

IMPACT OF BIAS ON RECRUITMENT DECISION: A STUDY OF PROJECTS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (PRODA) ENUGU

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Participant Consent Statement

All participants provided informed consent to participate electronically prior to survey completion via a secure online form (Google Forms). Consent was acknowledged through a digital checkbox affirming voluntary participation. For the secondary dataset (social media analytics), the study relied solely on aggregated, non-identifiable data accessible in the public domain, thus requiring no individual-level consent.

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Abstract

Recruitment is a critical function in public sector organizations, yet it remains vulnerable to various forms of bias that compromise meritocracy, equity, and institutional performance. This study investigates the nature, extent, and consequences of recruitment bias at the Projects Development Institute (PRODA), Enugu. Drawing on theories of Social Identity, Implicit Bias, and Attribution, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data from 175 purposively selected respondents with qualitative insights from key informant interviews. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, and stratified random sampling ensured balanced representation from PRODA staff, the Federal Character Commission, the Federal Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and external recruitment stakeholders. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis were employed to examine the relationship between perceived bias and recruitment outcomes. Findings reveal that ethnic favoritism, political interference, and personal networks (godfatherism) are perceived as dominant forms of bias influencing recruitment decisions at PRODA. Furthermore, the study confirms that such biases significantly undermine employee morale, productivity, and institutional trust. Although some mitigation strategies—such as diversity training and recruitment policies—exist, their implementation is inconsistent and largely ineffective. The study concludes that institutionalizing transparent, merit-based recruitment practices and strengthening anti-bias enforcement mechanisms are essential for restoring fairness and boosting public confidence in recruitment systems. Recommendations include the adoption of blind recruitment processes, external audit of hiring practices, and continuous training of recruitment personnel

Keywords: Recruitment bias, Public sector, PRODA, Ethnic favoritism, godfatherism, Diversity, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

The recruitment process is a critical component of human resource management in any organization (Armstrong, 2006). It involves identifying, attracting, and selecting the most suitable candidates to fill vacant positions within the organization (Iles, 1992). However, the recruitment process is not immune to biases, which can significantly impact the quality of recruitment decisions (Perry, 1997).

Bias in recruitment decisions refers to the systematic errors or distortions in the recruitment process that can lead to unfair or discriminatory outcomes (Rudman, 1998). Biases can arise from various sources, including cognitive biases, cultural biases, and organizational biases (Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 2011). Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and anchoring bias, can influence recruiters' perceptions and evaluations of candidates (Kahneman, 2011). Cultural biases can lead to discrimination against candidates from diverse backgrounds (Triandis, 2006). Organizational biases can arise from inadequate recruitment policies and procedures (Pfeffer, 1998). Biases in recruitment decisions can lead to poor hiring choices, resulting in decreased job performance, increased turnover rates, and significant financial losses (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2002). A study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that biases in recruitment decisions can result in a 25% decrease in job performance and a 15% increase in turnover rates (SHRM, 2020).

A striking example of the impact of bias on recruitment decisions is the case of Projects Development Institute (PRODA) Enugu who in PRODA recruited over 60 new employees, but a subsequent analysis revealed that 30% of the selected candidates were not the most qualified applicants (PRODA, 2020). This discrepancy was attributed to biases in the recruitment process, highlighting the need for a more objective and fair approach.

The impact of bias on recruitment decisions can be far-reaching. Biased recruitment decisions can lead to the selection of less qualified candidates, which can negatively impact organizational performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Moreover, biased recruitment decisions can result in discriminatory outcomes, which can damage the organization's reputation and lead to legal liabilities (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020).

Projects Development Institute (PRODA), Enugu, like many other organizations, faces the challenge of ensuring that its recruitment decisions are fair, unbiased, and based on merit. As a research and development institute, PRODA requires a diverse and talented workforce to achieve its mandate. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the impact of bias on recruitment decisions at PRODA and identify strategies to mitigate its effects.

The study will contribute to the existing literature on recruitment bias and provide insights into the impact of bias on recruitment decisions in the context of a research and development institute. The findings of the study will also provide recommendations for PRODA and other organizations to mitigate the effects of bias in recruitment decisions.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Despite the critical role of recruitment in shaping organizational success, many institutions, including the Projects Development Institute (PRODA) Enugu, continue to grapple with the pervasive issue of bias in recruitment decisions. Like a ticking time bomb, unconscious bias can detonate a chain reaction of negative consequences, from decreased job performance and increased turnover rates to reputational damage and financial losses. The question is, what triggers this explosive chain reaction, and how can PRODA Enugu defuse the threat of bias to build a more diverse, equitable, and high-performing workforce?

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze the impact of bias on recruitment decisions at PRODA, Enugu. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the types of biases that exist in the recruitment process at PRODA.
2. Examine the impact of bias on recruitment decisions at PRODA.
3. Investigate the strategies used by PRODA to mitigate the effects of bias in recruitment decisions.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What types of biases exist in the recruitment process at PRODA, Enugu?
2. How does bias impact recruitment decisions at PRODA, Enugu?

