STD
9	Lack of transparency in hiring practices negatively impacts candidate experience and increases the likelihood of ghost workers.	320	3.64	1.24
10	Inadequate staff verification processes during recruitment lead to a higher prevalence of ghost workers.	320	3.24	1.23
11	Corruption among civil service officials significantly undermines candidate experience and contributes to ghost worker syndrome.	320	3.55	1.20
12	Insufficient frequency of audits hampers the ability to identify ghost workers, affecting overall candidate experience.	320	3.05	1.38
13	Limited training for payroll staff results in recruitment mistakes that facilitate the existence of ghost workers.	320	3.20	0.97
14	Lack of public awareness about ghost workers diminishes candidate experience and contributes to their persistence in the civil service.	320	4.06	1.14
15	Poor payroll management systems negatively impact candidate experience and facilitate the existence of ghost workers.	320	3.55	1.38
16	Insufficient oversight and accountability mechanisms during recruitment allow ghost workers to persist, affecting candidate experience.	320	3.27	1.11
	Grand mean		3.45	1.21

Source: Primary Data, SPSS V20, 2025.

The table outlines the relationship between candidate experience and the prevalence of ghost workers in the Kogi State Civil Service. Each item highlights specific aspects of the recruitment process that are perceived

to contribute to the existence of ghost workers, with mean scores indicating the level of concern among respondents. The findings reveal that deficiencies in hiring practices and lack of transparency significantly impact both the integrity of the hiring process and the overall candidate experience.

One notable item is the lack of transparency in hiring practices, which received a mean score of 3.64. This suggests that when candidates perceive the recruitment process as opaque, their trust in the organization diminishes. A negative candidate experience can lead to disengagement and may attract individuals who are less committed to ethical standards. Consequently, this lack of transparency not only alienates genuine candidates but also creates an environment where fraudulent practices, such as the inclusion of ghost workers, can thrive, as individuals may feel emboldened to exploit these weaknesses.

Additionally, the data indicates that inadequate staff verification processes (mean 3.24) during recruitment exacerbate the issue of ghost workers. When proper verification is lacking, it becomes easier for fictitious employees to be added to payrolls without detection. This highlights the importance of thorough background checks and verification procedures as essential components of the recruitment process. By improving these processes, organizations can enhance candidate experience and reduce the likelihood of ghost workers infiltrating the civil service.

The implications of these findings are significant for the Kogi State Civil Service. The consistently high mean scores for issues related to transparency, verification, and oversight reveal that stakeholders recognize these challenges as critical barriers to effective recruitment. Addressing these shortcomings through improved candidate experience initiatives—such as enhancing transparency, implementing rigorous verification processes, and fostering public awareness—will not only help combat ghost workers syndrome but also contribute to building a more trustworthy and efficient civil service. Ultimately, fostering a positive candidate experience is essential for attracting committed individuals who uphold the integrity of the organization.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 4.2 ANOVA

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Between Groups	1663.717	7	237.674	29.296	.000
	Within Groups	2531.171	312	8.113		
	Total	4194.888	319			
2	Between Groups	4044.646	7	577.807	25.911	.000
	Within Groups	6957.554	312	22.300		
	Total	11002.200	319			

Source: Primary Data, SPSS V20, 2025.

Hypothesis One: Job description clarity has no effect on ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service.

The ANOVA results presented in Table 4.2 indicate a significant relationship between job description clarity and the prevalence of ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service. The F-value of 29.296 and a

p-value (Sig.) of .000 suggest that there are statistically significant differences among the groups being analyzed. This outcome implies that variations in job description clarity are associated with differences in the incidence of ghost workers. Given the low p-value, we reject the null hypothesis, concluding that inadequate job description clarity does indeed contribute to the persistence of ghost workers within the civil service from 2016 to 2024.

Moreover, the substantial sum of squares (1663.717) between groups indicates a strong variation attributable to the independent variable, which in this case is job description clarity. This reinforces the idea that improving job descriptions could be a key strategy for mitigating ghost workers syndrome. The data suggests that addressing this issue through clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities could enhance accountability and reduce the opportunities for fraudulent practices within the Kogi State Civil Service.

Hypothesis Two: Candidate experience has no significant effect on ghost workers syndrome in the Kogi State Civil Service.

For Hypothesis Two, the ANOVA results also reveal a significant relationship between candidate experience and the prevalence of ghost workers in the Kogi State Civil Service. The F-value of 25.911, accompanied by a significance level of .000, indicates that the null hypothesis can be rejected, demonstrating that variations in candidate experience correlate with differences in the persistence of ghost workers. This underscores the importance of enhancing candidate experience as a means to combat the issue of ghost workers, suggesting that a more transparent and engaging recruitment process could deter fraudulent practices.

The data further illustrates that the sum of squares between groups (4044.646) is significantly higher than that within groups (6957.554), indicating that candidate experience significantly influences the likelihood of ghost workers being present. The mean square for between groups (577.807) compared to the mean square within groups (22.300) highlights the need for improvements in candidate experience to effectively address the ghost worker issue. These findings suggest that by focusing on improving transparency and accountability in the recruitment process, the Kogi State Civil Service can enhance both candidate trust and organizational integrity, ultimately reducing the occurrence of ghost workers.