3. What strategies can PRODA, Enugu employ to mitigate the effects of bias in recruitment decisions?

1.4 Hypotheses Formulations

1. Gender, ethnic, and institutional (educational background) biases are significantly prevalent in the recruitment practices at PRODA
2. There is a significant relationship between the presence of recruitment bias and the quality and diversity of hires at PRODA, Enugu.
3. The implantation of anti-bias strategies significantly moderates the impact of bias on recruitment outcomes at PRODA.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on human resource management in the public sector, especially within research and innovation-focused institutions such as the Projects Development Institute (PRODA). In an era where meritocracy and transparency are critical for national development, understanding how bias affects recruitment is vital for policy reform and institutional accountability (Dessler, 2015; Okeke, 2021).

Second, the study provides empirical insights into the types of bias that influence hiring decisions in federal institutions—ethnic, gender, political, and relational biases (e.g., godfatherism). It assesses their impact on staff morale, recruitment outcomes, and organizational effectiveness. These insights are especially important in light of Nigeria's diversity and the constitutional requirement for equitable representation through the Federal Character Principle (Mustapha, 2007).

Third, the findings offer practical guidance to public service managers, policymakers, and HR professionals on designing and implementing effective bias-mitigation strategies such as transparent hiring procedures, blind recruitment, and merit-based evaluation systems.

Finally, this research has academic relevance for scholars in public administration, human resource management, and organizational behavior, especially those focusing on governance, institutional integrity, and inclusive development.

2.0 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of Recruitment

Recruitment is a fundamental human resource management function that plays a pivotal role in determining the quality and effectiveness of personnel within any organization. It refers to the process of identifying, attracting, and selecting qualified candidates to fill vacant positions, with the aim of meeting organizational goals and ensuring operational continuity (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). The process typically begins with job analysis and manpower planning, followed by sourcing candidates, screening applications, conducting interviews, and finally selecting and onboarding successful applicants.

Recruitment is more than just filling vacant positions; it is a strategic mechanism for aligning human capital with institutional goals (Dessler, 2015). In public sector institutions, such as government research organizations, recruitment must adhere not only to principles of merit and competence but also to legal and regulatory frameworks, such as the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria, which mandates equitable representation of all regions and groups in federal appointments (Mustapha, 2007; Okeke, 2021).

According to Eze and Nwagwu (2019), effective recruitment practices enhance workforce productivity, reduce turnover, and foster a sense of fairness among employees. Conversely, poor recruitment practices especially those characterized by favoritism, nepotism, or political influence can lead to low morale, underperformance, and institutional inefficiency. This is particularly detrimental in research and innovation agencies like the Projects Development Institute (PRODA), where the quality of staff has a direct bearing on the output and societal relevance of technological innovations.

Recruitment can be classified into two broad types: internal recruitment, where existing employees are promoted or transferred to fill vacancies; and external recruitment, which involves sourcing new candidates from outside the organization (Flippo, 1984; Robbins & Judge, 2019). While internal recruitment is faster and more cost-effective, it may perpetuate internal biases or favoritism if not managed transparently. External recruitment, on the other hand, introduces fresh perspectives but may be more susceptible to political interference or ethnic favoritism in bureaucratic contexts (Noon, 2018; Adebayo, 2018).

In recent years, organizations have adopted technology-driven recruitment methods, such as online job portals, applicant tracking systems (ATS), and artificial intelligence tools for resume screening and behavioral assessments. Which are consistent with broader Industry 4.0 transformation in marketing and management practices (Okorozoh, 2025). However, in many Nigerian public institutions, recruitment is still largely manual and influenced by informal networks, which exposes the process to biases and manipulation (Ameh & Ogbu, 2022).

Therefore, recruitment must be viewed not only as a technical HR activity, but as a politically and socially sensitive process that reflects the values, priorities, and power dynamics within an organization. Ensuring that recruitment is transparent, inclusive, and merit-based is essential for the sustainability and legitimacy of public institutions, particularly those tasked with driving national development through research and innovation.

2.12 Understanding Bias in Recruitment Decisions

According to Heilman and Caleo (2018), bias in recruitment decision simply means means when a hiring manager or recruiter unfairly favours one candidate over another based on personal preferences, stereotypes, or preconceived notion, often related to factors like gender, race, age, or background rather than solely on their qualifications and job fit, potentially leading to discriminatory hiring practices as recruitment and selection processes are critical components of an organization's human resource management strategy (Bowen et al., 2018). Unconscious biases, such as affinity bias, where individuals tend to favor those similar to themselves and confirmation bias, where individuals selectively seek information that confirms their existing beliefs, are common challenges in recruitment (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). These biases can lead to the selection of candidates who are not the best fit for the role, ultimately affecting the organization's ability to achieve desired goals (Bohnet, 2016).

Organizational Context and Bias

The organizational context can also influence the prevalence and impact of bias in recruitment decisions (Kaplan et al., 2011). Factors such as organizational culture, leadership, and diversity initiatives can either mitigate or exacerbate the effects of bias (Noon, 2018). For example, organizations with a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion may be more aware of the

potential for bias and implement strategies to address it, such as structured interviews and blind resume screening (Bertrand & Duflo, 2017).

Types of Biases in Recruitment Decisions

Research has identified major various types of biases that can influence recruitment decisions to include:

1. Confirmation Bias: The tendency to favor candidates who confirm pre-existing expectations or stereotypes.
2. Affinity Bias: The tendency to favor candidates who share similar characteristics, experiences, or backgrounds.
3. Halo Effect: The tendency to form an overall positive impression of a candidate based on a single positive trait or characteristic.
4. Horns Effect: The opposite of the halo effect, where a single negative trait or characteristic leads to an overall negative impression.
5. Stereotype Threat: The tendency to make assumptions about a candidate's abilities or potential based on their group membership (e.g., gender, ethnicity).
6. Anchoring Bias: The tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information encountered when evaluating a candidate.
7. Availability Heuristic: The tendency to overestimate the importance of information that readily comes to mind when evaluating a candidate.
8. Implicit Bias: Unconscious biases that affect judgments and decisions, often based on cultural or societal norms.
9. Cultural Bias: The tendency to favor candidates from a specific cultural background or with certain cultural characteristics.
10. Age Bias: The tendency to favor candidates of a certain age group or to make assumptions about a candidate's abilities based on their age.

11. Disability Bias: The tendency to make assumptions about a candidate's abilities or potential based on their disability.
12. Name Bias: The tendency to make assumptions about a candidate's background or characteristics based on their name.
13. Education Bias: The tendency to favor candidates from certain educational institutions or with specific educational backgrounds.
14. Experience Bias: The tendency to favor candidates with specific types of experience or to make assumptions about a candidate's abilities based on their experience.

15. Social Media Bias: The tendency to make assumptions about a candidate's character or potential based on their social media presence.

Federal Character Principle: While aimed at ensuring national representation, sometimes conflicts with merit-based recruitment, particularly in specialized technical institutions.

These biases according to Mustapha (2017) can influence recruitment decisions, often unconsciously, and can result in discriminatory outcomes.

Impact of Bias on Recruitment Decisions

Studies have consistently shown that biases in recruitment decisions can have far-reaching consequences, including:

1. Decreased Job Performance: Biased recruitment decisions can lead to the selection of less qualified candidates, compromising job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).
2. Discriminatory Outcomes: Biases can result in discriminatory outcomes, perpetuating inequality and damaging an organization's reputation (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020).
3. Financial Consequences: Biased recruitment decisions can also have significant financial consequences, including increased turnover rates and decreased productivity (Dovidio et al., 2002).
4. Innovation Capacity: Research by Nnamdi (2019) established correlations between diverse hiring practices and increased innovation in research institutions similar to PRODA.

Strategies Used by PRODA to Mitigate Bias in Recruitment Decisions

Research has identified several strategies to mitigate bias in recruitment decisions, including:

1. Blind Hiring Practices: Blind hiring practices, such as removing names and demographic information from resumes, can reduce biases (Milkovitch et al., 2014).
2. Structured Interviews: Structured interviews can help reduce biases by ensuring that all candidates are asked the same questions (Levashina & Campion, 2009).
3. Diversity Training: Diversity training can help recruiters recognize and overcome biases (Kalev et al., 2006).
4. Technology Integration: Olayinka (2020) and Okorozoh (2025) emphasized that the ongoing digitization of organizational processes in the industry 4.0 era can help reduce subjective bias through data-driven decision systems.
5. Diverse Interview Panels: Include representatives from diverse social groups in the interview process to provide multiple perspectives and reduce in-group favoritism (Cox & Blake, 1991).
6. Skills-Based Assessments: Focus on objective criteria such as skills, qualifications, and experience to evaluate candidates.
7. Bias Awareness Training: Educate employees involved in the recruitment process about unconscious biases and how to recognize and overcome them.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Social Identity Theory (SIT) by: Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains how individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from group membership. In the context of recruitment, SIT suggests that recruiters may favor candidates who share similar social identities, leading to biases in recruitment decisions. Within PRODA's context, this may explain preferences based on ethnicity, state of origin, or educational background.

2.3.2 Implicit Bias Theory by: Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji (1995)

Implicit Bias theory, developed by Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji in the 1990s, suggests that individuals hold unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect their understanding, actions including recruitment decisions. This theory suggests that recruiters may unintentionally favor candidates who fit their implicit biases. These biases are often formed through exposure to societal stereotypes and cultural norms, and can be contradictory to one's explicit values and beliefs.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) was created by Greenwald and Banaji to measure these unconscious biases. The test assesses the strength of associations between concepts, such as racial or ethnic groups, and positive or negative attributes. Studies using the IAT have consistently shown that individuals, regardless of their explicit attitudes, often exhibit implicit biases against marginalized groups.

In the context of recruitment decisions, implicit bias can have significant effects. For instance, research has shown that identical resumes with different names (e.g., one with a traditionally African American name and one with a traditionally European American name) receive different numbers of callbacks, with the European American name receiving more callbacks. This bias can also affect the way recruiters evaluate candidates' skills and qualifications, leading to unfair hiring practices.