Summary of Findings

- i. The findings indicate that a lack of clear job descriptions significantly contributes to the prevalence of ghost workers in the Kogi State Civil Service. Respondents highlighted issues such as inadequate staff verification processes and a lack of transparency in recruitment as critical factors that create opportunities for fraudulent practices.
- ii. The second set of findings reveals that candidate experience is closely linked to the persistence of ghost workers within the civil service. Lack of transparency in hiring practices and inadequate staff verification emerged as significant concerns, with high mean scores indicating that these factors negatively impact both candidate trust and the integrity of the recruitment process.

- iii. The ANOVA results indicate a statistically significant relationship between job description clarity and the prevalence of ghost workers in the Kogi State Civil Service, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that clearer job descriptions are associated with lower instances of ghost workers, highlighting the need for well-defined roles to enhance accountability and transparency.
- iv. The ANOVA analysis shows a significant relationship between candidate experience and the presence of ghost workers, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that improvements in the recruitment process and candidate engagement are critical to reducing the prevalence of ghost workers.

Discussion of Major Findings

The findings highlights that a lack of clear job descriptions significantly contributes to the prevalence of ghost workers in the Kogi State Civil Service. Respondents highlighted issues such as inadequate staff verification processes and a lack of transparency in recruitment as critical factors that create opportunities for fraudulent practices which is in line with Nelson (2019) findings revealed mixed perceptions among civil servants; while some acknowledged improvements in transparency, others expressed concerns about favoritism and a lack of accountability in recruitment decisions. Sani (2019) findings indicated that a significant number of civil servants perceived the recruitment process as biased, with concerns about nepotism undermining fairness

The result reveals that candidate experience is closely linked to the persistence of ghost workers within the civil service. Lack of transparency in hiring practices and inadequate staff verification emerged as significant concerns, with high mean scores indicating that these factors negatively impact both candidate trust and the integrity of the recruitment process. Ahsan (2021) noted that a rapid review of literature on ghost workers in the health sector highlights that payroll fraud, including the ghost worker phenomenon, is significantly influenced by inadequate verification processes and a lack of transparency in payroll management. The review suggests that improving record-keeping and implementing strong management systems can help mitigate these issues. Also Abubakar (2021) indicates that ghost workers are often a result of corrupt practices within the hiring process, where officials may manipulate recruitment to include fictitious employees. This manipulation is facilitated by a lack of transparency and oversight, which allows for the inclusion of non-existent workers on payrolls, draining public resources. Furthermore A study by Danjuma (2022) on the effects of transparency in recruitment processes reveals that when hiring practices lack clarity and accountability, it creates an environment conducive to ghost worker syndrome. The findings suggest that enhancing transparency and implementing rigorous verification processes are essential for reducing the prevalence of ghost workers in public sectors.

The ANOVA results indicate statistically significant relationship between job description clarity and the prevalence of ghost workers in the Kogi State Civil Service, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings is support with the review of Dada (2021) who highlighted that ghost workers syndrome is a manifestation of broader issues related to corruption within the public sector. The lack of effective internal controls and oversight mechanisms allows for the existence of ghost workers, which is exacerbated by inadequate staff verification processes and poor human resource management practices. Also Mahmoud

(2022) the economic development of Nigeria identifies ghost worker cloning as a significant barrier to sustainable development. It emphasizes that systemic failures, including corruption and ineffective institutional frameworks, contribute to the prevalence of ghost workers, confirming that multiple factors are at play.

The analysis shows improvements in the recruitment process and candidate engagement are critical to reducing the prevalence of ghost workers. The findings of the study is also backup with Nwosu (2022) who's findings presence of ghost workers is often linked to corruption within the public sector, where inadequate internal controls and oversight mechanisms allow for fraudulent practices. Strengthening these controls is essential to mitigate the risk of ghost workers. Also Lawal (2020) noted that ineffective human resource management practices, including poor recruitment policies and lack of staff verification processes, are critical factors contributing to the ghost worker phenomenon. Implementing robust HR policies can help ensure that only legitimate employees are included on payrolls.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the study highlight critical issues within the Kogi State Civil Service that contribute to the prevalence of ghost workers. The lack of clear job descriptions is a significant factor, as it creates ambiguity in roles and responsibilities, which in turn facilitates fraudulent practices. Additionally, inadequate staff verification processes and a lack of transparency in recruitment exacerbate this problem. Together, these factors undermine the integrity of the civil service and allow ghost workers to persist, ultimately affecting the efficiency and trustworthiness of the organization.

Furthermore, the connection between candidate experience and the presence of ghost workers underscores the importance of a transparent and well-managed recruitment process. High mean scores related to the negative impact of hiring practices on candidate trust reveal that addressing these concerns is vital for fostering a positive candidate experience. By implementing clearer job descriptions, enhancing verification processes, and improving transparency in hiring, the Kogi State Civil Service can effectively reduce the incidence of ghost workers and build a more accountable and credible workforce. These changes are essential not only for organizational integrity but also for restoring public confidence in the civil service.

Based on the findings, the study therefore recommends that;

- i. It is essential for the Kogi State Civil Service to develop clear and detailed job descriptions for all positions. This should be accompanied by robust staff verification processes that include thorough background checks and regular audits of employee records. By ensuring that job roles are well-defined and that verification is consistently applied, the organization can significantly reduce the opportunities for ghost workers to infiltrate the system.
- ii. The civil service should implement transparent hiring practices that involve open communication with candidates about the recruitment process. This could include publicly sharing job postings, selection

criteria, and the rationale behind hiring decisions. Additionally, creating a feedback mechanism for candidates can foster trust and engagement.

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