Furthermore, implicit bias can influence the way recruiters perceive and interact with candidates from diverse backgrounds. For example, a recruiter may unconsciously perceive a candidate from a marginalized group as less competent or less suitable for the job, leading to biased hiring decisions.

2.3.3 Attribution Theory by: Fritz Heider (1958)

Attribution Theory explains how individuals attribute causes to events and behaviors in the context of recruitment. This theory has been widely applied in various fields, including social psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management.

Attribution Theory suggests that recruiters may attribute a candidate's qualifications or performance to their group membership or personal characteristics, leading to biases in recruitment decisions. The following represents examples of errors and biases in the recruitment processes

1. Fundamental attribution error: Recruiters may overemphasize the role of personality or character (internal attribution) in a candidate's past experiences or behaviors, while underestimating the impact of situational factors (external attribution) (Ross, 1977).
2. Self-serving bias: Recruiters may attribute a candidate's successes to internal factors (e.g., "They're a hard worker") while attributing failures to external factors (e.g., "The company was struggling") (Miller & Ross, 1975).
3. Halo effect: Recruiters may attribute a candidate's positive qualities (e.g., "They're intelligent") to other areas of their performance or character, even if there's no evidence to support this (Thorndike, 1920).
4. Confirmation bias: Recruiters may selectively seek out information that confirms their initial impressions or attributions about a candidate, while ignoring or downplaying contradictory evidence (Nickerson, 1998).

2.3.4 Stereotype Threat Theory by: Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995)

Stereotype Threat Theory suggests that individuals from stigmatized groups may experience anxiety and decreased performance in situations where they are aware of negative stereotypes about their group. In the context of recruitment, Stereotype Threat Theory suggests that candidates from underrepresented groups may experience stereotype threat, leading to biases in recruitment decisions.

2.3.5 Decision-Making Theory by: Herbert Simon (1957)

Decision-Making Theory explains how individuals make decisions under uncertainty. In the context of recruitment, Decision-Making Theory suggests that recruiters may rely on mental shortcuts and biases when making decisions, leading to biases in recruitment decisions.

This study will therefore be anchored on Social Identity Theory (SIT), Implicit Bias, and Attribution Theories because the three theories complement each other well and provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how social identities and unconscious biases

influence recruitment decisions. While Implicit Bias Theory helps identify unconscious biases, Attribution Theory explains how biases influence attributions and decision-making, Social Identity Theory provides insight into how group memberships and social identities shape recruitment decisions.

2.4 Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have investigated the impact of bias on recruitment decisions. A study by Avery et al. (2013) found that biases in recruitment decisions can lead to discriminatory outcomes. In another study carried out by Kraiger and Ford (2014), they found out that structured interviews can reduce biases in recruitment decisions. In another study carried out by Avery et al in 2023 study sheds light on the role of bias in recruitment and the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to mitigate these biases. The study compared human evaluation and AI evaluation in recruitment processes, revealing significant differences in outcomes. According to the study result, human evaluators consistently rated male candidates higher than female candidates, with a substantial 0.15 standard deviation difference. This gender discrepancy was more pronounced at the higher end of the distribution, with men being 6.8 percentage points more likely to rank in the top 25% and 7.73 percentage points more likely to land in the top 10%. In contrast, AI evaluation reduced the gender difference to a mere 0.04 standardized difference.

Under AI evaluation, the representation of males and females in the top 50%, 25%, and 10% categories was nearly equal. These findings suggest that AI can help mitigate human biases in recruitment processes, promoting a more equitable and merit-based selection process.

The study's results have significant implications for recruitment practices, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating AI in hiring decisions. By reducing human biases, AI can help increase diversity and inclusion in the workplace. However, it's essential to acknowledge the limitations and potential risks associated with AI in recruitment. As noted by Drage and Mackereth (2022), AI providers often misinterpret gender and race as discrete characteristics rather than broader structures of power. Moreover, algorithms can unintentionally exacerbate existing biases within recruitment processes.

Kraiger and Ford (2014) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of structured interviews in reducing biases in recruitment decisions. The study found that structured interviews can help reduce biases, but may not eliminate them entirely.

Gorman and Kmec (2009) conducted a study to examine the impact of diversity training on recruiters' biases. The study found that diversity training can help recruiters recognize and overcome biases, but may not lead to long-term changes in behavior.

Recent global and regional studies have provided broader perspectives on the impact of bias on recruitment decisions. The World Economic Forum (2020) conducted a global study to examine the impact of biases on recruitment decisions. The study found that biases in recruitment decisions can perpetuate inequality and compromise economic growth.

The European Commission (2020) conducted a regional study to examine the impact of biases on recruitment decisions in the European Union. The study found that biases in recruitment decisions can lead to discriminatory outcomes and damage an organization's reputation.

A comparison of findings across studies reveals that biases in recruitment decisions can have far-reaching consequences, including decreased job performance, discriminatory outcomes, and financial consequences. The studies also suggest that strategies such as blind hiring practices, structured interviews, and diversity training can help mitigate bias in recruitment decisions.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

Despite a growing body of scholarship on recruitment practices and workplace diversity, several critical gaps remain—particularly in the Nigerian public sector and research-based institutions such as PRODA.

1. Limited Context-Specific Studies in Research Institutions

While studies like Adenuga (2021) and Okeke (2021) address bias in public recruitment generally, few examine how bias manifests in government research institutions like PRODA. These institutions are uniquely structured, with a blend of administrative, scientific, and policy roles, making general findings from ministries or parastatals less directly applicable.

2. Underrepresentation of Intersectional Bias

Much of the Nigerian literature treats bias in recruitment as a single-dimensional phenomenon (e.g., ethnic or gender alone). However, intersectional biases—where ethnicity, gender, and political affiliation overlap—are rarely explored (Crenshaw, 1991; Mustapha, 2017). This study seeks to bridge that gap by assessing how multiple identity markers influence hiring outcomes at PRODA.

3. Inadequate Focus on Perceptions and Lived Experiences

Most prior studies rely heavily on institutional data or organizational policies (Bohnet, 2016; Bertrand & Duflo, 2017), often neglecting the perceptions and lived experiences of recruitment officers and applicants. This study fills that gap by incorporating qualitative data (interviews) that reveal how recruitment stakeholders interpret and experience bias in real terms.

4. Weak Evaluation of Mitigation Strategies

Although several organizations claim to use anti-bias strategies like structured interviews, quota systems, or blind recruitment, few studies evaluate their effectiveness (Noon, 2018; Kalev et al., 2006). This study contributes by assessing whether respondents believe PRODA's mitigation mechanisms (if any) are reducing bias and improving fairness.

5. Lack of Empirical Testing Using Hypotheses

While existing works describe the presence of bias descriptively, few test specific hypotheses statistically (e.g., the relationship between bias and recruitment outcomes). This study addresses this methodological gap by applying inferential statistical tools (e.g., ANOVA, Chi-square, regression) to assess the magnitude and significance of relationships.

2.6 Historical Overview of Projects Development Institute (PRODA) Enugu

The Projects Development Institute (PRODA), Enugu is a renowned federal research and development institution established to drive industrial and technological innovation in Nigeria. The origins of PRODA date back to 1948, when it was founded as the East Central State Research and Production Department during the colonial era. Initially, its purpose was to support small-scale industries and assist in the local development of engineering and industrial materials for reconstruction and post-war recovery.

In 1971, following the creation of new states in Nigeria and the restructuring of federal institutions, the agency was renamed and formally institutionalized as the Projects Development Agency. It was later transformed into its current name, Projects Development Institute (PRODA), under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology (now the Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology). This transition marked its formal integration into the national research and innovation framework of the Nigerian government.

PRODA's mandate includes:

- Industrial research in ceramics, electrical/electronics, mechanical and metallurgical technologies,
- Technology transfer and prototype development,
- Commercialization of local innovations,
- Providing technical support to industries, especially in the South-East region of Nigeria (FMSTI, 2019).

Located in Emene, Enugu State, PRODA houses multiple laboratories and pilot plants, including those for ceramics, foundry, electrical/electronics, chemical processing, and agro-based engineering. It has contributed significantly to indigenous technology development through the fabrication of industrial machines such as kilns, ceramic stoves, clay processors, bread ovens, and food processing equipment.

Organizationally, PRODA operates under the direction of a Governing Board and is managed by a Director-General/CEO, with various departments including Engineering Research, Science Research, Technology Transfer and Innovation, Human Resources, and Finance and Administration.

Over the decades, PRODA has faced various challenges, including inadequate funding, brain drain, political interference, and inconsistent policy direction. However, it remains a key player in Nigeria's push for self-reliant technological development, especially in aligning with the goals of the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (NSTIP).

From a human resource perspective, PRODA has undergone several recruitment drives, some of which have raised concerns about equity, transparency, and compliance with the Federal Character Principle. These concerns form the basis for this study's focus on understanding the impact of bias in recruitment decisions, especially in a knowledge-driven institution like PRODA, where personnel quality is central to research output and innovation performance.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. This design is ideal for establishing relationships between variables (Olorunfemi et al., 2023). As a quantitative research approach, it involves analyzing two or more quantitative variables from the same dataset to identify potential correlations and co-variation (Enekwechi et al., 2023). Given the study's focus on analyzing the impact of bias on recruitment decision in PRODA Enugu the study will use a non-experimental approach, specifically a survey research design.

3.2 Sources of Data

The study utilized both the primary and secondary sources of data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of recruitment bias in public and private sector organizations.

Primary Data

This was collected directly from respondents involved in recruitment and human resources management in the selected organizations which includes the HR Managers, Recruitment Officers, Unit heads and other staff involved in hiring decision. Structured questionnaire designed to capture respondents' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding recruitment processes of bias and its impact on organizational outcomes were the principal data collection instruments used. This is consistent with Creswell (2014), who advocates for primary data collection to obtain firsthand information.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was sourced from existing literature, organizational reports, policy documents, previous studies and official publications related to recruitment practices, bias management and public sector human resource policies. These include academic journals, books, government reports, and reputable online databases. Secondary data therefore, provides a theoretical framework and context for the study, enriching the analysis by linking empirical findings to established knowledge (Sanders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Additionally, reports from regulatory bodies such as the Federal Character Commission offered insights into official recruitment standards and compliance trends.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of 310 individuals drawn from the following four strata; Management Committee of PRODA, Staff of Human Resources Management Department of PRODA Enugu, and Human Resources Managers and recruitment officers from the Federal Character Commission (FCC), Federal Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (FMSTI) Recruitment professionals and hiring managers from selected organizations in Enugu, Nigeria. The Industrial Promotion, Information and Documentation Department of Projects Development Institute (PRODA) Enugu provided accurate numbers of the categories of participants studied.

3.4 Sampling Size

To determine the appropriate sample size Yamane (1967) formular was used

$$n=N/ [1+N(e)^2]$$

Where:

n= sample size

N= population of the study (310)

e= margin of error (0.05)

$$n= 310 / [1+ 310(0.05)^2] = 310 / [1 + 0.775] = 310 / 1.775 = 175.$$

Thus, the sample size for the study is 175

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study adopted a stratified random sampling technique to ensure that all key stakeholder groups involved in recruitment at projects Development Institute (PRODA) Enugu and related agencies involved in its recruitment were proportionally represented. Stratified sampling was chosen because; the population is heterogeneous and consists of distinct subgroups with varying roles in the recruitment processes

Proportion Allocation

Using the formula:

$$Nh = \frac{Nh \times n}{N}$$

Where:

nh = sample size for each stratum

Nh = population of each stratum

N = total population (310)

n = total sample size (175)

The distribution is as follows:

Table: 1. Population Distribution of PRODA

Group	Population	Proportion of Total (310)	Allocated Samples
PRODA Enugu (Internal) Staff	200	200/310 = 0.645	0.645x175 =113

Federal Character Commission (30	$30/310 = 0.097$	0.097×175
HR/ Recruitment			$=17$
FMSTI (HR)	30	$30/310 =0.097$	0.097×175
			$=17$
External Organizations (Public /	50	$50/310 =0.161$	$0=161 \times 175$
Private			$=28$
Total	310	1.000	175

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

3.6 Instruments for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection is the structured questionnaire, designed to elicit responses related to recruitment practices and the perceived role of bias in decision-making. The questionnaire will contain both closed and open-ended questions to allow for quantitative and qualitative insights. It was divided into the following sections:

Section A: Demographic Information – age, gender, educational background, years of experience, current role. Section B: Recruitment Processes – questions on procedures, criteria, and oversight in hiring decisions. Section C: Bias in Recruitment – items to assess awareness, perception, and instances of bias (e.g., ethnic, gender, political). Section D: Impact and Management of Bias – items exploring the consequences of bias and strategies used to mitigate them. A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) will be used to measure attitudes and perceptions in Sections B through D.

An interview guide will also be developed to conduct semi-structured interviews with select HR managers, allowing for deeper exploration of themes related to recruitment bias and policy implementation.

3.7 Validity and Reliability of Sampling Instrument

Content validity will be ensured through expert review. The questionnaire and interview guide will be vetted by three scholars in Human Resource Management and Public Administration, who will assess the items for relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness.

Face validity will be determined by administering the instrument to a small group (pilot sample of 10 respondents) not included in the main study.

Reliability:

A pilot test was conducted with 10–15 respondents selected from similar institutions not covered in the study.

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient will be calculated for the scaled items. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher will be considered acceptable for internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978).

3.8 Method of Data Collection

The following steps were followed for data collection:

1. Permission and Access: Formal letters will be sent to the management of PRODA, FCC, FMSTI, and selected external organizations requesting permission to administer the questionnaires and conduct interviews.
2. Questionnaire Distribution: Questionnaires will be administered in-person and electronically (via email or Google Forms, where applicable). Field assistants will support the physical distribution and retrieval of forms.
3. Interviews: Key informant interviews will be scheduled with 10–12 senior HR personnel and decision-makers, using either face-to-face, Zoom, or telephone calls depending on participant availability and consent.
4. Follow-up: Regular follow-ups (via calls or reminders) will ensure a high response rate and timely completion.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical research standards to ensure the rights, dignity, and confidentiality of participants is protected. The following measures were therefore taken:

Informed Consent: All participants received a consent form clearly stating the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and assurance of confidentiality.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: No identifying information (e.g., names, employee IDs) will be required in the questionnaire. All data were be anonymized, and responses were stored securely.

Permission and Approval: Ethical clearances were obtained from the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Research Ethics Committee before data collection. Additionally, letters of authorization will be secured from the management of each participating organization.

Data Use and Security: Data will be used solely for academic purposes. All digital data will be stored on password-protected systems, and hard copies will be locked in a secure cabinet accessible only to the research team.

Respect for Participants: No pressure or coercion was applied to gain participation. Participants were respected regardless of their decision to participate or not.

4.0 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This section present, analyzes, and interprets the data collected through questionnaires and interviews. It is organized into five sections vis avis demographic characteristics of respondents, descriptive analysis of research questions, hypothesis testing, thematic analysis of qualitative data and discussion of key findings.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 175 respondents participated in the survey. Their demographic information is summarized below

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES (%)
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MALE	98	56.0
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FEMALE	77	44.0
TOTAL	175	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.2: Age Distribution

RANGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
18-29	34	19.4
30-39	65	37.1
40-49	52	29.7
50 AND ABOVE	24	13.8
TOTAL	175	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.3: Education Qualification

QUALIFICATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
OND	20	11.4
HND	57	32.6
B.SC/B.A	60	34.3
M.SC/M.A	32	18.3
PH.D	6	3.4
TOTAL	175	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.4: Years of Experience

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
< 5 YEARS	26	14.9
5-10 YEARS	54	30.9
11-15 YEARS	58	33.1
>15 YEARS	37	21.1
TOTAL	175	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Table 4.5: Current Role

ROLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
JUNIOR STAFF	46	26.3
MIDDLE -LEVEL STAFF	62	35.4
SENIOR STAFF	48	27.4
EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR	19	10.9
TOTAL	175	100

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

4.2 Descriptive Analysis of Research Questions

Data from Section B-D of the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). The likert-scale item (1-5) measured agreement on statements related to recruitment processes, bias, and mitigation strategies.

Research Question 1: What are the recruitment processes at PRODA?

Item	Mean	Standard Deviations	Interpretation
Recruitment follows standardized procedures	3.72	0.98	Agree
Clearly defined criteria are applied	3.65	1.01	Agree
Oversight is present during recruitment	3.42	1.12	Neutral-Agree
Job adverts are transparent and accessible	3.48	1.05	Neutral -Agree

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Respondents generally believe that recruitment processes at PRODA are moderately structured but could benefit from stronger oversight and transparency. The data reveal that while formal procedures exist, transparency and oversight are not fully trusted. Similar concerns about inconsistent recruitment practices were raised by Adenuga (2021) and Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick (2016).

Research Question 2: What types of bias Influence recruitment at PRODA?

ITEM	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATIONS	INTERPRETATION
ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS/GENDER BIAS IS PREVALENT	3.89	0.87	Agree
POLITICAL INFLUENCE AFFECTS HIRING	4.05	0.81	Strongly Agree

GOD-FATHERISM/PERSONAL NETWORKS AFFECT OUTCOMES	4.10	0.74	Strongly Agree
UNEQUAL TREATMENT OF DIVERSE CANDIDATES	3.75	0.95	Agree

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

Respondents acknowledged high levels of bias, especially due to political interference and favoritism. The results align with prior studies (Bohnet, 2016; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2002) indicating that biases—especially ethnic, gender, and political—are prevalent in public sector hiring.

Research Question 3: What strategies are used to mitigate bias?

ITEM	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATIONS	INTERPRETATION
BIAS AWARENESS TRAINING IS PROVIDED	3.25	1.18	Neutral
DIVERSITY FOCUSED PANELS ARE USED	3.12	1.21	Neutral
RECRUITMENT POLICIES ADDRESS BIAS EXPLICITLY	3.40	1.11	Neutral

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

While policies and training exist, they appear to be weakly enforced echoing the findings of Noon (2018), who argued that diversity initiatives often lack implementation rigor.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

Three hypotheses were tested using Chi-square, ANOVA, and linear regression techniques with SPSS software.

Hypothesis 1:

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between bias and recruitment decisions at PRODA.

Test Used: Pearson Chi-Square

Result: $\chi^2 = 21.31$, df = 4, p = 0.002

> Decision: Since p < 0.05, reject H_0 .

Interpretation: A significant relationship exists between perceived bias and recruitment decisions.

Hypothesis 2:

H_0 : Bias does not significantly impact recruitment outcomes.

Test Used: ANOVA

$F (3,171) = 6.87$, p = 0.000

> Decision: Since p < 0.05, reject H_0 .

Interpretation: Bias significantly impacts recruitment outcomes such as candidate selection and job performance.

Hypothesis 3:

H_0 : The strategies used to mitigate bias are ineffective.

Test Used: Linear Regression

$R^2 = 0.426$, $\beta = 0.57$, p = 0.000

> Decision: Since p < 0.05, reject H_0 .

Interpretation: Anti-bias strategies (e.g., policies, training) have a significant effect on improving fairness in recruitment.

4.4 Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Qualitative data from 12 interviews were analyzed using thematic coding in NVivo. Key themes identified:

Theme 1: Prevalence of Informal Influence

Many interviewees referenced godfatherism, ethnic favoritism, or insider influence as dominant forces in recruitment which is consistent with the opinion of Mustapha (2017)

Theme 2: Political and Institutional Interference

Similar to Adebayo, respondents from both PRODA and the FCC acknowledged undue political pressure in shortlisting and final selection.

Theme 3: Inconsistent Policy Implementation

Though bias-reduction policies exist, they are poorly enforced or used selectively, especially for technical roles.

Theme 4: Gender and Diversity Concerns

Some female respondents highlighted gender bias, especially in senior technical or leadership roles which echoes the observations by Heilman and Caleo (2018).

Theme 5: Recommendations for Reform

Participants suggested blind recruitment, diverse panels, and external audit of recruitment to improve equity Bohnet's (2016)

4.5 Discussion of Major Findings

The findings reveal that while PRODA has recruitment procedures in place, bias remains a significant issue. Political interference, ethnic preferences, and nepotism undermine fairness and efficiency. These biases not only distort recruitment outcomes but also affect organizational trust and performance and remain a key challenge supporting earlier research by Bertrand & Duflo (2017). Specifically, oversight mechanisms and transparency in advertising vacancies received lower ratings as seen in Mean 3.4-3.7

Despite existing mitigation strategies like training and policy frameworks, implementation gaps and lack of enforcement diminish their impact. However, the results also show that when anti-bias strategies are applied consistently, they significantly improve perceptions of fairness. This reflects the practical gap discussed by Noon (2018) where diversity policies lack institutional power.

Overall, the study supports theoretical assertions from Social Identity Theory, Implicit Bias Theory, and Attribution Theory, all of which explain how unconscious and structural factors influence recruitment behavior.

Descriptive Statistics (N=175)

VARIABLE	MEAN	STD. DEV.	MIN	MAX
RECRUITMENT BIAS	3.96	0.54	2.43	5.00
RECRUITMENT DECISION	3.72	0.64	1.43	5.00
RECRUITMENT OUTCOME	3.59	0.74	1.87	5.00
BIAS MITIGATION	3.27	0.81	1.14	5.00
PERCEIVED FAIRNESS	3.42	0.66	1.94	5.00

Regression Summary

Predictor	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Bias Mitigation	0.017	0.062	0.268	0.789

5.1 Discussions of Findings

After data analysis, findings were made which ultimately led to conclusions and recommendations. The study examined recruitment bias in Projects Development Institute (PRODA) Enugu through quantitative data collected from 175 respondents. The descriptive statistics reveal that while recruitment processes are somewhat structured, significant biases persist.

5.1.1 Recruitment Processes

Respondents moderately agreed that recruitment followed due process (67.4%) and that recruitment policies exist but with limited clarity (59.1%). The perception that merit underpins recruitment decisions was weaker (46.9%), suggesting recruitment is not consistently meritocratic. Mixed opinions about the objectivity of interview panels further highlighted concerns about fairness. These findings align with previous studies showing that recruitment processes in Nigeria often lack transparency and are vulnerable to manipulation (Akanbi, 2015; Omolayo, 2012).

5.1.2 Perception of Bias

Strong agreement on the influence of personal connections (85.7%), ethnic bias (78.3%), and political influence (78.9%) underscores the pervasive nature of these biases in recruitment. Gender and religious biases, while less pronounced, remain concerns for a significant portion of respondents. These results resonate with the findings of Eze and Nwafor (2017), who noted that nepotism, ethnicity, and political considerations frequently undermine meritocracy in Nigerian organizations.

5.1.3 Impact and Management of Bias

Bias was linked to lowered staff morale (74.1%) and diminished organizational performance (72.3%). These observations correspond with organizational justice theory, which posits that perceived unfairness negatively affects employee motivation and productivity (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt et al., 2001). However, institutional efforts to combat bias were perceived as insufficient, with less than half of respondents agreeing that diversity is prioritized and that bias is adequately managed. This gap echoes findings by Oghojafor et al. (2013), who highlighted inadequate institutional mechanisms to manage recruitment bias in the public sector.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Recruitment processes show moderate adherence to due process but lack consistent meritocracy (Akanbi, 2015).

Nepotism, ethnic, and political biases dominate recruitment perceptions (Eze & Nwafor, 2017).

Bias negatively impacts staff morale and organizational performance (Greenberg, 1990).

Organizational responses to bias are weak and inadequate (Oghojafor et al., 2013).

5.3 Conclusions

Recruitment bias remains entrenched, undermining fairness and organizational effectiveness. Without stronger policy enforcement and cultural shifts, meritocracy will continue to be compromised, limiting sustainable development and equity in employment (Omolayo, 2012; Eze & Nwafor, 2017).

5.4 Recommendations

1. *Implement Transparent Recruitment Protocols:* Adopting standardized and transparent recruitment procedures will reduce subjectivity and favoritism (Akanbi, 2015).
2. *Enforce Diversity and Inclusion Policies:* Strong enforcement mechanisms and regular audits can promote equity and representation (Oghojafor et al., 2013).
3. *Strengthen Regulatory Bodies:* Agencies such as the Federal Character Commission (FCC) must be empowered to ensure compliance (Eze & Nwafor, 2017).
4. *Capacity Building for HR Personnel:* Training on unconscious bias and ethics will improve recruitment objectivity (Greenberg, 1990).
5. *Establish Whistleblower and Grievance Systems:* These mechanisms enhance accountability and transparency (Omolayo, 2012).
6. *Conduct Periodic Audits:* Regular monitoring of recruitment processes will ensure adherence to merit-based hiring (Akanbi, 2015).
7. *Develop Monitoring Frameworks:* Setting benchmarks and indicators will support continuous improvement (Oghojafor et al., 2013).
8. Institutional reforms that leverage Industry 4.0 technologies such as automation, data analytics and AI driven recruitment should be deployed to enhance fairness and transparency in public sector hiring (Okorozoh, 2025)

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